



# Conservationists Keep Big Basin State Park Growing

Coastal fog hung like a shroud across the tree tops, a billowy blanket that snuffed the sun and fused the shadows in the forest below. The smell of evergreen saturated the air, and the soft crunch of the mulch underfoot was a pleasant change from concrete and asphalt.

by Joel Moreno

As we sized up the park using a map at the ranger station to choose a trail for an early morning walk, the discordant cry of a Stellar's Jay came across on a puff of wind from nearby. We picked an easy loop called the Redwood Trail and started off leisurely, wanting to enjoy the coolness of the morning and admire the majesty of the redwoods that makes some visitors proclaim that Big Basin Redwoods State Park is one of the most beautiful places in the world.

Big Basin is about 23 miles north-east of the city of Santa Cruz, rolling across the Santa Cruz Mountains and down to the

sea at Waddell Creek. The "basin" was formed millions of years ago by an "uplifting" movement along the Zayante fault line on the park's semi-circular rim. The center of the basin was formed by the resulting erosion of stream action through the valley. It is the flat valley floor where the park headquarters is now located.

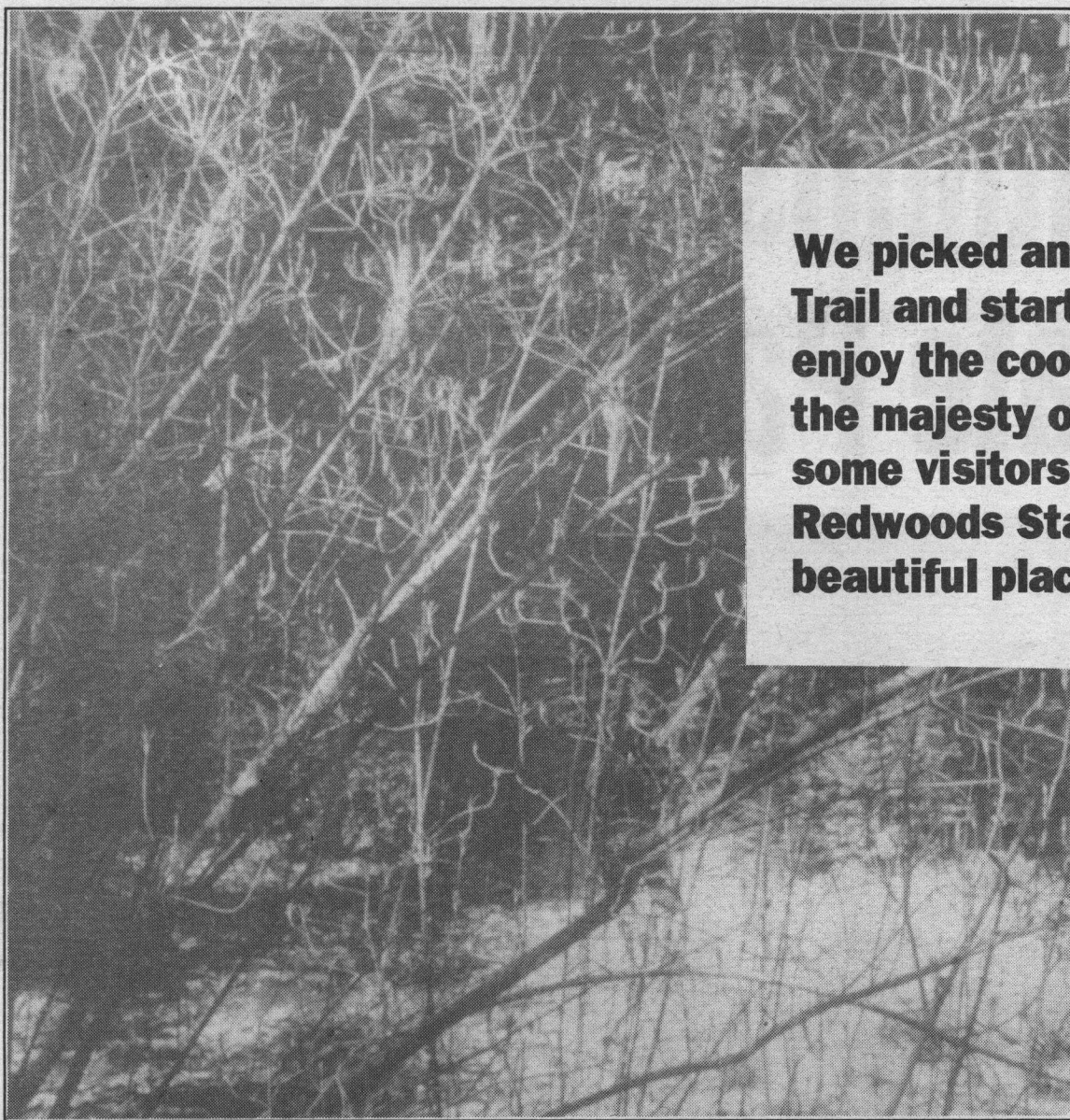
The Redwood Trail is a .6 mile loop that passes through some of the oldest, most significant stands of coastal redwood trees in the region. It's a short walk, but also one of the most popular. Points of interest are marked along the way and a trail guide is available to explain some

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#### Day Hikes

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of the unique features of a redwood forest.

The tree canopy is so dense at Big Basin it is practically impermeable to sunlight. Shade is the rule beneath the tightly woven redwood crowns, which keeps understory growth to a minimum. As our walk took us deeper into the woods, the height and sheer straightness of the redwoods diminished everything else around them. The trees were like the wooden pillars of Nature's Parthenon, holding mysteries known to the native tribes people of the Ohlone Indian culture but lost on our own civilization.

Park curators put a hazy estimate of "several million people" as having toured the Redwood Trail since the park was established in 1902. Ken Morris, who has been a park ranger for 17 years at Big Basin, said there are 80 miles of hiking trails in the park. While the Redwood Trail has been the most popular, Morris said he has always liked the arduous hike to the waterfalls deep within the park the best.

"The biggest attraction is called Berry Creek Falls, but that's a long hike. It's 10.3 miles round trip," Morris said. "It is in

my opinion the most spectacular part of the park. The falls drop 65 feet. The whole thing is a drainage of the Waddell, forested all the way down."

#### Many Hiking Trails

The "big" hike to Berry Creek Falls winds through redwoods and along stream banks, and eventually comes upon three separate waterfalls, of which Berry Creek is the highest.

Aside from these, there are other main loops which exemplify the variety of plant communities in Big Basin.

The Rim Trail is a 10 mile loop that goes from old growth redwood to chaparral, passes from streams to sandstone formations, and offers beautiful views of the basin at several points. The remains of an old shingle mill from the early logging days can also be spotted from the trail.

The Howard King Trail, named after the noted photographer and conservationist, climbs steeply from deep redwoods to chaparral, and treats the hiker to sweeping ocean views and a look at Berry Creek Falls.

The Sequoia Trail is a romp through the birthplace of Big Basin State Park. The 4 mile trail traces the preserve's history, and hikers can see the evidence of past

logging and visit Slippery Rock, where in May 1900 a group of environmentalists called the Sempervirens Club committed themselves to "save the redwoods" by establishing California's first state park. Along the way, there are old growth redwoods, Douglas fir and tan oaks.

#### First State Park

Spared from some of the heaviest logging in the early part of this century, Big Basin has been a favorite of environmental organizations for decades. Today, several conservation groups are working to expand the park's boundaries to include the entire watershed in the basin, working to guarantee that the whole of the redwood ecosystem will be preserved for posterity.

One of the most active groups in adding to the park's boundaries has been the Sempervirens Fund, an offspring of the Sempervirens Club. Since 1968, the group has worked to protect coastal redwoods throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains, but specifically in Big Basin. In that time the group has bought over 3,000 acres of forested land solely to preserve the unique habitat, and is presently targeting another 2,000 acres in Big Basin and in selected other parks for acquisition.

"These were the first redwoods ever set aside anywhere by anybody," said Verl Clausen, Executive Director of the Sempervirens.

for particularly large purchases, and coordinate the administration of the lands through the Department of Parks and Recreation.

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It is due solely to the Sempervirens Fund and its predecessor, the Sempervirens Club, Clausen added. Through their campaigning, the 3,800 acre California Redwood Park was established in 1902.

When the California Legislature created the State Park system in 1927, the land was renamed Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

Big Basin currently occupies 18,000 acres. The Waddell basin amounts to about 22,000 acres. The organization's goal for preservation is straightforward. They want to acquire the remaining privately-held parcels.

"Simply put, it is the entire drainage of Waddell Creek," Clausen said. "It would be just a jewel of redwood ecology. There's not been the kind of heavy-damage cutting in the Waddell Creek area that has happened in places up north."

The Sempervirens Fund is an independent non-profit organization, and Clausen said they raise over \$1 million a year that goes for the purchase of redwood areas. They sometimes work in tandem with other groups, such as Save the Redwoods League,

#### Unspoiled Nature Close to Town

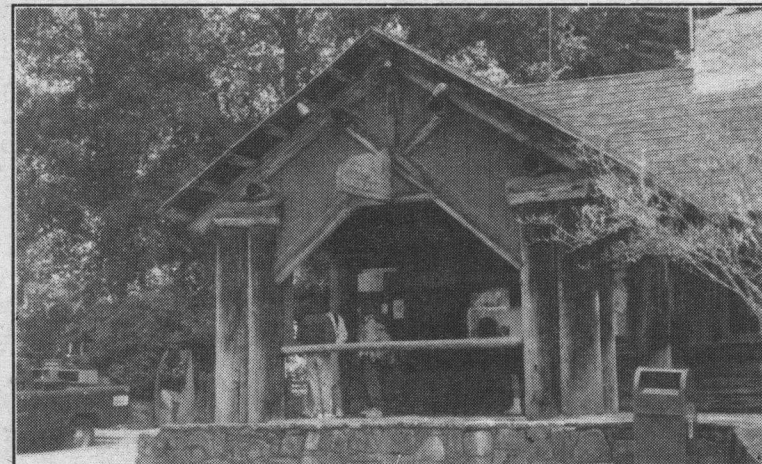
Due to the area's unspoiled nature and its proximity to the Bay Area, Big Basin has been very popular with tourists. Facilities for camping and RVs are available, or reservations can be made for one of the 36 tent-cabins in the park.

The park is so popular, Morris said that on weekends the park could not offer "enough" campsites.

But, as with any kind of real estate, part of the appeal of the park seems to be the location. It's hard to find any open areas in Big Basin. The park is forested from the peaks of the Santa Cruz Mountains on down to nearly the seashore, which can be divided into several major ecosystems.

Sequoia sempervirens, the redwoods, are of course the most notable of the various habitats. These trees are thought to have once covered much of North America, but now are confined to a narrow strip along the Pacific which corresponds to the coastal

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## Day Hikes --

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fog belt. The redwoods favor the moisture that coastal fog brings them throughout the year. Huckleberry, western azalea and different kinds of ferns can be found on the forest floor beneath these giants.

Other trees are able to mix into this community and co-exist alongside their enormous neighbors. The Douglas fir, tan oak, California laurel, and wax myrtle trees all find a place amongst the redwoods.

Surrounding these redwood stands is a mixed evergreen community made up of such species as madrone, coastal live oak, California hazel and other trees.

On south-facing slopes and along dry rocky ridges, chaparral stands in contrast to the redwoods. The plants in this community are usually short and tight-growing due to the semi-drought conditions of this area. Coffeeberry, manzanita, Knobcone pines and California fuschias do well here.

Near the mouth of Waddell Creek marshlands are present, down in the Rancho del Oso section of the park along Highway 1.

As to the fauna, there are some

animals which are very common and some which are almost never seen.

Aside from the shrieking Stellar's jays, there are acorn woodpeckers busily battering at tree trunks and the junco bird with its dark eye-markings. Red-tailed hawks patrol the more open mixed evergreen and chaparral areas while the marbled murrelet, a web-footed shorebird, nests high atop the redwood forest.

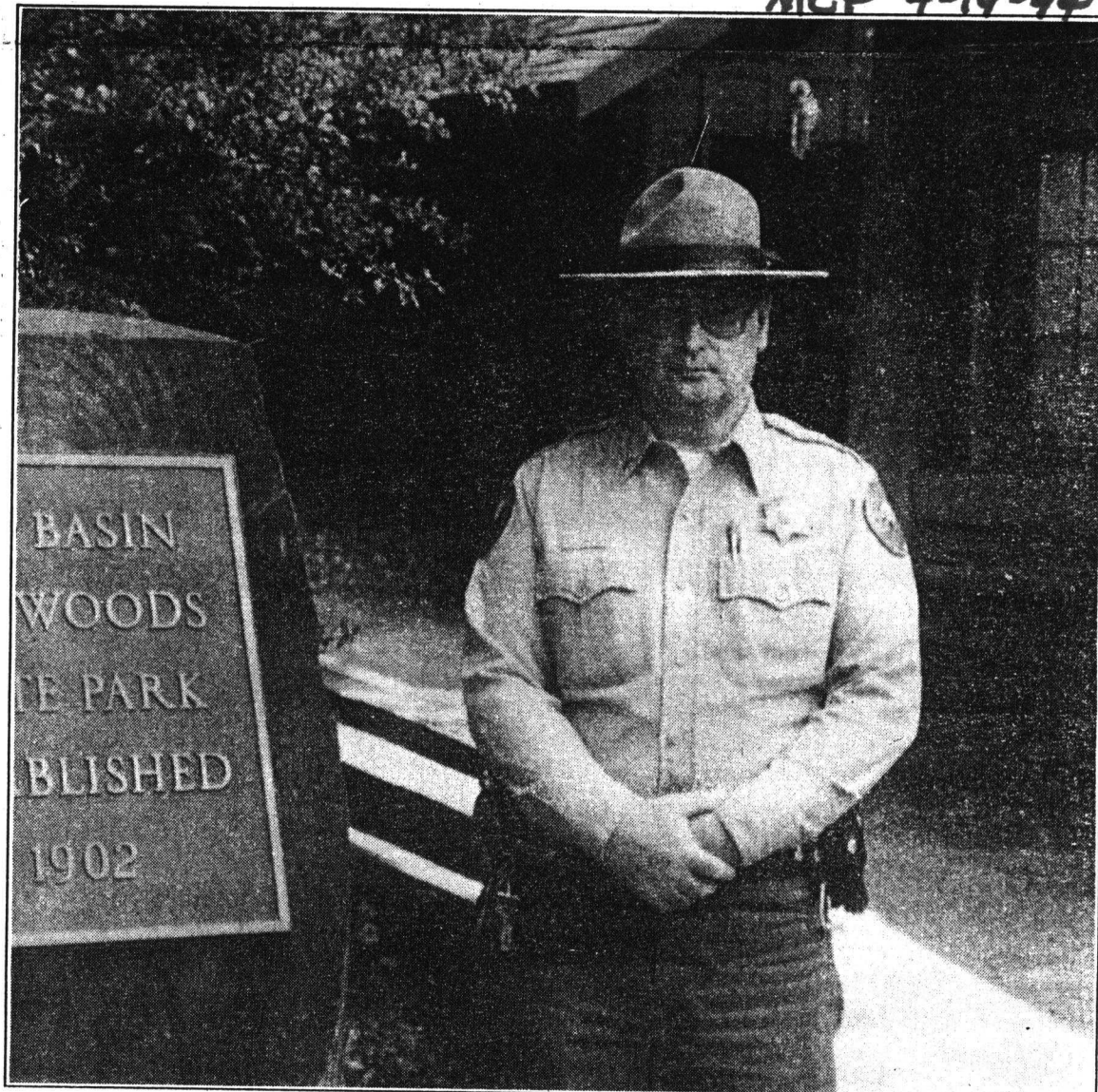
There are bobcats, foxes, skunks and mountain lions, but more likely a visitor will see black-tailed deer, gray squirrels, chipmunks and raccoons.

The deer have presented a particular problem, approaching campers to beg for food with little trepidation.

"Big Basin has had a long history of deer feeding," Morris said. "At the turn of the century it was a common practice. Deer food was sold at a concession stand."

But forest officials noticed the deer becoming dependent on these handouts, disrupting their natural cycles to venture into the park headquarters parking lot for a handout.

"Now its a 180 degree turnaround," Morris said. "In other words it's illegal to feed the deer." □



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And remember don't feed the deer.