

SATURDAY BAY LIVING

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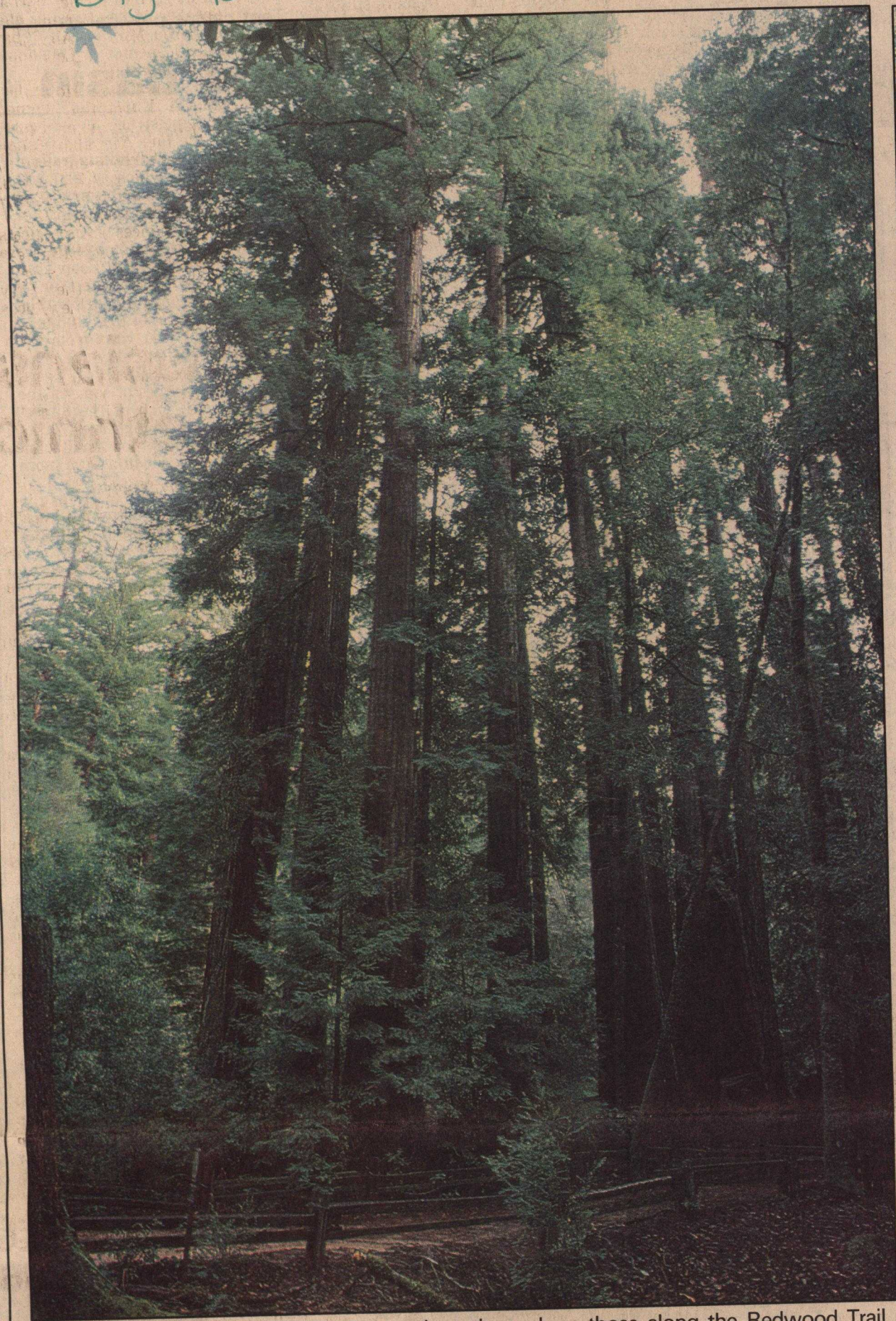
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Santa Cruz Sentinel

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Big Basin

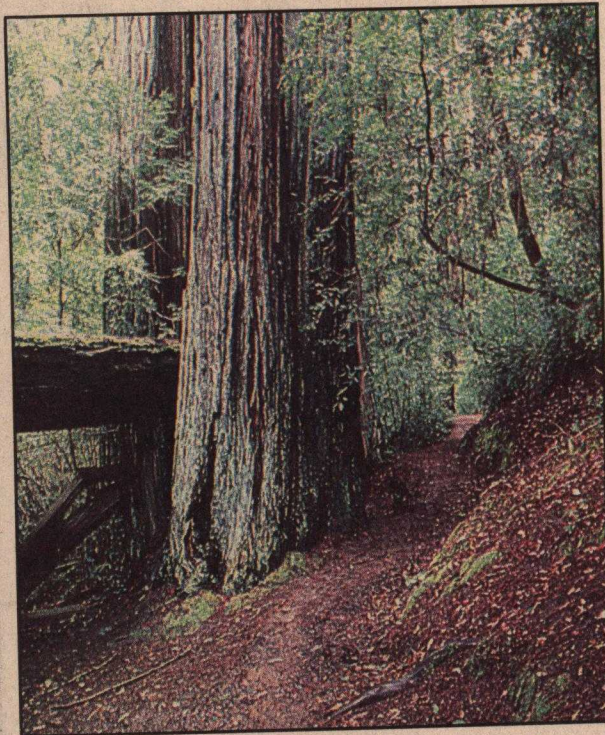


The park is home to strands of virgin redwoods, such as those along the Redwood Trail.



January and February storms have brought the many creeks that flow through Big Basin back to life.

Sentinel photos by Shmuel Thaler



With more than 100 miles of hiking trails, Big Basin provides plenty of paths to follow.

REDWOOD ADVENTURE

Winter rains are pumping new life into Big Basin

By MIKE BLAESSER
Bay Living editor

IT'S FRESH, lush and green. And cold and muddy. Exhilarating, beautiful and pristine.

And really cold and muddy. Welcome to Big Basin Redwoods State Park in the late winter of a wet year, a time when those who are willing to brave the elements are treated to a pageant put on by Mother Nature as she awakens the forest from its winter nap.

Big Basin, a 16,000-acre playground with miles of hiking trails and groves of redwoods, is a superb destination for families with small children looking for easy hikes, and it also offers the more intrepid the opportunity for longer and more challenging treks.

But during the early spring, the park comes alive. "It's all the water that make this a nice time to visit the park," said Rich Seymour, a volunteer resident naturalist at Big Basin. The park's natural environment — the fungus, moss and ferns — is "in the peak of its growing cycle," he said.

A recent visit to the park, which lies between Highway 9 and the coast north of Boulder Creek, proved Seymour's point.

Water does make all the difference at this time of year.

With the seemingly endless canopy of cover provided by the giant redwoods, Big Basin is always somewhat shady and lush. But recent rains have added an element of adventure to the world below the towering giants. As you walk the paths you'll notice new growth emerging and if you take the time to inspect the ground around you,

you're likely to find a mushroom here or there.

Creeks that have been reduced to a mere trickle the past few years are again filling out their streambeds.

But the thing you're most likely to notice is the mud. It's everywhere. Be prepared to detour around it and step through it. Sometimes there's no avoiding it.

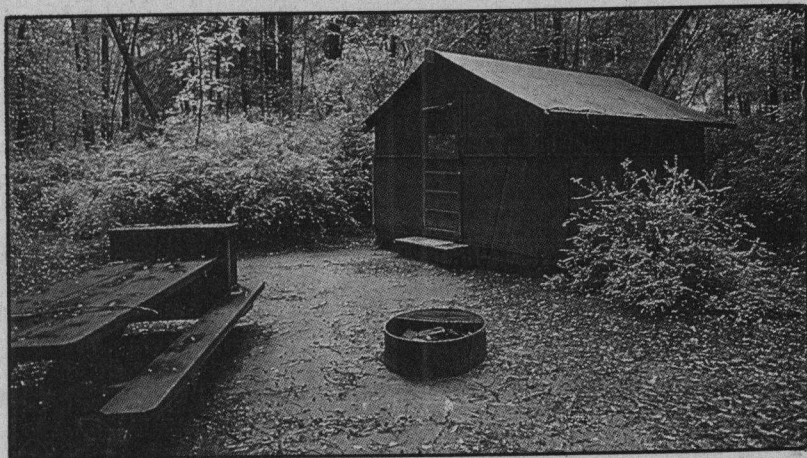
And speaking of detours, watch for fallen trees that will cause you to duck under thick trunks that have fallen across the trail or force you to follow the temporary trail that hikers ahead of you have mapped out. But the fallen trees



Excursions is a guide to day trips in the area. It appears the last Saturday of each month in Bay Living

can hardly be called a nuisance. Instead of the decaying, rotting wood that lies alongside trails later in the year, the newly fallen trees give you the chance to inspect and experience the freshness of the forest. Walking through a section of downed trees is much like walking through a lot of freshly cut Christmas trees. It won't last for long, however. By late spring, Seymour said, the trees will have been moved off, making way for the summer visitors.

Please see BIG BASIN — D2



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Tent cabins provide warm shelter during the cold months.

Big Basin

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THE 100 miles of hiking trails at Big Basin, which in 1927 was the first park under the new state park system, offer something for everyone.

A family with small children can delight in the Redwood Loop Trail near the park headquarters or go for a casual jaunt along the relatively flat portion of the Skyline to the Sea Trail that runs from the headquarters to a day-use area near Gazos Creek Road.

Even the inclines of some of the steeper trails, such as the Sunset Trail or the Creeping Forest Trail, are gentle enough for small children willing to put in a little more effort.

For those who like to go for the gusto, there is the 10-12 mile Skyline to the Sea Trail that will take you all the way to the coast.

And if you're really in the mood for a workout, check out Berry Creek Falls. Take heed of the signs at the trailheads that warn you it is a long and extremely steep trail. Judging by the looks of one sweat-soaked hiker heading back up the trail, the signs are not to be taken lightly.

"It's a very long hike. More people actually hear about it than do it," said naturalist Seymour. The hike, he said, is a 10-mile round trip that takes you to the 70-foot high falls.

An easier hike to the smaller Sempervirens Falls is easily negotiated.

BIG BASIN is cold this time of year. Even in the middle of the day you will need a heavy coat, and gloves may not be a bad idea. Once the sun goes down you have two options: leave or head for your camping spot.

The park has five camping areas with plenty of sites, but at this time of year you probably won't want to pitch a tent unless you plan to curl up early in your sleeping bag.

A better choice is the tent cabins operated by the California Parks Co., the concessionaire at Big Basin. The company also operates a grocery store, self-serve snack

Big Basin

Where: Take Highway 9 to Boulder Creek, turn left at Big Basin Way (Route 236). Follow the road to the park. The drive takes about 45 minutes from Santa Cruz.

Weather: Cold. Bring sweatshirts and coats. Sturdy hiking shoes are also recommended.

Facilities: There are plenty of areas to enjoy a picnic lunch, and there are shops — a gift shop, snack bar and grocery store — that are currently open only on weekends. Starting April 1 they will be open daily. Park headquarters also houses a museum/nature center.

Prices: Entry fee is \$5. Camp sites are \$12 (\$14 April 1 through Oct. 31 per night). Tent cabins are \$32 per night. On Friday and Saturdays, tents cabins must be reserved for two days. Reservations can be made through MISTIX, the state park reservation system. A \$6.75 reservation fee is charged. Call MISTIX at (800) 444-7275. Reservations cannot be made through the tent cabin operator at this time.

Information: The phone number for the park is 338-6132. The visitor information center also sells a map of the park that is a must for hikers.

shop and a gift store.

The tents, located in the Huckleberry Campground, are tucked away in secluded sites. Each plywood and canvas cabin has a table, a wood-burning stove and two double beds. Bring your own sleeping bags or rent linens from the concessionaire. The sites also have space to pitch a tent and an outside picnic table and a fire ring.

Marilyn Eckels, who manages the operation, said later in the year reservations are a must, but now, during the slow season, visitors can register with the campground host. If the weather improves, however, weekend reservations are advised.