

# Author pens first guidebook to Wilder Ranch

*Wilder Ranch*

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**SANTA CRUZ »** Wilder Ranch has always been the go-to state park for Eric Henze's family, a combination of history and natural beauty that attracted him.

But there was never one chest to contain all its treasures. Whether you wanted to know more about the colorful history — famed Western author Zane Grey was a ranch hand there — or learn more about the park's 7,000 acres of flora and fauna, visitors had to rely on docents and piece together a picture for themselves.

So Henze decided to change that, beginning work on a 180-page Wilder Ranch book that

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## Wilder

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would eventually receive an official stamp of approval as the park's first official guidebook.

After a few months in circulation, Henze said sales are more than meeting expectations.

"I love writing, I love history, I love geology and I love hiking. It combined all of those different passions," Henze said of the park, which was acquired by the state 40 years ago. "For me, it started as a personal endeavor, and what I found along the way is that state parks are hurting and there was need to give back. ... It was a way to draw some additional attention to the parks."

A Los Gatos resident, Henze recently released a second book, "RVing with Monsters," a memoir and guidebook that recalls family trips through the American Southwest. He is also working on guides to Henry Cowell State Park and The Forest of Nisene Marks.

Wilder is known as much for its creation story as for its natural and historic features, including miles of hiking and biking trails, secluded pocket peaches and sweeping coastal plains. At one point, it was eyed for a massive development before local residents voted to preserve it as open space.

The book tells some of the stories of the ranch's origins and of the Wilder family itself. It traces its transformation from a dairy farm to a beef cattle operation, which included a stint as a locale for rodeos and the gambling that came with them.

But much of the book is utilitarian, providing maps and trail info, and details on different plants and animal species found

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in the park.

"The point of this book is — you're going to Wilder anyway. Whether you see an animal or a plant or you see trail you haven't been on before, there's something in there for everyone. It's trying to be a reference for all things Wilder," Henze said.

The trail maps go beyond what's typically available from state park guides, including, for example, surfing spots. But Henze said he was careful not to disclose local breaks that aren't widely known.

"They're parts of the park that are kind of secret and hidden, so I kept them secret and hidden," Henze said.

Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks Executive Director Bonny Hawley said the group worked with Henze because the park offers many things to visitors.

Whether going mountain biking or for a walk or to learn more about the history of natives peoples on the land, the book has something for everyone.

"I was excited about that because there isn't one place you can go for that kind of information," Hawley said.

"The Complete Guide to Wilder Ranch State Park" is available at Bookshop Santa Cruz and on Amazon.com. Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks is also selling the book at its Wilder Ranch store and at its website, [thatsmypark.org](http://thatsmypark.org).