

As Big Basin Redwoods State Park celebrates its 100th year this weekend, a group of self-proclaimed Hobbits plans to crash the party. The Hobbits' annual party has been booted out of the park because of trash, noise and crowds. The Hobbits intend to protest, in a friendly fashion, at the centennial.

JIM GENSHEIMER —  
MERCURY NEWS  
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# Hobbits left out of centennial bash at Big Basin park

By David L. Beck  
Mercury News

A celebration just wouldn't be a celebration without a protest. Not in Santa Cruz, at any rate.

This weekend, Big Basin Redwoods State Park, the foundation stone of California's state park system, completes a 100-day celebration of its 100th year. There will be two days of music, speeches and theater. Bluegrass bands will play. Dancers will dance. Tree-sitter Julia Butterfly Hill will speak.

And a group of human-sized Hobbits will protest their current lack of welcome in the park, the result of a long-running squabble that boils down to fun vs. rules. These Hobbits arose in 1978 not from Middle Earth but from San Jose State University.

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## BIG BASIN | Redwoods park marks 100 years

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What began as a birthday party at Big Basin — it was the birthday boy who named the party after J.R.R. Tolkien's forest-dwellers — has evolved into an annual gathering of increasingly respectable types: designers, doctors, veterinarians, at least one San Francisco County official, even a park ranger or two. "Just regular folks," said Hobbit Party organizer Gregor Nelson. "We're not rabid Tolkienistas," although he admits they were back in '78.

Nelson, who has a design studio in Healdsburg, added, "It really just became a way for people who are far-flung and having busy lives and families and careers and all that stuff" to know that there's a time and a place where they can still get together.

The parties continued without interruption for more than 20 years, attracting in excess of 80 people, children included, each fall.

They drank home-brewed beer and mead. They had puppet shows for the children, and treasure hunts for everyone. An astronomer erected a telescope, and people stayed up all night watching the stars. They mastered the art of barbecuing pizza. A good time was had by all, say the Hobbits.

But in 2001, their run at Big

### TURNING 100

Here is a look at the Big Basin Centennial Festival, which will be held today and Sunday.

**Tickets:** \$5 (includes bus transportation from park-and-ride locations in Santa Cruz, Scotts Valley, Felton and at Redwood Elementary School)

**Parking:** None. Visitors must use buses.

**Time:** 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. today and Sunday

**Events:** Ranger walks, vintage vehicles and camping equipment, old photos, oral histories, puppet histories and regional art

**Entertainment:** On two stages, beginning at 11 a.m. each day

**Keynote speech:** Julia Butterfly Hill, 4 p.m. Sunday

**Information:** (831) 338-8862 or [www.bigbasin.org](http://www.bigbasin.org)

Source: Big Basin Redwoods State Park

Basin ended.

Robert Culbertson, the State Parks Santa Cruz District's mountain sector superintendent, said, "Apparently there were enough problems that they were asked not to come back." He referred other questions to Liz Burko, who has been supervising ranger at Big Basin since 1998 and who wrote the original letter informing Nelson and his group that they were no longer welcome.

"The tenor of the rangers changed over time," Nelson said, "and they became much less the noble stewards of the



Visitors at the start of the 20th century pose in front of a redwood tree at Big Basin Redwoods State Park, celebrating its centennial this weekend.

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forest and ... much more like cops."

But Burko described a continuing series of permit violations involving primarily noise, trash and excessive numbers of cars and people that culminated in her order that they take their Hobbit Party elsewhere.

"It was a continuous non-compliance kind of a thing," she said.

Nelson argues that the special event permit fees they were assessed covered the unusual size and nature of the event. "The fact is, we've always lived very lightly in the park. ... If it's just going to be 'Kumbaya' around the campfire and lights out at 9," he said, "we shouldn't be paying a special events fee."

The Hobbits will still have their party — later this month in Mendocino — but some of them also will be at Big Basin

today.

"We'll have signs," said Janet Swanson of Sunnyvale. "We'll play our whoopees," which she describes as "little plastic things" like party favors. There may be a trombonist among them. "We'll have silly costumes, clown hats," she said.

Nelson thinks "protest" is too harsh a term. "We might go and make a little noise," he said. "Bilbo, Not Burko! 'Rangers Out of Middle Earth!' Some people will dress funny, and maybe we'll play 'Louie, Louie' on kazoos or something like that."

Culbertson and Burko say that's fine with them. "They're welcome to purchase tickets," she said. "Anybody is. This is a celebration for us, and we want to celebrate it with the public."

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