

# Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve

## Austin Creek State Recreation Area



### Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(707) 869-2015**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

#### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

P.O. Box 942896

Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

For information call: (800) 777-0369.

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

Discover the many states of California.™



[SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp](http://SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp)

**Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve  
Austin Creek State Recreation Area  
17000 Armstrong Woods Road  
Guerneville, CA 95446  
(707) 869-2015 or (707) 865-2391 District Office**

© 2011 California State Parks (Rev. 2015)

*The cathedral-like  
trees of Armstrong  
Redwoods State Natural  
Reserve complement  
the rolling, tree-studded  
hills of neighboring  
Austin Creek State  
Recreation Area.*



**Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve and Austin Creek State Recreation Area** share a boundary, but the parks are quite different from each other. Serene, 805-acre Armstrong Redwoods—shaded by ancient coast redwoods—has been a cool summer escape for generations of park visitors. Temperatures are moderate, with fog year-round. The nearly 6,000 tree-studded acres of Austin Creek provide a bright, sunny place best experienced in spring and fall; summer temperatures here can reach 100 degrees.

### **PARK HISTORY**

#### **Native People**

Before the early 1800s, the Kashaya Pomo people lived along the coast and what is now called the Russian River. The ocean and the river's plentiful resources sustained the Kashaya people.

With the construction of nearby Fort Ross in 1812, the lives of the Kashaya were abruptly altered. Fur trappers from the Russian-American Fur Company arrived at the fort, seeking sea otter pelts and a place to grow food for their Alaskan outpost. For nearly 30 years, the Russians employed numerous Kashaya Pomo people as agricultural laborers—many of whom lived around the fort or in nearby villages. Some Kashaya women intermarried with the Russian immigrants.

Today Kashaya Pomo and other native groups still live in or visit the area to gather leaves, roots and other natural ingredients needed to make some of the world's finest, most sought-after Native American baskets.

#### **Colonel James B. Armstrong**

Ohio native Colonel James B. Armstrong was one of the very few 19th-century lumber barons who appreciated both the intrinsic beauty and the commercial uses of the redwood groves.

In 1874 Armstrong moved to Sonoma County with his wife and family. They built their home in Cloverdale, where he invested in orchards and real estate there and in Santa Rosa. Working with crop plants, Colonel Armstrong became a lifelong friend of agricultural pioneer Luther Burbank.

Upon his arrival in Sonoma County, Armstrong began to purchase land in the dense redwood forest 2.5 miles north of Guerneville. He saw that thousands of acres of seemingly inexhaustible redwoods were being reduced to clear-cut tree stumps (thus inspiring Guerneville's original name, "Stumptown"). To preserve some of his land



*Colonel Armstrong Tree*



*Colonel James Armstrong  
in 1883*



*Elizabeth Armstrong  
Jones, ca. 1900*

from this fate, he deeded 600 acres of the ancient forest to his daughter Kate, with plans for an arboretum and natural park. The Armstrong family allowed the public to visit and enjoy the beauty of the peaceful redwoods.

Armstrong later bought the Big Bottom Sawmill and cut and processed millions of feet of redwood lumber. The redwoods he had deeded to Kate remained intact; 400 of those acres eventually became Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve (SNR).



*The popular Redwood Forest Theater was built in 1934.*

Armstrong's other daughter Elizabeth (Lizzie) and her husband, Reverend William Ladd Jones, dedicated the Colonel Armstrong Tree. This "monarch of the forest," chosen before his death in 1900, commemorates Armstrong's vision of saving ancient redwoods.

The State of California acquired the grove in 1934; by 1936 Armstrong Redwoods State Park was open to the public.

Armstrong Redwoods became a reserve in 1964, after insight into its ecological importance suggested that this vital resource should be more effectively managed. That same year, the State began acquiring the land which now comprises Austin Creek State Recreation Area (SRA) to provide camping and recreational facilities and preserve important wildlife corridors.

### NATURAL HISTORY

The remaining coast redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*), the tallest living trees on Earth, now grow naturally only along a narrow coastal belt from southern Oregon to central California. The wet fog that shrouds this ancient, temperate rainforest helps maintain the moist conditions that the trees—and the wildlife that depend on them—need to exist. Today, scientists are studying the effects of climate change on redwoods.

#### Habitats and Wildlife

The area's distinct habitats shelter a wide range of native wildlife.

**Redwood**—Coast redwoods shade forest floor plants such as redwood sorrel, trillium, calypso orchids, and sword and bracken ferns. Look for banana slugs, myotis bats, and black-tailed mule deer.

**Mixed Evergreen/Douglas-Fir**—Along ridges and slopes grow a mix of Douglas-fir, Pacific madrone, tanoak, and California bay laurel. These trees house northern spotted owls, pileated woodpeckers, and tree voles. Hound's tongue and common madia make seasonal displays in the sparse understory, which is also home to wood rats and alligator lizards.

**Oak Woodland**—This habitat includes California buckeye, manzanita, Oregon white oak, and California black oak. Band-tailed pigeons, king snakes, and gray foxes live here. Checker lilies may be found among the oaks.

**Riparian**—Along rivers, streams and other waterways, wood ferns, bracken ferns, and maidenhair ferns thrive. White and red alder, chain fern, giant horsetail, western azaleas, and various mosses shelter California newts, Pacific tree frogs, American dippers, and

belted kingfishers. Great blue herons fish in streams for coho and steelhead salmon or red-legged frogs as river otters play.

**Closed-Cone Cypress**—Sargent's cypress stands grow on serpentine rock outcrops.

**Chaparral**—Chamise, manzanita, and sticky monkeyflower make up this habitat. Deep in tangles and thorns, white-footed mice, California quail, and other small prey hide from gray foxes. Bobcats may be spotted hunting in chaparral and grassland areas, bordered by a mixed conifer forest.

**Grasslands**—Native purple needlegrass and California oatgrass grow wild. Soap plant, clarkia, globe lily, and other wildflowers feed and shelter black-tailed jackrabbits, Oregon juncos, western fence lizards, gopher snakes, and garter snakes.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Trails**—Hikers on 20 miles of hiking trails find it necessary to carry plenty of water at Austin Creek, where summer temperatures can be extremely warm.

**Equestrians**—Park trails are open seasonally to horses; horse trailers are not allowed beyond the picnic area at Armstrong Redwoods SNR. For trail conditions, call (707) 869-2015.

**Bicycles**—Ride bicycles only on paved and unpaved fire roads, not on trails. At Austin Creek, the paved

and unpaved fire roads gain 1,000 feet of elevation. At Armstrong Redwoods, bicyclists must share the flat, paved road with hikers, horses, and vehicles.

**Camping**—At Austin Creek, camping is available year round. Some campsites are first-come, first-served; others can be reserved at [www.hipcamp.com](http://www.hipcamp.com). Sites have tables and fire rings with nearby flush toilets and drinkable water (but no showers). For questions, call Stewards at (707) 869-9177.

**Backcountry (Primitive) Camping**—The non-reservable Tom King and Mannings Flat hike-in campsites require permits for backcountry camping, available when the entry kiosk or volunteer center are open. Sites have tables, fire rings, and nearby pit toilets. Water from the year-round stream must be purified before drinking.



*Bullfrog Pond Campground*

When camping is allowed, register and get a permit for Austin Creek camping at the Armstrong Redwoods SNR entry kiosk. If staff is absent, contact Stewards at (707) 869-9177 or [stewards@stewardscr.org](mailto:stewards@stewardscr.org).



**Pond Farm Pottery**  
*Shortly after World War II, internationally known ceramic artist Marguerite Wildenhain accepted an invitation from Gordon and Jane Herr to move to their art colony (now part of Austin Creek SRA). Wildenhain lived, worked, and taught at Pond Farm until her death in 1985. In 2014, Pond Farm was added to the National Register of Historic Places.*



*Banana slug*



*Bullfrog Pond*

**Facilities**—The reserve has a visitor center, outdoor amphitheater, picnic facilities, and about nine miles of hiking trails. The visitor center (nature store) has interpretive displays and sells a variety of educational items.

Two picnic areas in the redwoods are ¼ mile from the park entrance. Nearby Fife Creek runs swiftly in winter and slows or dries in spring, summer, and fall. A seasonal waterfall is close by. Amenities include picnic tables, barbecue grills and pit, and restrooms. For group picnic area reservations, call (707) 865-2394.

**Annual Events**—Armstrong is home to many annual events. The Old Grove Festival takes place in September. For an event calendar, visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

### Armstrong Redwoods

**Picnic Area**—Accessible picnic sites are near the trailhead at Pool Ridge Trail.

**Parking**—Routes of travel from parking area to accessible sites are paved, but help may be needed with slopes.

**Exhibits/Programs**—The visitor center is accessible; wheelchair users may need help with ramp and path slopes.

**Trails**—The accessible Discovery, Armstrong and Pioneer Nature Trails through the redwoods are self-guided.

### Austin Creek

Currently there are no accessible features at this park. Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- All park features are protected by law and may not be disturbed in any way.
- Stay on designated trails. Off-trail walking and riding cause soil erosion, damage redwood root systems, and expose visitors to ticks, snakes, and poison oak.
- Vehicles are permitted only on paved roads. When meeting oncoming traffic in Austin Creek SRA, vehicles traveling downhill must yield to uphill traffic.
- Vehicles more than 20 feet long or towing trailers may not use the narrow, steep park road up to Bullfrog Campground.
- Except for service animals, dogs are permitted only on paved roads in both parks. Dogs must be on leash.

- Hunting and the possession of weapons are prohibited anywhere in the parks.
- Fishing is available only in Bullfrog Pond. All streams are closed to fishing to protect vital spawning habitat.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Fort Ross State Historic Park  
19005 Highway 1  
Jenner, CA 95450 (707) 847-3286
- Sonoma Coast State Park  
3095 Highway 1  
Bodega Bay, CA 94923  
(707) 875-3483 or (707) 865-2391



Austin Creek SRA is currently operated by Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods.

Both state parks receive support through this nonprofit organization.

For more information, contact:

Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods  
P.O. Box 2, Duncans Mills, CA 95430  
(707) 869-9177 • [www.stewardscr.org](http://www.stewardscr.org)

