Salt Point

State Park

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) 847-3221. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting:

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Salt Point State Park
25050 Coast Highway One
Jenner, CA 95450
(707) 847-3221

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Salt Point State Park's wide-open meadows, thundering surf, brisk ocean breezes and stunning views represent Mother Nature at her best.

About 90 miles north of San Francisco, Salt Point State Park rests majestically on one of several jutting promontories off State Highway One. This 6,000-acre park—which includes one of California's first underwater parks—has breathtaking views of offshore rocks, a thundering, boisterous surf and unforgettable sunsets.

On California's north coast, winters are mild and wet, with average temperatures in the low 40s. Cool and foggy summer days average about 64 degrees. Changes in weather are common and frequent.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

The earliest known native residents—the Kashaya Pomo people—occupied an area from just north of Stewarts Point to just south of what is now the Russian River. From the coastline, their lands extended inland about 30 miles.

The Kashaya Pomo are expert artisans whose exquisite basketry graces museum collections all over the world. Historians estimate that at the time of the first Spanish contact, the Kashaya Pomo numbered about 1,500 people, occupying several large villages. Summers were spent fishing along the coast; in late fall the Kashaya moved inland to hunt and to reoccupy their winter villages.

Over the years, the Kashaya Pomo people have been able to preserve much of their traditional culture. Today many Kashaya descendants occupy a rancheria near Stewarts Point as well as other areas near Fort Ross.

Europeans

On April 8, 1846, Ernest Rufus received a Mexican land grant for 17,500 acres along the coast. The area, called Rancho German, encompassed the land from about six miles north of Fort Ross to the Gualala River. The southern portion of the rancho included what is now Salt Point.

Beginning in 1849, the land changed hands several times, becoming the site of several active sawmills from 1853 to 1859. Lumber was shipped on schooners to San Francisco. In 1870, the southern section of Rancho German was sold to Lewis Gerstle and Frederick Funcke to mill tanoak and other hardwoods. They built a hotel in 1872 and surveyed the westernmost section of their ranch for the plat of a town they named Louisville.

After the sawmills ceased operations in 1876, the land was transitioned to grazing livestock as its primary use.

NATURAL HISTORY: INLAND

The inland portion of the park features acres of grasslands and forest areas. Northeast of Highway 1, coastal brush and grasslands merge with lush growths of wind-sculpted Bishop pines towering over wild calypso orchids. Mixed evergreens skirt the edges of the second-growth redwoods, descended from trees that were logged in the last two centuries. Douglas-firs stand tall among madrone, tanoak and peaceful meadows.

Second-growth redwoods

At about 1,000 feet elevation, a large open prairie was once home to elk. At the park's highest point, a pygmy forest holds stands of smaller cypress, pine and redwoods. Their growth is stunted because of the area's highly acidic, nutrient-poor soil and a hardpan layer beneath the surface. Similar groves of stunted trees can be found along the coast from Monterey County northward to Mendocino County.

Among the native animals, coyotes and gray foxes usually hunt at night, while bobcats are more active during the day. Black-tailed deer, raccoons, striped skunks, and several varieties of squirrels, chipmunks and field mice may be seen. Bears, mountain lions, badgers and porcupines—rarely seen—occasionally range the area.

The forest, grassland and ocean shore host a wide variety of birds. Look for pelicans, ospreys, woodpeckers and oystercatchers. Be especially wary of mischievous Steller's jays and ravens, who ravage unattended campsites in search of food.

NATURAL HISTORY: THE COAST

Bull kelp thrives along the coast. In April, though the kelp is not yet visible, its growth has already begun. Attaching to rocks with a holdfast (a root-like structure that holds the kelp to the ocean floor), bull kelp will grow up to ten inches a day reaching for the sunlight at the surface. After storms, bull kelp can be found piled in large, greenish-yellow mounds all over the beach. Visitors might be lucky enough to spot a great blue heron fishing from "rafts" of kelp at sea. In August, the water is dark with the lush kelp forest that provides homes for countless varieties of rockfish and marine organisms.

From November to January, gray whales pass through the kelp forests as they migrate south to breeding and calving areas along the coast of Baja California. The whales return to summer

Photo courtesy of Steve Clabuesch

Marine life abounds in the waters off Salt Point. Above: bull kelp forest; right: anemone.

feeding areas in the Bering Sea, heading north between February and April.

The Sonoma Coast is famous for its red abalone. This slow-growing mollusk, an important part of the intertidal community, takes about ten years to reach a diameter of seven inches.

On the north coast, the rocky tide pools are full of life. Sea stars, mussels, sea urchins and several varieties of tiny young fish lead a precarious existence in these pools. These organisms are so fragile they can easily be destroyed by accident. Many of these creatures can be damaged by even the simple act of turning over a rock and exposing them to the sun.

At Gerstle Cove State Marine Reserve, Stewarts Point State Marine Reserve and the Salt Point Marine Conservation Area, no form of marine or intertidal life or artifacts may be collected or disturbed. Only kayaking, underwater photography, and recreational diving are permitted within these designated reserve areas.

SANDSTONE AND TAFONI

During the mid-1800s, sandstone from Salt Point played a vital role in the construction of the streets and buildings of San Francisco. Along the marine terrace north of Gerstle Cove, visitors can see enormous slabs of quarried sandstone, drill holes and scattered eye bolts left by long-ago stone workers.

Tafoni is a natural phenomenon common to the sandstone near the ocean's edge at Gerstle Cove and Fisk Mill Cove. An Italian word for "cavern," tafoni refers to a honeycomb-type erosion caused by seasonal wetting and drying of the sandstone, weakening it into pits, knobs, ribs and ridges.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Popular activities at the park include camping, picnicking, fishing, free diving, kayaking, scuba diving and hiking.

Camping—Camping reservations are strongly advised from March 15 to October 31, especially on weekends. Each site has a fire ring and picnic table with food locker. Drinking water and restrooms are nearby, but no showers or sanitation stations are available. Call (800) 444-7275 to reserve campsites or visit **www.parks.ca.gov**.

Family Campsites—The 109 family sites at Salt Point State Park include 30 on the ocean side of the highway at the Gerstle Cove Campground, and 79 on the east side of the highway at the Woodside Campground.

Walk-in Campsites—The 20 walk-in sites in the Woodside Campground do not require reservations, but they are frequently unusable in bad weather. Check at (707) 847-3221 before your trip. The sites are approximately 1/3- to 1/2-mile from the parking area. No dogs are allowed.

Hike/Bike Campsites—Ten hike/bike campsites are behind the ranger office near the Woodside Campground.

Group Campground—The group campground, on the ocean side of Highway 1, accommodates a maximum of 40 people and 10 cars. No dogs are allowed.

Overflow Camping—A day-use parking lot below Gerstle Cove Campground is available for self-contained vehicles only (no tent camping or open fires). There are no restroom facilities, and you must bring your own drinking water.

Fishing—Salt Point is a very good spot for surf fishing. In the Gerstle Cove State Marine Reserve and the Stewarts Point State Marine Reserve, marine life is completely protected. Abalone diving, spearfishing, and rod and reel fishing are permitted elsewhere in the area. Anglers over the age of 16 must carry a valid California fishing license.

Diving—Salt Point's rocky coastline attracts abalone divers. Abalone collection is highly regulated. People taking abalone need a valid California fishing license and abalone report card. Additional rules apply regarding minimum size, daily bag and possession limits, tagging and reporting. For more information on abalone and fishing regulations, contact the Department of Fish and Game or visit **www.dfg.ca.gov**.

Tafoni formations in sandstone

Fisk Mill picnic area

Picnicking—Fisk Mill Cove, a day-use area with paved parking, picnic tables, upright barbecues, restrooms and drinking water, is shielded from the wind by Bishop pines. For a dramatic view of the Pacific Ocean, take a short walk from the north parking lot to Sentinel Rock's viewing platform. Stump Beach, one of the few sandy beaches north of Jenner, has some picnic tables near the parking lot and a primitive toilet, but no running water. A 1/4-mile trail leads to the beach. Gerstle Cove also has picnic tables, a primitive toilet and a scenic view of the ocean.
Trails—The park has more than 20 miles of hiking and equestrian trails—visit **www.parks.ca.gov** for details. Mountain bikes are not allowed on single-track trails because they can damage wet trail surfaces. Please stay on the trails to preserve the park's unspoiled qualities and to avoid contact with ticks and poison oak. Motor vehicles are permitted only on paved roads.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Accessibility is continually improving in California State Parks. Some picnic areas have accessible tables. The Salt Point Trail is accessible for one-tenth of a mile along the coastal bluffs.

The Gerstle Cove day-use area has accessible parking and an accessible restroom. Accessibility updates may be viewed at **http://access.parks.ca.gov**.

PLEASE REMEMBER

Fires—Ground fires and open fires of any kind are not permitted. Use your own off-the-ground barbecue to cook in the campground areas, or you may use the facilities provided. Safely extinguish hot coals in park fire rings.
Pets—Dogs must be kept on a leash at all times and are permitted only in the developed areas, except the group campground and walk-in campsites. They must be kept in a tent or vehicle at night. Only service dogs are allowed on trails.
Tide Pools—Tide pools are extremely sensitive to any disturbance. As you observe and explore tide pool areas, please watch your step; do not disturb or collect any of their delicate residents.
Note—All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be distrubed.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Kruse Rhododendron State Natural Reserve, 22.5 miles north of Jenner; take Kruse Ranch Road off Highway 1 (707) 847-3221 or (707) 865-2391
- Fort Ross State Historic Park 12 miles north of Jenner on Highway 1 (707) 847-3286 or (707) 865-2391
- Sonoma Coast State Park Off Highway 1, just north of Bodega Bay (707) 875-3483

KRUSE RHODODENDRON STATE NATURAL RESERVE

Once part of a large sheep ranch owned by the Edward P. Kruse family, the reserve adjoins Salt Point State Park. The ranch, established in 1880, was donated to the people of California in 1933. Beginning in late April, beautiful pink blossoms appear throughout the redwood forest. Three miles of hiking trails lead visitors through this silent, pristine area.

Pets and bicycles are not permitted on the trails, and mushroom gathering is prohibited everywhere in the park.

Pacific Rhododendron

Photo by Robert Potts © California Academy of Sciences

This park receives support in part through a nonprofit organization. For information, contact Fort Ross Interpretive Association, 19005 Coast Highway 1, Jenner, CA 95450 (707) 847-3437 • **www.fortrossinterpretive.org**