

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park



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Sugarloaf Ridge State Park

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Kenwood, CA 95452-9004

(707) 833-5712

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www.parks.sonoma.net

Photos on cover and inside panel courtesy of Diane Askew

*“A rough smack of
resin was in the air,
and a crystal mountain
purity . . . There are
days in a life when
thus to climb out of the
lowlands seems like
scaling heaven.”*

—Robert Louis Stevenson

Sugarloaf Ridge State Park is named for the shape of the ridge at its southern edge. In the 1800s, sugar was molded into cone-shaped loaves; many hills and mountains with a conical shape were whimsically called “sugarloaf.” The 4,020-acre park is located northeast of Kenwood in the Mayacamas Mountains between the lush Sonoma and Napa valleys.

Elevations in the park range from 600 feet at the entrance to 2,729 feet at the top of Bald Mountain, overlooking the Napa Valley and Mount Saint Helena to the north. On clear days, you can see the Golden Gate Bridge and the Sierra Nevada from Bald Mountain’s summit.

Temperatures during spring and fall are mild. The wettest months—from November to April—can bring 30 to 40 inches of rain. Wintertime lows can drop into the 20s, but daytime highs average 50s and 60s. Summer is hot and dry, often in the 90s, cooling to the 40s in the evenings. Wear a hat, and bring drinking water.

Along the creek near the entrance to the campground, the visitor center provides general information and a guide to the park’s natural and cultural history.

PARK HISTORY

Native People

Anthropologists believe that the Wappo people are one of the oldest native California groups, descended from the first people to settle here. For thousands of years, they led fairly stable lives on lands that produced everything they needed to thrive. The Wappo gathered obsidian for arrow



Valley view from Bald Mountain

homes from local materials. Their social structure included chiefs who acted much like consultants with expertise in specific areas. For instance, if someone had a health problem, a chief would consult someone with experience in medicinal cures. Family ties were of vital importance to the Wappo, and they held their elders and children in high regard.

The Wappo village, called Wilikos, was located along the upper reaches of Sonoma Creek before the first Spanish settlers came. Acorn grinding rocks can be seen locally. Accomplished artisans and excellent resource managers, the Wappo were known for their fine basketry and their expertise in farming techniques.

points from the slopes of Mount Saint Helena. They traveled to the coast to gather salt, seashells and seaweed, and traded with the Pomo people for items not available locally.

Perhaps 1,500 years ago, the Wappo settled in the Alexander Valley area, building their

When the Spaniards first tried to take their lands and resources, ca. 1823, the Wappo successfully resisted. Before long, however, the people were forcibly moved from their traditional lands to reservations, where they lived with other native groups. Despite their strongest efforts to retain their identity, Wappo culture and language were largely lost. Today some Wappo descendants are making an effort to revive their spoken language.



Wappo bead basket

Photo courtesy of Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology and the Regents of the University of California

NATURAL HISTORY

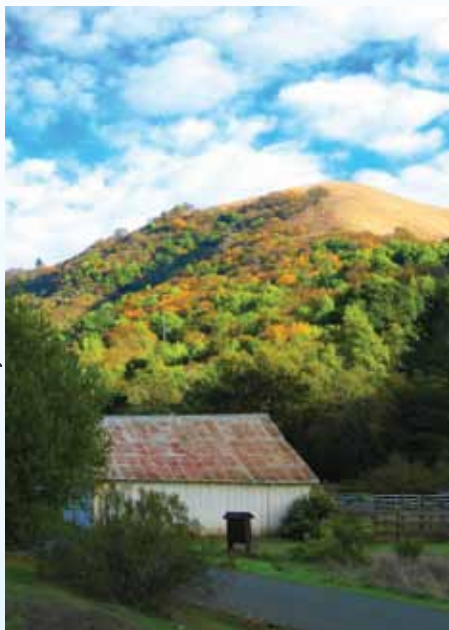
The park encompasses three distinct ecological systems: chaparral-covered ridges, oak/fir woodland along the open meadows, and redwood forest in the Sonoma Creek canyon. Big-leaf maples, madrone, California laurels, gray pines and alders also grow here. California lilacs, coyote bush, toyon, and winebush make up some of the chaparral community. As you hike, watch out for poison oak and, along the creek, stinging nettles.



Panoramic view of Sugarloaf Ridge



Canyon Trail waterfall



Old ranch barn

Sonoma Creek begins in the park and runs for three miles through its southern portion. The creek is not deep enough for swimming and often dries up by late summer. Following the winter rains, a picturesque 25-foot waterfall flows along Sonoma Creek below the campground. In the spring, the park comes alive with wildflowers such as California poppies, cream cups, penstemon, buttercups, shooting stars, trillium, and Indian warrior. Less

common are golden fairy lantern, zigadene and fritillaria. Clarkia, scarlet larkspur, Mariposa lilies, monkey flowers and Indian pinks bloom in early summer. Invasive yellow starthistles and tarweed abound in late summer.

RANCHING

By the 1870s, a number of settlers were living in the hills near Sugarloaf Ridge. Farming was limited and marginal. One settler cut and slowly burned trees to make charcoal that was sold in San Francisco. Eventually “gentlemen farmers” came to own Sugarloaf Ridge; hired managers ran their ranches while they tended to

other businesses in town.

The State of California bought the property in 1920 to dam the creek and provide water for Sonoma State Hospital, but neighbors along the creek objected. Until World War II, the area was used for camping, picnicking and a Boy Scout camp. In 1942 the land was leased for grazing, and it became part of the California State Park System in 1964.

RECREATION

Camping

The campground, located around the meadow near Sonoma Creek at an elevation of 1,200 feet, has 49 campsites that can accommodate trailers and campers up to 24 feet. Each site has a table and a fire ring, with flush toilets and drinking water nearby.

Group camping

The group campground accommodates up to 50 people. There is one large barbecue and fire ring, with water faucets and chemical toilets.

Picnicking

Across the creek from the campground are picnic sites with tables, barbecues and day-use parking.

Fishing

Trout fishing in Sonoma Creek is best in late spring and early summer (the creek is not stocked). Fishing season varies each year—please consult current California Fish and Game regulations. Anglers over the age of 16 must have a valid California fishing license.

Hiking

The park has 21 miles of trails that wind through the chaparral, oak and fir forest, and the redwoods in the canyon along Sonoma Creek.

THE ROBERT FERGUSON OBSERVATORY

The dark night sky here makes this a perfect location for an observatory. Named after a Sonoma county amateur astronomer, the observatory is located near the group campground and surrounded by a protective ring of hills, decreasing the light pollution from nearby cities. This astronomy observatory houses several telescopes. The observatory is open to the public on select weekends throughout the year for both night and solar viewing. Per-person fees are charged at the door for night viewing.



Schoolchildren enjoy the visitor center.

Classes teach visitors about the night sky, how to make a telescope, and more. For information or group reservations, call (707) 833-6979 or visit www.rfo.org.

PLANET WALK

This scale model of the solar system, designed to fit within Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, allows you to “hike” through the entire solar system by shrinking it more than 2,360,000,000 times.

Our sun is large enough to hold a million Earths, yet it is only a middle-sized star. At the scale used for this model, the nearest neighboring sun is more than 10,000 miles away. Each step you take is equal to nearly one million miles of empty space.

To begin your walk, start at the sign representing the sun in the southeast corner of the observatory parking lot. If you take one step every five seconds, you will be walking at the speed of light, but plan on 1/2 to 2 hours for your hike.

Enjoy your journey!

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

The visitor center and parking are generally accessible. Assistance may be needed with the portable restroom at the visitor center. For information on disabled access to the observatory, call (707) 833-6979 or visit www.rfo.org for details.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Pets must be controlled at all times. They must be on a leash no longer than six feet, and kept inside a vehicle or tent at night. They are permitted in the campground and picnic area, but not on park trails or in the backcountry areas. Please clean up after your pets.
- Fires are allowed only in the fire rings provided. You may use your portable stove or barbecue, but only in the established camping and picnic areas. Wood gathering is not allowed—dead wood is part of nature’s recycling system. Purchase firewood at the entrance station.
- Smoking is limited to developed areas. The park becomes tinder-dry in summer when fire hazard is high; please do not smoke on trails.
- Quiet hours are 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. Generators may only be operated between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m.
- Plants and wildlife are protected. Do not pick the flowers. Their seeds make next year’s flowers.
- For their welfare and your safety, please do not feed or attempt to pet wild animals. Please secure food items at night to keep raccoons from stealing them.



Observe coyotes and all wildlife from a distance.

MOUNTAIN BIKES

- Mountain bikes may only be ridden on designated fire roads and service roads.
- Maximum speed is 15 mph.
- If visibility is less than 50 feet, slow to walking speed.
- Alert trail users ahead of you of your approach.
- Yield to horses.
- See “Horses and Bicycles” rules.

HORSES AND BICYCLES

- Horses and bicycles may only be ridden on designated, named trails.
- Please note: some named trails are posted “no use” by horses and/or bicycles. Check postings at trailheads.
- Stay on trails—Do not take “short cuts” or use unnamed trails.
- Obey signs. Some trails are subject to seasonal closure. Check with park rangers when planning your ride.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Annadel State Park
6201 Channel Drive, Santa Rosa
(707) 539-3911
- Jack London State Historic Park
2400 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen
(707) 938-5216
- Sonoma State Historic Park
363 3rd Street West, Sonoma
(707) 938-9560

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