

GUIDE TO THE BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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Park History

Big Basin Redwoods State Park contains roughly 18,363 acres of natural, cultural, and historical resources. Located in Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties, the park resides primarily in the Santa Cruz Mountains and extends to the Pacific Coast, encompasses the Waddell and Año Nuevo Creek watersheds, and is roughly 65 miles southeast of the city of San Francisco and 23 miles northwest of the city of Santa Cruz. The park is accessible by car from the east via Highways 9 and 236 and from the west via Highway 1.

The oldest park in the California State Parks system, the area now called "Big Basin Redwoods State Park" has been inhabited by humans for at least 10,000 years. Prior to European contact in the late eighteenth century, the region hosted the Quiroste, Achistaca, Cotoni, and Sayante tribes, four bands included in the larger Ohlone group. These hunter-gatherer tribes subsisted on local game, including rabbits, elk, and marine life as well as acorns and grassland seeds, clarkia and tarweed. Archaeological evidence includes grinding rock milling sites, stone and shell bead ornaments, and obsidian projectile points, implying access to a vast trade network. Subject to Spanish missionaries, the majority of the Quiroste, along with other Ohlones, ultimately died from the disease and violence so prevalent in the mission system.

As early as the 1830s, the region's abundant timber resources attracted Euro-American loggers, a trend only accelerated after California gained statehood. By 1884, the Big Basin area claimed 28 sawmills and produced 34 million board-feet of lumber, shingles, railroad ties, and posts per year. In 1877, Ralph Sydney Smith, editor of the *Redwood City Times & Gazette* and coiner of the battle-cry "Save the Redwoods," first advocated for the disappearing resources. Smith was murdered 10 years later, but other like-minded conservationists continued his mission. In 1896, the Sierra Club, founded four years earlier to protect Yosemite, focused on Big Basin. Concurrently, a photographer in San Jose, Andrew P. Hill, also began a fight to preserve the ancient trees. In 1900, Hill assembled a meeting of journalists, writers, publishers, artists, politicians, businessmen, and scholars at Stanford University and formed the Sempervirens Club (**Figure 1**). The following year, State Assemblyman George Fisk introduced a club-authored bill to create a state park at Big Basin. It passed in 1902, thus heralding the first successful effort to save coast redwoods from logging and creating California's oldest park (then called California Redwood Park).



Figure 1. Sempervirens Club, ca. 1900. Catalog # 090-S9146.

After debating costs, the State of California purchased—and received by donation—roughly 3,800 acres of redwood groves from the Big Basin Lumber Company. In 1908, the Redwood Park Commission, legislatively created alongside the park in 1902, acquired an additional 3,980 acres of federal land, property that incorporated roughly half of the Waddell Creek watershed into the park. Soon after, the commission successfully campaigned to develop access roads. Saratoga-Big Basin Road opened in May 1915, right on time to receive visitors to the Panama-Pacific International Exposition held in nearby San Francisco. Two years later, alerted to the construction of an adjacent sawmill, the commission successfully lobbied in support of a bill to purchase the neighboring land, thus increasing the park's size to 9,300 acres. Responding to the park's mounting popularity and cramped conditions after July 4, 1919, park warden William H. Dool constructed 100 more camp sites including camps for the Campfire Girls, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, and the YWCA. Although Sempervirens Club founder Andrew P. Hill died in 1922, the organization continued to push to acquire all of Big Basin's watersheds and, coordinating with other concerned conservationists, to create a statewide park system. In 1928, Newton B. Drury, then secretary of Save the Redwoods League, helped establish the State Park Commission, launch a sweeping state park survey, and author that year's state park bond bill. That same year, California Redwood Park was renamed and reclassified Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

In addition to a nationwide economic depression, the 1930s also ushered in an era of massive development for the state and national park systems. One of several New Deal programs, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) recruited unskilled, unemployed young men to work under the supervision of unemployed professionals including engineers, landscape architects, and other contractors in service of national, state, and local parks. The CCC established its first work camp at Big Basin in 1933 and soon built two more (**Figure 2**). During its tenure there, the CCC constructed the Headquarters Administration building and Outdoor Theater with stage, campfire circle,

and cut-log benches in 1935, the Nature Museum and Store in 1938, and expanded the Nature Lodge in 1939, in addition to building roads, a trail network, campsites, ranger residences, garages, work sheds, and other facilities (**Figure 3-5**). CCC-era buildings, designed in the Park Rustic architectural style and constructed out of local natural materials, still stand in the park's original 3,800-acre acquisition. Together with the ancient stand of coast redwoods and the area's other natural resources, the Park Headquarters constitute a historic district nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.



Figure 2. CCC work camps, ca. 1939. Catalog # 090-3586.



Figure 3. Campfire Bowl, ca. 1927. Catalog # 090-15075.



Figure 4. Administration building, ca. 1930s. Catalog # 090-3668.



Figure 5. Park Store, ca. 1930s. Catalog # 090-3663.

The CCC was discontinued with American entry into World War II in 1941, but development and expansion of the park resumed soon after the war. New employee residences were built at Lower Sky Meadow in 1949, and the 1950s saw the removal or remodel of several dated features, such as filled-in swimming pools and updated water and sewage treatment systems. New features like the Sempervirens Reservoir were also introduced. In 1961, the State of California purchased 488 acres of adjacent land from the Big Creek Timber Company, which included Golden Falls, Silver Falls, and Lower Berry Creek Falls. In 1982, the State acquired, named, and classified two subunits: 23-

acre Theodore J. Hoover Natural Preserve and 5,810-acre West Waddell Creek State Wilderness. Most recently, in 2011 California State Parks acquired the 534-acre Little Basin property from the Peninsula Open Space Trust and Sempervirens Fund, which had acquired the property from Hewlett-Packard in 2007.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Mountain Parks Foundation, the Waddell Creek Association, the Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks, the Santa Cruz Mountains Bioregional Council, the Santa Cruz Mountains Trail Association, Save the Redwoods League, the Sempervirens Fund, and the Wildlands Restoration Team, preserves and interprets a wealth of natural, cultural, and historical resources at Big Basin Redwoods State Park (**Figure 6**). In addition to its internationally renowned redwoods population, the park also houses knob-cone pine, Douglas-fir, red alder, madrone, chinquapin, buckeye, and tanoak trees. The park also offers refuge to several endangered species, including California red-legged frogs, San Francisco garter snakes, coast horned lizards, southwestern pond turtles, marbled murrelets, American peregrine falcons, western snowy plovers, California brown pelicans, and, along the coast, northern fur seals, California sea lions, Steller sea lions, harbor seals, and northern elephant seals. In addition to its CCC-era headquarters, the park also provides rich historic interpretation at Rancho del Oso, which includes sites and structures related to Ohlone tribes, Spanish explorers, early loggers, ranchers, and the prestigious Hoover family. The park provides 146 family campsites, 4 group campsites, tent cabins, trail camps, horse camps, and over 80 miles of roads and trails.



Figure 6. Redwood trail, January 30, 2010. Catalog # 090-P67046.

Scope and Content

The Big Basin Redwoods State Park Photographic Collection spans the years 1890-2014, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1900-1940, 1945-1980, 1987-1995, and 2010-2014. There is a total of 1,895 cataloged images including 1,076 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 633 35 mm slides, and 186 born-digital images. Photographs originated primarily from Sempervirens Club founder Andrew Putnam Hill and California State Parks staff.

The collection mainly depicts the natural and built features within the park. Natural features include vegetation, creeks, waterfalls, beaches, mountains, and famous redwood trees "Father of the Forest," "Mother of the Forest," "Auto Tree," "Chimney Tree," "Animal Tree," "George Washington Tree," "Stanford Tree," and tree groups, "Cathedral Group" and "Cloistered Aisle." Locations include Opal Creek, Waddell Beach, Waddell Bluff, Waddell Creek, Sky Meadow, Silver Falls, Berry Creek Falls, Golden Falls, Butano Creek, Basin Creek, and Lower Scott Creek. Also included are various views of the park and its interior from numerous vantages including Pine Mountain and Mount Bielwaski.

Documenting the park's built environment, the collection includes images featuring Park Headquarters, the Campfire Bowl amphitheater, Maddock's Cabin, the Warden's Office, the Nature Lodge, the Coffee Shop, the employees' quarters, the Gift

Shop, Big Basin Inn, park museums, the carpentry shop, and the Rancho del Oso Visitor Center. Campgrounds, such as Barlow Camp, Governor's Camp, Huckleberry Campground, and Sempervirens Campground as well as Sempervirens Dam and the park's sewage treatment facilities are also depicted. Also featured are various trails—Redwood, Shadow Brook, Creeping Forest, Lane-Sunset, Giant Berry Creek Falls, Soroptimist Memorial Grove, and Horse trails—as well as Boulder Creek Highway and Gazos Creek, Sky Meadow, Campground, and Hihn-Hammond roads.

The collection also includes historic photographs created by Andrew P. Hill and donated to California State Parks by the Sempervirens Club of California. These images document the Sempervirens Club and the Redwood Park Commission's activities at Big Basin circa 1900-1915. Included are numerous group portraits featuring club members such as Stanford University President Dr. David Starr Jordan, members of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, T. W. Billings and Q. Packard, professors Emory Smith and H. R. Dudley, General N. P. Chipman, journalist Carrie Stevens Walter, Lieutenant Governor William T. Jeter, Judge John E. Richards, and businessman H. L. Middleton, among many others. Also included are individual portraits of California governors Henry Tift Gage and Hiram W. Johnson, journalist Josephine Clifford McCrackin, ranger Albert M. Weaver, and Andrew P. Hill himself. Historic photographs also document several locations in and around the park including H. L. Middleton's sawmill, Forgev's Ranch, the Boulder Creek Hotel, Waddell Creek, Barlow camp, Slippery Rock, Sempervirens Falls, Big Basin Inn, Saratoga Summit, Pescadero Canyon, and Pine Mountain.

Also depicted are numerous exhibits from the Nature Lodge, interpretive programs, and DPR employees engaging in other park business. Exhibit images primarily include plant and animal specimens collected and mounted by park interpreter Leonard Penhale. Interpretive programs include Campfire programs at the amphitheater hosted by first female state park ranger and collection donor, Harriett "Petey" Weaver, with Don Meadows, Bud Reddick, and Leonard Penhale in the 1940s as well as the 2014 Junior Ranger Program led by DPR employee Kelsey Killoran. Other DPR-employee activities include various construction and facility-maintenance projects.

The collection also documents several ceremonies and events held at the park. These include the Andrew P. Hill dedication ceremony held in 1946; naturalist conferences held in 1954, 1957, and 1960; the Lane-Sunset Trail Camp dedication held in the early 1970s; the 1972 Soroptimist Memorial Grove Trail groundbreaking; and Big Basin Redwoods State Park's 50th-anniversary celebration in 1978.

The collection also contains several images from the CCC era. Images include: vegetation surveys featuring various plant specimens; buildings such as employee residences, the Warden's Office, Governor's Camp, and Big Basin Lodge; group portraits of CCC workers; and the construction of North Escape Road.

The collection also includes several miscellaneous items such as historic postcards from the park, Sempervirens Club documents, and H. Richter paintings of pioneer life produced for the Works Progress Administration.

The Big Basin Redwoods State Park Photographic Collection captures the scenic qualities of the park, documents its natural and built features, conveys its myriad interpretive efforts, and showcases seminal California State Parks history with its

inclusion of scanned Sempervirens Club photographs. However, the collection of CCC-era images would be stronger with the inclusion of other construction projects, such as the Park Headquarters, Campfire Bowl, trail network, campgrounds, and various facilities. Additionally, while the Rancho del Oso Visitor Center museum interior is documented, the actual historic properties that house it are not.

Related Collections

Big Basin Park Photograph Album, History San Jose Research Library.

Big Basin Redwoods State Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Save the Redwoods League Records, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Sempervirens Club of California Records, History San Jose Research Library.

Sempervirens Club of California: An Album of Photographs of the 1900 and 1901 Gatherings of the Club in Santa Cruz County, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Administration building	Eagle Rock
Aerial view	Exhibit(s)
Alder Creek	Father Tree
Amphitheater	Girl Scouts
Andrew P. Hill	Golden Falls
Auto Tree	Governor Henry Tiff Gage
Berry Creek	Governor's Camp
Berry Creek Falls	Group portrait
Big Basin Inn	Harriett E. "Petey" Weaver
Big Basin Lodge	Interpretive program
Boulder Creek Highway	Junior Ranger Program
Boulder Creek Road	Landscape view
Buzzard's Roost	Little Basin
Camp Herbert	Maddock's Cabin
Campfire Bowl	McCrary Mill Site
Campfire Program	Mother Tree
Cathedral Aisle	Naturalist Conference
Chimney Tree	Nature Lodge
China Grade Road	Nature Lodge Museum
Civilian Conservation Corps	North Escape Road
Creek	Opal Creek
Dedication	Painting(s)
DPR Employee(s)	Park Commissioners

Park Headquarters
Pine Mountain
Portrait
Rancho del Oso
Ranger(s)
Redwood(s)
Redwood Inn
Redwood Trail
Scott Creek
Sempervirens Campground
Sempervirens Club
Sempervirens Club Founders Grove
Sempervirens Creek

Visitor(s)
Visitor Center
Waddell Beach
Waddell Bluff
Waddell Creek
Waddell Creek Marsh
Warden's office
Washington Tree
Waterfall

Sempervirens Dam
Sempervirens Falls
Sempervirens Reservoir
Sequoia Trail
Sewage treatment plant
Silver Falls
Sky Meadow
Sky Meadow Road
Slippery Rock
Soroptimist Memorial Grove Trail
Specimen(s)
Trail(s)
Twin Redwoods