

Visit more state parks in 2008

When my husband and I moved back to California in 1980, we resolved to visit every state park and monument. This being WAY pre-Internet, we requested a list, which turned out to be an oversize paperbound book with hundreds of parks, monuments, and historic sites. Not surprisingly, we never got around to touring them all.

I tend to write more manageable resolutions now, mostly ones that replace words like "all" with words like "some." This year I'd like to suggest this goal: "VISIT SOME STATE PARKS IN 2008." Everything from world-class birding to spectacular rock formations, petroglyphs, and elk herds are within a day's reach of Santa Barbara. It is a win-win resolution, because while you get to know your state, you support what makes us great:



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a diversity of ecosystems and cultures. In the process you un-tether yourself from the strip of pavement chain-linking us between LA and the Bay Area.

Your first steps can be quite small. There are several state parks within the confines of Carpinteria to Goleta. El Presidio State Historic Park is right downtown. Founded April 21, 1782, the Presidio was the last of four military fortresses built by the Spanish along the coast of Alta California. There are often

special events there, especially around Founder's Day, Fiesta, and Christmas, so check their site. My personal new favorites are their outstanding 1st Thursday performances.

Chumash Indian Caves, also a State Historic Park, is a bit further up the road. If you head up Highway 154

towards Santa Ynez Valley, take a right turn on Painted Caves Road before the pass. You will find a large sandstone cave which features religious and secular drawings from the 1600s, created by Chumash Native Americans.

Also well within reach for a half-day excursion are Refugio, El Capitan, Gaviota, and Carpinteria State Beaches. These are not just pretty faces, but places to develop outdoor skills like biking, camping, hiking, surfing, and observing birds and other wildlife. Carpinteria is home to seals, sea lions, and some great tidepooling. A pier on the west end of Gaviota State beach is popular with anglers and scuba divers.

When I visited Refugio State Beach, I happened upon a plaque commemorating the 1812 tsunami which is said to have washed the "Thomas Newland", a smuggler ship filled with otter skins, right up Refugio Canyon. When I tried to verify this curious historical note, I

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found the 1812 earthquake and the existence of the ship to be well documented, but the tsunami story may be apocryphal.

Santa Barbara County is also home to La Purisima Mission and Point Sal State Park. La Purisima is considered the most completely restored mission in California, with a church, shops, living quarters, a blacksmith shop, and other original buildings fully restored and furnished. Point Sal, on the other hand, has been closed since 1998, when heavy El Nino storms destroyed Point Sal Road across Vandenburg Air Force Base. Unfortunately, no one seems able or willing to cough up the funds to repair the road.

When you've gotten to know Santa Barbara's generous supply of State sites, three others will help paint the picture of what lies to our east before you get to Las Vegas, Denver, Chicago, and New York City.

One is Tomo-Kahni State Historic

STATE PARK WEBSITES:

- www.calparks.org
- www.parks.ca.gov

Park, by Tehachapi, off highway 5 as it bursts out of L.A. Tomo-Kahni protects the Kawaiisu Native American Village. The Kawaiisu, noted for finely woven baskets, migrated from the Great Basin and lived at Tehachapi for two to three thousand years.

Red Rock Canyon is a State Park located in Kern County. There are significant historical and archeological sites within the park, including petroglyphs and mining-era remains. The springtime wildflowers are spectacular after a rainy winter. Its dramatic, desolate cliffs and rock formations might remind you of Bryce Canyon, but it is considerably closer.

My final recommendation is Tule Elk State Reserve, an hour west of

Bakersfield. This park protects a herd of tule elk which were on the brink of extinction in the late 1800s. A cattleman named Henry Miller worked for 50 years to save the herd. In 1932 the herd earned permanent protection on the park property. Descendants of these elk have been transplanted to other parts of California, which now have free-roaming herds.

The Tule Elk website suggests a visit from late summer through early autumn, since that's when they're most active. That's when I plan to check out the action - binoculars and picnic basket in hand.

Happy New Year, and happy tramping. Remember to "take only pictures, and leave only footprints"!

Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of people, nature, events, and observations transporting the reader around the world and back to Santa Barbara. Her writing can be found at www.CanyonVoices.com, including excerpts from her book, Canyon Voices - the Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon.

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