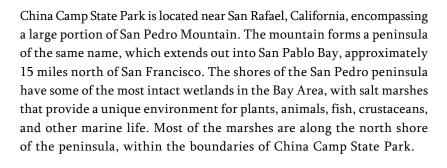




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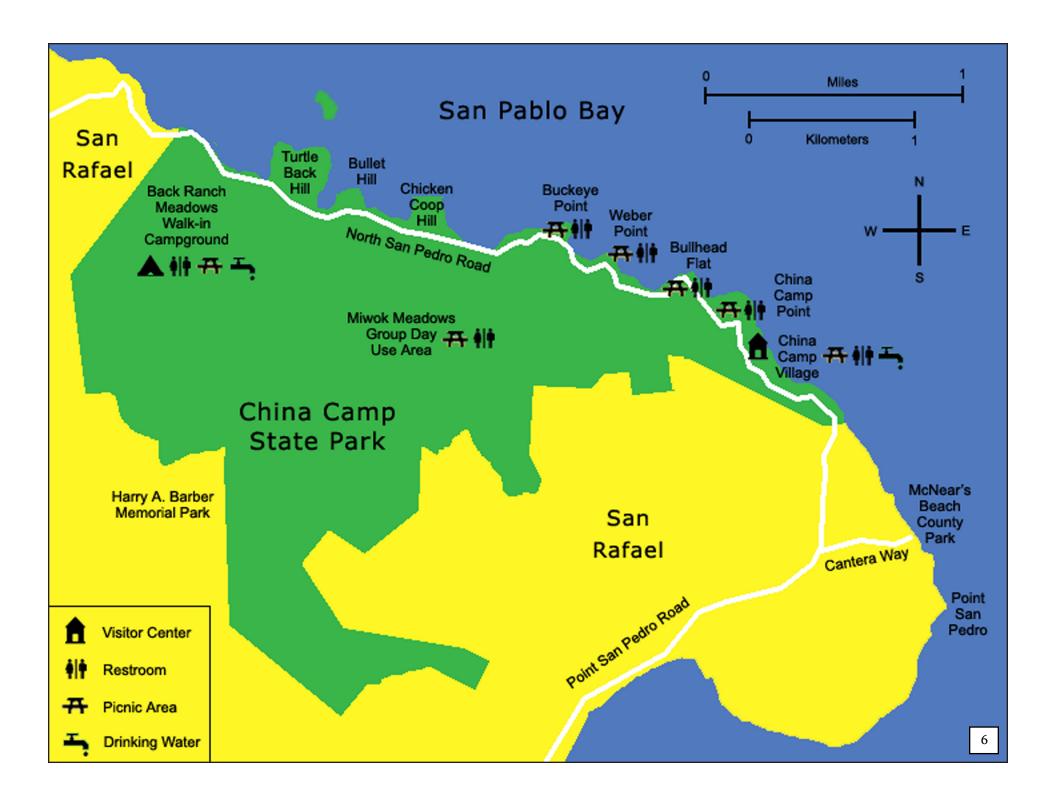


This area has a rich history, starting with the Miwok people who lived here for thousands of years. The Spanish were relative latecomers, and the San Pedro peninsula became settled as a land grant in the Mexican era. The American takeover followed, and Chinese immigrants later came to the shores of San Pablo Bay to take in the rich harvests of shrimp.

China Camp has a comfortable temperate climate year round, with an average of more than 200 fog-free days per year. Winters see most of the rainfall, although temperatures are still usually in the 50s and 60s. Summertime temperatures can get much hotter, often into the 90s, but with low humidity. Spring and fall offer balmy moderate days, with few extremes in temperature. Visitors to the park will be most comfortable dressed in layers, to adjust to changes in the weather, with sturdy hiking boots to cover the trails.

This guide offers an introduction to China Camp State Park, with a timeline of history, overview of flora and fauna, information on the scenic attractions and natural landscapes, as well as practical information such as picnicking sites and camping. A number of trails are described in detail, which can be used either for hiking or mountain biking. Maps accompany each trail description, showing major trail junctions and important landmarks along the way. Welcome to China Camp, a quiet place away from the large crowds of the nearby cities, but close enough for a day trip to wilderness.





CHINA CAMP AT A GLANCE

China Camp State Park is located on the San Pedro peninsula, near San Rafael, California. The park has 1,640 acres with a variety of habitats, including oak woodlands, meadows, grasslands, and tidal salt marshes.

China Camp Village was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 1979, recognizing its significance in the areas of exploration/settlement, architecture, commerce, and social history.

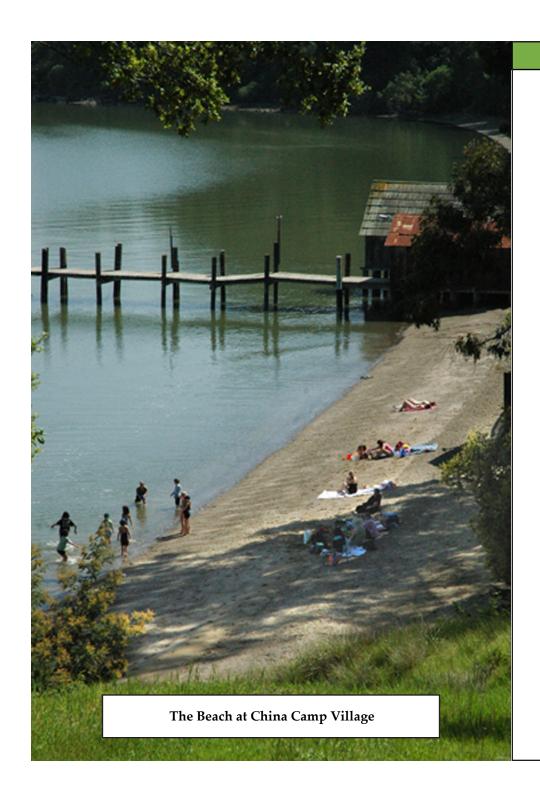
Heritage Day is celebrated each year at China Camp Village in August. The maritime history of the park is commemorated with music and dance performances, along with tours of the *Grace Quan*, a replica Chinese fishing junk, and the *Alma*, a restored scow schooner, both of which are docked at the fishing pier. The junk is named after the mother of Frank Quan, the only remaining resident of China Camp Village.

The salt marshes of China Camp along the shore of the Bay represent the most pristine and best preserved tidal wetlands remaining in the entire San Francisco Bay estuary. See the Salt Marshes chapter for more information abut this unique ecosystem.

China Camp State Park has 15 miles (24.1 kilometers) of trails, most of which are shared by hikers, bicyclists, and horseback riders. See the Hiking & Biking chapter for more information and hike descriptions.

Picnic areas are located throughout the park, including the large site at Miwok Meadows, which can be reserved for groups. See the Picnic Areas chapter for more information.

China Camp State Park is supported by the Friends of China Camp, a nonprofit committee of the Marin State Parks Association, that operates the park in a partnership with California State Parks. See the Friends of China Camp chapter for more information or go to the Friends of China Camp website at friendsofchinacamp.org.



A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHINA CAMP

The area that is now China Camp State Park was inhabited by the Coast Miwok for thousands of years before the arrival of the Spanish in San Francisco Bay in 1775. The Miwok had dozens of small villages, known as *rancherias* in Spanish, scattered throughout Marin County. They led a peaceful existence in a land of plenty, hunting game such as deer and rabbits in the hills, harvesting acorns from the groves of oaks, fishing from the abundant sea, and gathering clams, oysters, and abalone along the shores of the Bay. The Miwok population in Marin and Sonoma Counties is estimated to have been several thousand at the time of the Spanish arrival and was almost wiped out within 100 years. Today, there are still Miwoks in the area, survivors of the changes that occurred in their land.

1817

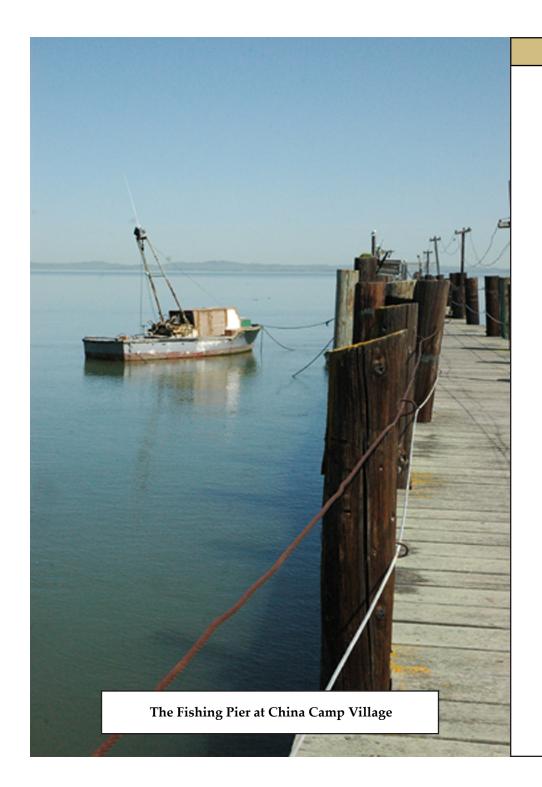
The Mission *San Rafael Arcángel* is founded by the Spanish as an *Asistencia*, or outlying mission, to the Mission Dolores in San Francisco. Miwok, Pomo, and Ohlone converts, or neophytes, are brought here from Mission Dolores because of the warmer and healthier climate. Mission life signals an end to the traditional Miwok way of life, and their population is decimated due to disease and abuse at the hands of the Franciscan friars.

1821

Mexico becomes independent from Spain and foreign trade restrictions in the remote territory of Alta California are greatly eased.

1844

Timothy Murphy, an Irishman who had moved to Mexican California in 1828, is granted a sizeable land grant near San Rafael, called the *Rancho San Pedro, Santa Margarita y las Gallinas*. Murphy, referred to as Don Timoteo Murphy in Spanish, establishes a cattle ranch on the peninsula that is now home to China Camp State Park.



John A. McNear and his brother George begin to purchase land at San Pedro Point. They establish a large dairy ranch that sprawls over 2,500 acres, including five miles of waterfront along San Pablo Bay. The McNear family later builds a hotel and resort that eventually becomes the nearby McNear's Beach County Park.

1870

Chinese immigrants start work as laborers at the McNear family ranch in San Rafael. They move on to become shrimp fishermen on the McNear property, making camp along the northern shores of the San Pedro peninsula. China Camp is one of more than two dozen shrimping camps located around San Francisco and San Pablo Bays.

1880

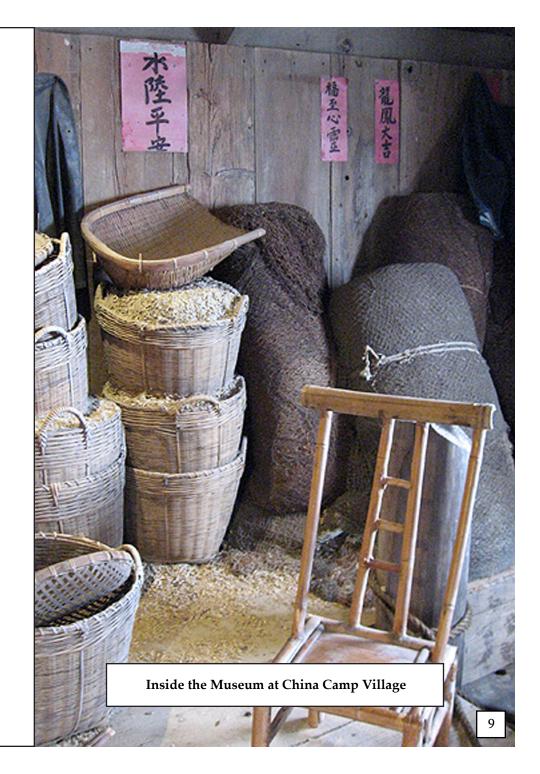
China Camp Village is at the height of its prosperity, with almost 500 residents. Some three million pounds of shrimp are harvested from the Bay each year, the vast majority of which is dried and exported to China.

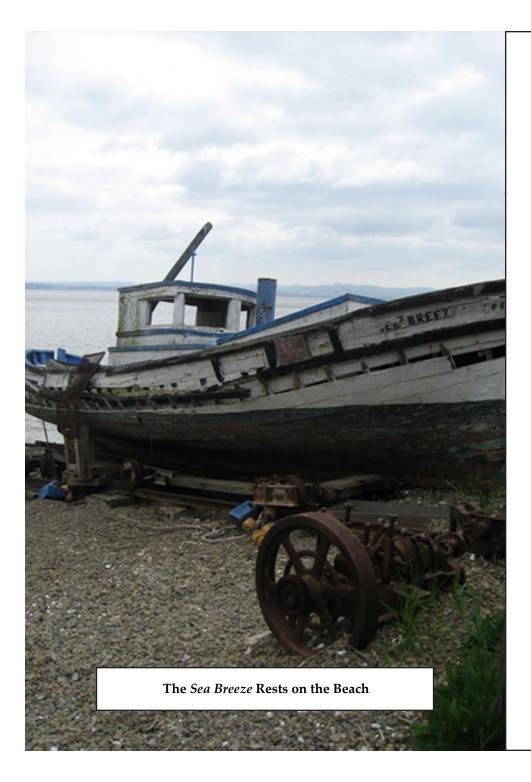
1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act is passed by the federal government, severely limiting immigration from China. This is the first time in the nation's history that a specific nationality is prohibited from immigrating to the United States.

1895

Quan Hung Quock arrives at China Camp Village. He leaves Chinatown in San Francisco during a time of virulent anti-Chinese sentiment. He finds refuge in this remote and inaccessible village, which is a self-sustaining community with its own shops and vegetable gardens.





As part of a series of discriminatory laws that target Chinese immigrants, the export of shrimp to China is prohibited, striking a blow at the mainstay of the economy at China Camp.

1911

The bag nets used by Chinese fishermen are outlawed, making it more difficult for them to earn a living. The Chinese population at China Camp Village dwindles away.

1920 - 1950

With the commercial fishing industry in a steep decline, China Camp develops into a small scale fishing resort, where boats can be rented and bait bought. The amount of shrimp harvested is nowhere near what it was around the turn of the century.

1955

The movie *Blood Alley* is filmed at China Camp Village. John Wayne and Lauren Bacall star in this classic Cold War-era adventure, in which China Camp Village plays the role of a small village in China. Viewed through a modern lens, *Blood Alley* is a reflection of Cold War hysteria, as well as Hollywood's historically inaccurate portrayal of Asians.

1972

While Gulf Oil is working on plans to create a massive commercial and residential development, the group *Save San Pedro Peninsula* is founded by Louise Kanter Lipsey, Tina Ferris, and Sandy Hansen to preserve the area as a park. Their objective is "to preserve as open space the ecologically unique and environmentally significant land of the San Pedro Peninsula."

Much of the land of the San Pedro peninsula is acquired by the California State Park Foundation, which later sells it to the state of California. The 36-acre site of China Camp Village is donated by developer Chinn Ho, who wants the area to be preserved as a memorial to Chinese-American history.

1978

China Camp becomes a state park. Frank Quan, the lone resident, continues to live at China Camp Village and manage the general store. His tenancy is guaranteed in the park's general plan, which states that: "Special consideration will be given to continuing residential use within China Camp Village, to the extent that Frank Quan will be permitted to continue his life-long tenancy in the area."

2009

Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger proposes a state budget that will result in the closure of 220 of the 278 California state parks, including China Camp. The cuts will result in layoffs of at least 2,000 park rangers, biologists, lifeguards, interpreters, architects, and maintenance workers. The backlog of deferred maintenance projects in the state parks reaches one billion dollars. After strong objections from park supporters, the proposal is ultimately scaled back, settling instead for reduced maintenance, administrative staff, and operating hours at some parks.

2010

Proposition 21 is defeated in the November elections. This ballot initiative would have provided the California state parks with a steady and reliable source of funding, through an \$18 increase in vehicle license fees. Supporters of state parks look for new ways to keep the parks funded, as impending cutbacks renew the prospect of park closures.





May 13, 2011

China Camp State Park is placed on a list of 70 state parks that are slated for permanent closure. The Department of Parks & Recreation faces a significant cut in its operating budget, which they feel can only be addressed by closing more than one fourth of the parks in the state. In response to this, park supporters begin to mobilize throughout California, starting grassroots campaigns, raising money, and looking for creative solutions to keep the state parks open. Many nonprofit cooperating associations, including the Friends of China Camp, begin to investigate the provisions of AB42, legislation authored by Assemblyman Jared Huffman, which allows them to partner with California State Parks and assume some of the park operations.

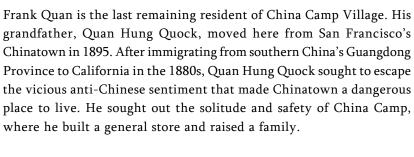
July 1, 2012

July 1 is the officially scheduled closure date for China Camp State Park. The park remains open beyond this date however, thanks to the efforts of Friends of China Camp, which enters into an Operating Agreement with California State Parks to keep the park open for three years. The Back Ranch Meadows Campground is once again open seven days a week year round, as are the picnic sites at Buckeye Point and Weber Point.

July 20, 2012

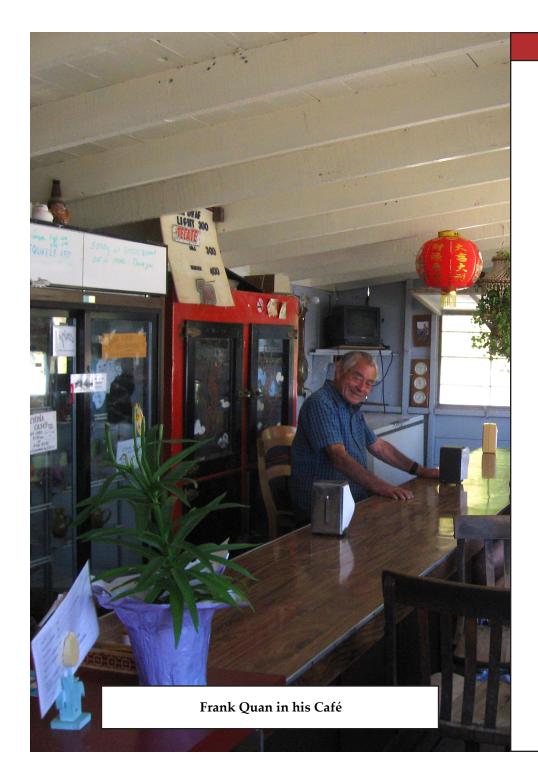
Just weeks after the scheduled July 1 closure date for up to 70 California state parks, a massive scandal breaks out in Sacramento. The entire time that the Department of Parks & Recreation is pleading poverty and pushing the need to shut down parks, they are sitting on two secret funds that total \$54 million. Director Ruth Coleman resigns immediately and her second in command is fired. The community that has worked so hard to keep the parks open is suddenly thrown into a state of confusion, anger, and frustration. The future is uncertain, but we know there is still strong support for China Camp State Park.



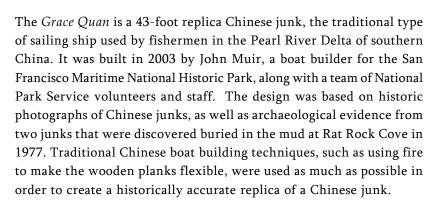


Frank is 86 years old and other than serving in the military during World War II, has spent his entire life at China Camp. He continued to catch shrimp in the Bay for many years after the commercial fishery declined, selling most of the catch for bait. The shrimp fishery of San Pablo Bay has been almost completely depleted over the past thirty years, as water diversion and pollution have compromised the health of the Bay. Frank still operates the general store and café, which is located near the entrance to China Camp Village in a building that dates back to the 1930s. The store is like a museum, with pictures and memorabilia on the walls that tell the story of China Camp and the many people who have worked and visited here. It is open on weekends for the many people who throng to the beach and the picnic sites.

When China Camp State Park was put on a list of state parks that were slated for closure, the issue of Frank's residency was suddenly thrown into uncertainty. The park's general plan, which was written in 1979, states that: "Special consideration will be given to continuing residential use within China Camp Village, to the extent that Frank Quan will be permitted to continue his life-long tenancy in the area." The question that arose, and that nobody was able to answer with certainty, was whether or not this clause would still apply if China Camp were no longer a state park. Now that the park has been saved, this is thankfully no longer an issue and Frank can focus on providing a warm friendly place for visitors to get a bite to eat and hear some fascinating stories about the rich and eventful life he has spent at China Camp.



THE GRACE QUAN



The boat is designed in the classic style of a southern Chinese junk, although many of the materials used are more native to California. The boat itself is built of redwood, a sturdy, long-lasting, and reliable wood. The mast is from an 80-foot Douglas-fir found in Napa County. The reddish brown rust-colored hue of the sails comes from a traditional sailing practice of using the crushed dried bark of tanbark oak to treat cotton canvas sails, in order to preserve them in the harsh elements of the sea.

Chinese junks were used extensively by shrimp fishermen around the shores of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Some of the junks were large 60-foot, two-masted vessels, but the majority of them were single-masted junks that boat builder John Muir describes as "... the workhorses of the Chinese shrimp fisheries during the period of its flourish, and up until its demise in 1911."

The *Grace Quan* was named after the mother of Frank Quan, who is the last remaining resident of China Camp Village. Most of the year it is docked at the Hyde Street Pier in San Francisco, along with other historic vessels in the San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park. The *Grace Quan* sails to China Camp Village in the summertime, and is on display during the annual Heritage Day celebration.



FLORA AND FAUNA



China Camp State Park has a diverse environment that is rich in plant, animal, and marine life. From the shores of San Pablo Bay to the heights of San Pedro Mountain, the park is teeming with life. The tidal salt marshes along the Bay and the oak woodlands that dot the hillsides each have their own unique combination of flora and fauna. In total, the state park has 26 species of mammals, 140 species of birds, 44 species of fish, and 15 species of reptiles and amphibians.

The salt marshes of China Camp represent the most intact wetlands remaining in the San Francisco Bay estuary. They are home to a number of endangered species, including the California clapper rail, a flightless bird that feeds on mussels, clams, snails, and worms. The salt marsh harvest mouse is another endangered species found at China Camp, and it is endemic to the salt marshes of the San Francisco Bay estuary.

Deer are among the most common and visible mammals in the forested hills of China Camp. Other mammals that make this area their home include raccoons, skunks, foxes, coyotes, bobcats, and a variety of rodents. Walking the trails of China Camp, the hiker will hear the gobbling of wild turkeys, as well as an orchestra of bird song. Scrub jays, sparrows, chickadees, acorn woodpeckers, and spotted towhees all add their distinctive sounds to the forest. Raptors such as turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, golden eagles, and peregrine falcons are circling in the skies overhead. Canada geese join seagulls and black cormorants along the shore of the Bay.

The forests of China Camp are rich in diversity, with oak woodlands dominated by elegant valley oaks and the classic coast live oak, whose signature gnarled trunk and branches form an iconic presence on the hillsides. California black oak and blue oak are also present, and mixed in with the oak woodlands are California bay laurel, toyon, madrone, and manzanita. There are three small groves of redwoods that can be found in the deeper canyons of San Pedro Mountain.

Wildflowers of China Camp

The hillsides, forests, and wetlands of China Camp are lush palettes of colorful wildflowers throughout the year. Springtime is when most wildflowers are at their peak, but there is always something in bloom no matter the season. In addition to adding color to the landscape, many of these wildflowers provided food and medicine to the native Miwok people. Here is a small sampling of some of the wildflowers you will encounter as you hike around the park.



Henderson's Shooting Star

Dodecatheon hendersonii

This delicate beauty can be found in woodlands and grasslands that are somewhat shaded. The stamens point out, like the tip of a shooting star, followed by the sepals, which flow behind. The leaves and roots of this plant were roasted and eaten by the Miwok people.



Star Lily

Toxicoscordion fremontii

A member of the Lily family, the Star Lily forms a beautiful bouquet of white to yellow star-shaped flowers at the tip of a stalk. It is often found on grassy hillsides or wooded areas. It is also known as Death Camas, and all parts of the plant are poisonous.



Footsteps of Spring

Sanicula arctopoides

The proximity of this plant to trails may account for the name "footsteps." The scientific name is *Sanicula arctopoides*, with *Sanicula* or sanicle being the genus of approximately 40 species. The name *arctopoides* is Greek for bear's foot, another reference to this plant's tendency to form footprints along a trail.



Bowl Tube Iris

Iris macrosiphon

Also known as Ground Iris, the Bowl Tube Iris is one of the most common early spring wildflowers in the forests of China Camp. Ranging in color from white to deep purple, this iris can be found in shaded areas as well as grassy hillsides that get a fair amount of sun.



California Poppy

Eschscholzia californica

The state flower of California is well represented throughout China Camp, from the shores of the Bay to the top of San Pedro Mountain. The golden orange flowers start coming out in February and can last well into September. Seeds and leaves were used by the Miwok in cooking.



Coast Sun Cup

Camissonia ovata

Open meadows and grasslands are good places to see the yellow flowers of Coast Sun Cups. A cluster of flowers grows out of a rosette of leaves, often found in marshy areas and alongside trails. The scientific name *Camissonia* comes from the French-born botanist Adelbert von Chamisso.



Woodland Strawberry

Fragaria vesca

The Woodland Strawberry grows throughout the forests of China Camp. It bears fruit that are smaller and not as sweet as the cultivated varieties of strawberry, but part of the human diet for centuries. The Beach Strawberry, *Fragaria chiloensis*, can also be found in places within the park.



Indian Paintbrush

Castilleja miniata

The bright red flowers of Indian Paintbrush can be found in open meadows and grasslands. Popular with butterflies, whose larvae use the flowers for food, this plant takes its generic name from the Spanish botanist Domingo Castillejo. In bloom from spring through summer.



Royal Larkspur

Delphinium variegatum

The Royal Larkspur, a member of the buttercup family, is usually deep violet or blue, but a very rare albino form of this species can be found at China Camp. Look for this unusual flower in the grasslands of Turtle Back Hill in the late spring. It can also be found in oak woodlands.



Coast Mule Ears

Wyethia glabra

The bright yellow blossoms of this member of the sunflower family add color to the hills and meadows of China Camp. The seeds from Mule Ears were used by the Miwok for making pinole, a type of flour that was baked into bread. Coast Mule Ears bloom from spring into early summer.



Indian Warrior

Pedicularis densiflora

The deep red stalks of Indian Warrior can be seen in the forests and grassy hills of China Camp from late spring until well into summer. A perennial herb, Indian Warrior is reported to have mild relaxing qualities when brewed in a tea or smoked.



Ithuriel's Spear

Triteleia laxa

A member of the lily family, Ithuriel's Spear blooms in the grasslands and open meadows of China Camp. The angel Ithuriel was a character from English poet John Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. The slightest touch from Ithuriel's Spear was believed to expose any type of deceit.



Western Blue-Eyed Grass

Sisyrinchium bellum

The delicate Blue-Eyed Grass is a common sight alongside trails, as well as in the open grasslands of China Camp. In spite of the name, it is not a grass, but rather a perennial member of the iris family. It blooms in spring and can still be found in many places throughout the summer.



Sticky Monkey Flower

Mimulus aurantiacus

The prolific orange blossoms of Sticky Monkey Flower cover entire hillsides at China Camp throughout the summer months. The native Miwok and Pomo people found the flowers and roots to be a natural antiseptic, and used them to treat scrapes and burns.

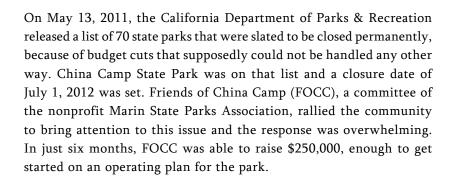


California Honeysuckle

Lonicera hispidula

The perennial vines of California Honeysuckle, also known as Pink Honeysuckle, can be found in the woodlands of China Camp, especially near streams. It produces red berries, which are edible, although bitter tasting. The berries are popular with birds, especially hummingbirds.





The July 1 scheduled closure date came and went, but the park remained open. FOCC signed an Operating Agreement with the Department of Parks & Recreation later that month, forming a partnership to jointly operate the state park for three years. The Back Ranch Meadows Campground is now open seven days a week year round, as are the two previously closed picnic sites at Buckeye Point and Weber Point. The future is still uncertain though, as the Department of Parks & Recreation has become mired in scandal and corruption. Community support is more important than ever as the park finds its way through this difficult time. Grassroots community support is not just financial; much of the work being done now is with the help of dedicated volunteers.

Friends of China Camp offers annual memberships to individuals for \$15, for families \$25. Visit the Friends of China Camp website at friendsofchinacamp.org to find out more information or to purchase a membership online, make a donation, or check out volunteer opportunities.

You can also join Friends of China Camp or make a donation by mailing a check to:

Friends of China Camp 100 China Camp Village San Rafael, CA 94901



The Ranger Station and Visitor Center

RANGER STATION AND VISITOR CENTER

The Ranger Station is a small building that functions as park headquarters and a Visitor Center. It has a Natural History Museum and provides visitors with a wealth of useful information, including maps of the park, a library of natural history books, and interpretive displays about the ecological communities, birds, trees, and animals that can be found at China Camp. It is also the administrative headquarters for the state park rangers and the best place to go in case of emergencies, lost hikers, or to report a problem.

The Ranger Station and Visitor Center is a good place to start your visit to China Camp State Park, especially if this is your first visit. Volunteer docents can answer questions and make suggestions about sites to see and hikes to take. The interpretive exhibits give visitors a good overview of the park's ecology, flora and fauna, and tidal processes. The library of books and other materials has extensive information about the history of China Camp Village and the shrimp fishing industry, as well as other aspects of the China Camp story. For those interested in the history of Chinese settlement in the area, a number of books are available with historical photos that show how the area looked in the past.

The Ranger Station and Visitor Center is located at 100 Peacock Gap Trail, just across North San Pedro Road from the Bullhead Flat picnic area. At this time, it is only open sporadically, when Park Rangers are working onsite or when volunteer docents are available to staff the desk. Long-term plans call for a more permanent presence here with an expanded Natural History Museum and interpretive programs for park visitors.

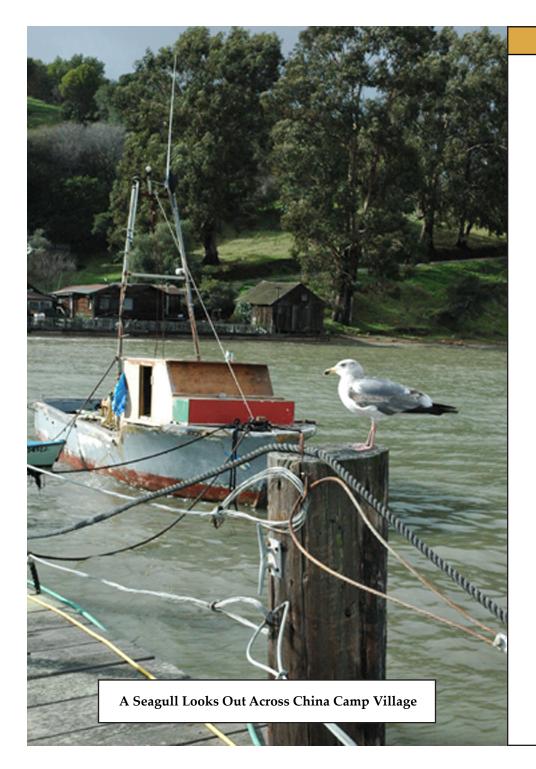
A display board outside the entrance provides useful information about the park that can be viewed even when the building is not open. There is usually a stock of maps available outside as well. Free parking is available in front of the building. Restrooms are across the road at Bullhead Flat.

CHINA CAMP VILLAGE

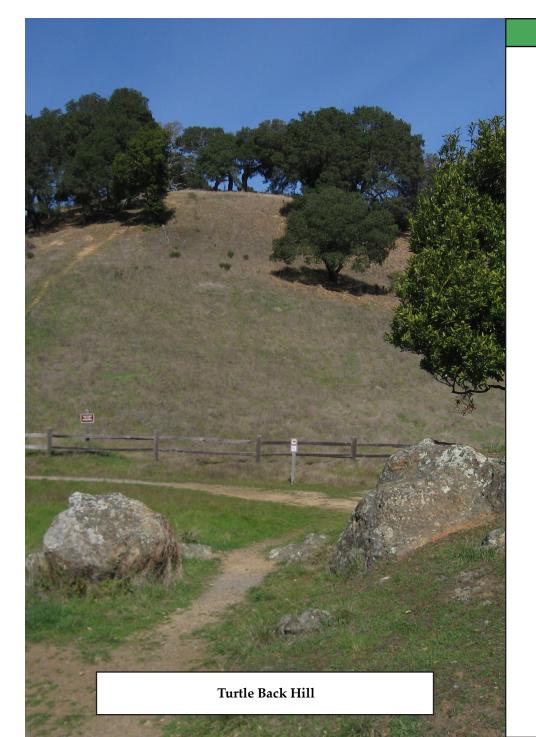
Located along the shores of San Pablo Bay, China Camp Village was the site of a Chinese shrimp fishing camp that dates back to around 1870. It was one of dozens of shrimping camps around the shores of the Bay that thrived from the 1870s until the early part of the 20th century. At its heyday in the 1880s, there were more than 500 people living at China Camp Village, with several small streets lined with wooden buildings. The residents of the village made their living harvesting the shrimp from the tidal mud flats along San Pablo Bay. Some of the shrimp was sold to local restaurants, but the vast majority was dried and prepared for export to China.

China Camp Village began to decline in 1882, when Chinese immigration to the United States was banned by the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act. This was the first time in U.S. history that immigration was banned for an entire nationality. Additional discriminatory laws were passed against the Chinese, making life difficult for the fishermen of China Camp Village. In 1905 the export of shrimp was outlawed, striking a severe blow to the China Camp economy. In 1911, the use of the traditional bag nets favored by the Chinese was prohibited. As a result of these laws, the population of China Camp Village declined until almost all residents were gone.

A number of historic structures remain along the waterfront, including a small museum with exhibits and interpretive displays about the history of the village and the shrimp fishing industry. The general store is operated by Frank Quan, the grandson of Quan Hung Quock, who came to China Camp Village in 1895. Also still standing are a shrimp drying platform and shed, a shrimp grinding shed, a number of residences, and a 300-foot pier jutting out into the Bay. The China Camp Village Museum is located in one of the old historic buildings and is open on weekends and other days when volunteer docents are available to staff it. A small beach runs in front of the village, with several picnic areas available.



TURTLE BACK HILL



Turtle Back Hill is a small peninsula that is actually more like an island, a unique ecological island that is almost entirely surrounded by the salt marshes along San Pablo Bay. Turtle Back Hill features a microcosm of the ecology of China Camp State Park. All four types of oaks that can be found in the park are on Turtle Back Hill: coast live oaks, valley oaks, California black oaks, and blue oaks. Interspersed with the oak woodlands are grasslands that have a mixture of both native and non-native species. On the northwest side of the hill is a beautiful field of purple needlegrass, the official state grass of California. And surrounding the hill are the vast salt marshes that so typify the shoreline of San Pablo Bay.

Just offshore from Turtle Back Hill is Jake's Island, a small hill that rises up from the landscape, completely surrounded by the salt marshes. Jake's Island is forested with a dense oak woodland and provides an isolated and highly sensitive environment for wildlife. The island is not accessible to visitors because of its sensitive ecology and because getting to it would require traversing the even more sensitive salt marshes. Jake's Island can be viewed from afar though, especially from signpost number two on the Turtle Back Hill Nature Trail. The island gets its name from a man who set up a small homestead there in years past.

The Turtle Back Hill Nature Trail is an easy signposted trail with interpretive markers that tell the story of the salt marshes and the bay environment. See the Bay and Marsh Loop hike in the Hiking chapter to get a detailed description of this hike. Hikers can also listen to an Interpretive Audio Tour while taking this hike. The tour has been created by the California Department of Parks & Recreation and features a series of MP3 files that can be downloaded and played on an IPod or other MP3 player. The files can be downloaded from the China Camp State Park section of the State Parks website, at http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=26081.

THE SALT MARSHES

The salt marshes of San Pablo Bay line the northern side of the San Pedro peninsula, providing a rich environment for fish and wildlife that is a protected area within China Camp State Park. These type of wetlands were once common all around the shores of San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, although they have diminished greatly after centuries of development and urban expansion. Once regarded as useless swamps, tidal wetlands are now understood to play an important role in the environmental processes that are critical to a healthy environment for plant and animal life. It is recognized that the salt marshes of China Camp carry out many important functions, such as acting as a buffer from stormy seas, easing the effects of erosion, and forming a natural filter for the waters of the Bay. They also absorb excess nutrients that reduce oxygen levels and cause "dead zones."

The salt marsh harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys raviventris*) is a rodent species endemic to the San Francisco Bay Area salt marshes and listed on both federal and state endangered species lists. Another endangered species found here is the California clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris obsoletus*), a small flightless bird that gets its name from its rail-thin body that is capable of moving through the saltgrass and pickleweed with ease.

China Camp State Park is part of the San Francisco Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, an organization that conducts research on wetland ecosystems, monitors water quality, and offers educational programs for science teachers and local school groups. The salt marshes of China Camp can be viewed alongside North San Pedro Road, from the entrance to the state park all the way to China Camp Point. Turtle Back Hill, Bullet Hill, and Chicken Coop Hill are small peninsulas that extend out into the marshes, offering great views of this unique landscape. See the Bay and Marsh Loop hike for a description of the Turtle Back Hill Nature Trail, which provides a great overview of the salt marshes of China Camp.



The Salt Marsh Ecosystem

The salt marshes of China Camp State Park are the most pristine and best preserved in the entire San Francisco Bay Estuary, with a wealth of plant life that helps sustain a variety of birds, fish, mammals, and invertebrates. These plants contribute to an extremely productive ecosystem, one that serves to filter the waters of the Bay, and sequester carbon dioxide, mitigating the effects of global warming. Each plant has its own place in the salt marsh ecosystem, depending on its tolerance for salt and its ability to supply oxygen internally. Cordgrass forms a band at the lower levels of the marsh, while gumplant is usually found at the highest levels. The plants grow in spring and summer, either from roots or rhizomes. They die back in the winter, and their detritus adds to the nutritional "soup mix" of the Bay. The plants of the salt marshes provide a source of nutrition for the many types of animals, worms, invertebrates, and other organisms that make their homes here. In addition, the shrubs and grasses of the marshes offer shelter, nesting sites, and nesting materials for many species of birds and small mammals.



Common Pickleweed

Salicornia pacifica

This perennial shrub covers much of the marsh sediment along the Bay, providing shelter for the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse and California clapper rail. It has a high tolerance for salt water and acts as a conduit for nutrients that are transported upward from the sediment.



Salt Marsh Gumplant

Grindelia stricta var. angustifolia

This member of the sunflower family has large yellow blossoms that bloom all summer long. The gumplant favors well drained soils, so it is commonly found just above mean high tide. The "gum" in the name comes from the sticky, aromatic resin, which exudes from the plant and was used by the Miwok to treat rashes.



California Cordgrass

Spartina foliosa

This perennial grass has a high tolerance for salt and forms a bright green border along the lower tidal edge of the salt marshes. It plays an important role in the ecology of the salt marsh, releasing organic compounds and nutrients when its growth dies at the end of the summer.



Fleshy Jaumea

Jaumea carnosa

Also known as marsh jaumea, this succulent has small yellow flowers that bloom in the summer. Like other plants in the salt marshes, it is *halophytic*, which means that it has a high tolerance for salt. It grows low to the ground, forming a dense mat.



Alkali Heath

Frankenia salina

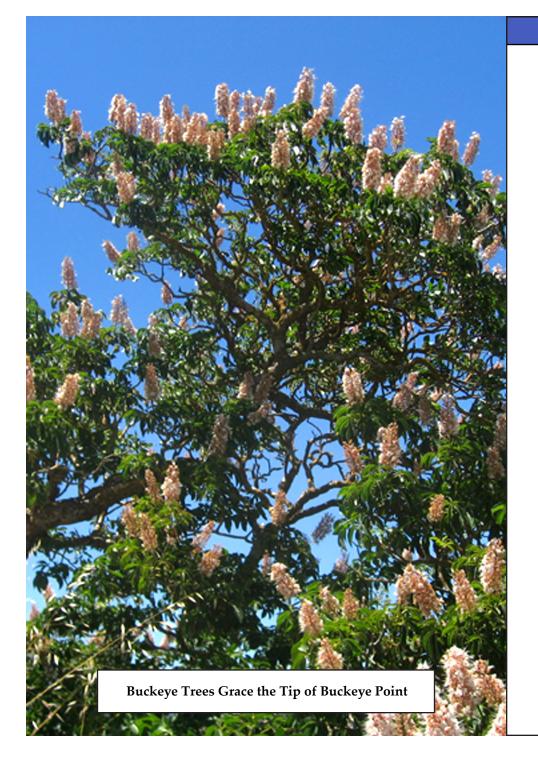
Also known as salt marsh heath, this low growing perennial herb has a very limited range, growing mainly in the salt marshes around San Pablo Bay. Like other plants of the salt marshes, it is a *halophyte* that is capable of excreting salt. The small pink flowers bloom in the summer.



Saltgrass

Distichlis spicata

Saltgrass is a perennial low growing grass. Like many of the salt marsh plants, it has *rhizomatous* growth, which means it propagates asexually by spreading horizontal rootstalks through the mud. It also has glands that excrete salt, allowing it to thrive in the alkaline salt marshes.



Along the north side of the San Pedro peninsula, the shoreline along San Pablo Bay is punctuated with a number of small promontories that reach out into the Bay. From Turtle Back Hill to China Camp Point, these dramatic headlands separate the salt marshes into small bays and form ecological islands of grasslands and oak woodlands. These promontories are referred to as the Points, and the largest of them is Turtle Back Hill, which has its own chapter in this guidebook.

The rest of the Points have colorful names, that provide some insight into the history of the area before it became a state park. Bullet Hill was once littered with spent bullets, detritus from a nearby gun club. An old house on Chicken Coop Hill had a small coop in the back where chickens were kept. Buckeye Point has a number of California buckeye trees, two of which grace the very tip of the point. Weber Point was home to the Weber family for many years. They had a large house on the point that dated back to the 1940s. It was torn down after the state park was created in the 1970s.

Both Buckeye Point and Weber Point have small picnic areas, with picnic tables, barbecue grills, trash/recycling bins, and restrooms. Each of these two sites has parking for 10 cars. They can be reserved for special events such as weddings or company offsites, by calling (800) 444-7275 or online at www.reserveamerica.com.

Five Pines Point separates Rat Rock Cove from Bullhead Flat, a small picnic area across North San Pedro Road from the Ranger Station. China Camp Point is up the hill from China Camp Village and has a large picnic area, with picnic tables, barbecue grills, restrooms, and a large parking lot. The wide green lawn and sweeping views of the Bay make this an especially appealing spot for a picnic.

See the Picnic Areas chapter for more information about picnic sites throughout the park.

PICNIC AREAS

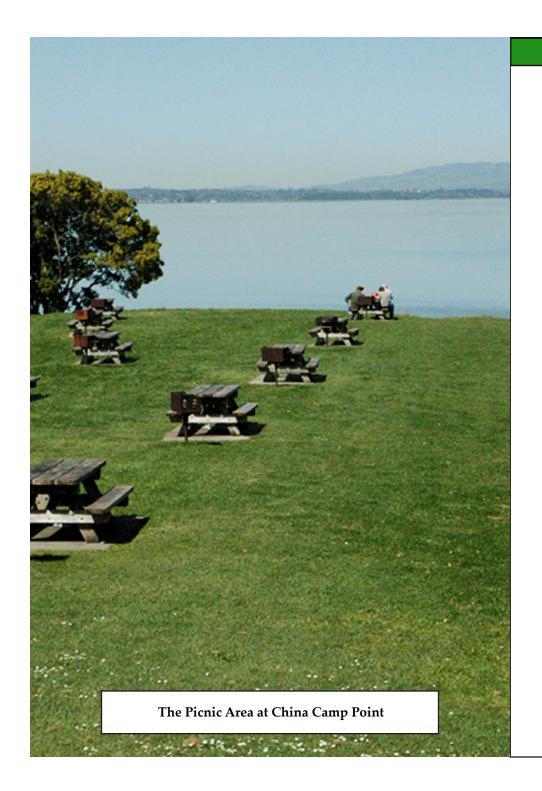
China Camp State Park has a number of scenic picnic sites, with locations in open meadows, grassy lawns, or along the shores of San Pablo Bay. It is a great place to bring the family for a day outing or a special barbecue. During the week, most picnic areas are lightly used, and even on weekends, there are usually ample facilities for anyone who wants to enjoy a nice picnic in a quiet and serene place.

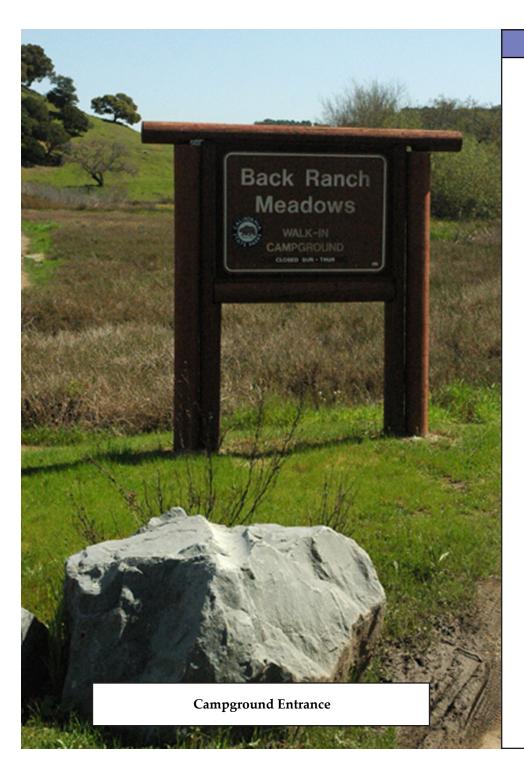
Several of the picnic areas can be reserved for large groups. Miwok Meadows is the largest picnic area in the park, and can accommodate up to 200 people. It is located in a wide grassy meadow surrounded by groves of bay laurel and oak trees, a short distance inland from San Pablo Bay. The site has two large fire pits for grilling, two dozen picnic tables, a horseshoe toss area, trash and recycling containers, and portable toilets. There is no running water available at this site.

Other large picnic areas that can be reserved are Buckeye Point and Weber Point. Both of these are bayside locations, with sweeping views across the water to the hills beyond. Each of these two sites can be reserved for groups up to 50 people. They feature barbecue grills, picnic tables, trash and recycling containers, drinking water, and restrooms. Day use parking for Buckeye Point and Weber Point is \$5. Reservations can be made through ReserveAmerica by calling (800) 444-7275 or online at www.reserveamerica.com.

Special events with large numbers of people may require a permit. More information can be had by contacting David Kopler, the State Parks Events Coordinator for the Marin District, at (415) 898-4362, or send an email to dkopler@parks.ca.gov.

Smaller picnic sites that do not require reservations are located at China Camp Village, China Camp Point, and Bullhead Flat. Each of these sites has picnic tables, barbecue grills, trash and recycling containers, drinking water, and restrooms.





China Camp State Park has one campground, available for walk-in tent camping. It is called the Back Ranch Meadows Campground and is located near the entrance to the park, just off of North San Pedro Road. There are 30 campsites situated among groves of oaks, bay laurels, and madrones. Back Ranch Meadows is approximately three miles (4.8 kilometers) from China Camp Village and is close to a number of hiking trails, including the Shoreline Trail and the Turtle Back Hill Nature Trail.

Back Ranch Meadows Campground has restrooms, showers, picnic areas, and fire rings. Ranger-led campfire programs are held at a small amphitheater throughout the summer.

Tents and equipment must be carried from the parking lot, approximately 50-300 yards.

One Hike and Bike campsite is available. Eight campsites are accessible to the disabled, as are campground restrooms.

Self-contained recreational vehicles are allowed to stay one night in the parking lot, although no electrical or water hook-ups are available.

Check in time is after 2:00PM and check out time is Noon. The campground gate closes at 9:00PM. During the high season of April through October, there is a seven-day limit on camping at Back Ranch Meadows. The rest of the year, the limit is 15 days.

Reservations are accepted throughout the year and can be made for specific sites. Reservations can be made through Reserve America by calling (800) 444-7275 or online at www.reserveamerica.com.

Call the park Park Office at (415) 456-0766 for more information.



China Camp has 15 miles (24.1 kilometers) of trails, most of which are open to both hikers and bicyclists. The one exception is the Nature Trail on Turtle Back Hill, which goes through a highly sensitive ecosystem and is only open to hikers. The trails at China Camp are well maintained and signposted, and take the visitor through beautiful landscapes of tidal wetlands, forests, grasslands, and mountain top. China Camp is known for its spectacular show of wildflowers in spring and throughout the summer.

Bay and Marsh Loop

The Turtle Back Hill Nature Trail is an accessible signposted trail that makes an easy loop around Turtle Back Hill, a small peninsula that juts out into the salt marshes along San Pablo Bay.

Through the Forest

Take a long stroll through the oak and Bay laurel forests of China Camp on a trail lined with wildflowers for much of the year. A gradual climb takes hikers and bikers up along a ridge with views of the Bay and tidal marshes.

Hike up the Hill

The hike up to the top of San Pedro Mountain is somewhat strenuous, but surprisingly gradual considering the elevation gain. The higher reaches of the mountain afford views in all directions, with a dramatic close-up view of Mount Tamalpais. San Pablo Bay is spread out before you to the north, while Mount Diablo dominates the horizon to the east. Directly below is the city of San Rafael and much of Marin County.

Around and Over the Mountain

Take a ride around the entire San Pedro Peninsula, along the shores of San Pablo Bay, through China Camp and San Rafael. This ride includes paved roads through much of the state park, plus a dirt road trek up and over San Pedro Mountain.

BAY AND MARSH LOOP The Turtle Back Hill Nature Trail

Total distance: 0.75 miles (1.2 kilometers)

Difficulty: Easy

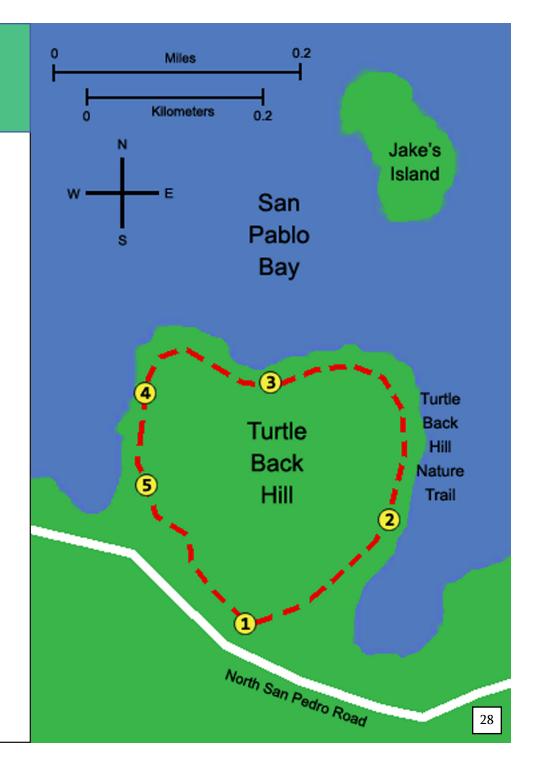
Situated on a small peninsula that juts out into the salt marshes along San Pablo Bay, Turtle Back Hill is an ecological island with a fascinating natural history. The Turtle Back Hill Nature Trail is an easy signposted trail with interpretive markers that tell the story of the salt marshes and the bay environment. Because of the sensitive natural environment and the narrow single-track trail, the Turtle Back Hill Nature Trail is open to hikers only. The trail is mostly flat and is accessible to wheelchairs and the disabled.

1. Mile 0: Start the Hike

The hike starts at a turnout on North San Pedro Road, a half mile (0.8 kilometers) east of the park entrance, Look for the large signpost, the first in a series of signposts that provide information about the nature trail. Start down the trail, looking out over the salt marshes to the right and the grassy meadows that ascend the slopes of Turtle Back Hill to the left. The meadows are dotted with wildflowers in the spring and summer, often bursting with the bright orange of California poppies. Blue-eyed grass, shooting stars, sun cups, buttercups, and wild iris can also be seen here.

2. Mile 0.2: Second Signpost

The second signpost describes the ecological process of estuaries such as San Francisco Bay, where saltwater and freshwater come together. Look out over the vast salt marshes that line the shores of the Bay, traversed by sloughs that carry the mixture of fresh and salt water that allows this unique environment to be so rich in wildlife. See The Salt Marshes chapter for more information about the ecology of this landscape, which represents some of the best preserved tidal marshes in the Bay Area. The trail continues straight ahead and starts to curve around the peninsula, always staying close to the shore of the Bay.



3. Mile 0.4: Third Signpost

The third signpost is located near the tip of the peninsula. Looking out across the Bay, you will see Jake's Island surrounded by the thick clumps of saltgrass and pickleweed that fill the marshes. The sign explains the complex workings of the salt marshes and the types of plants that make up this fragile ecosystem.

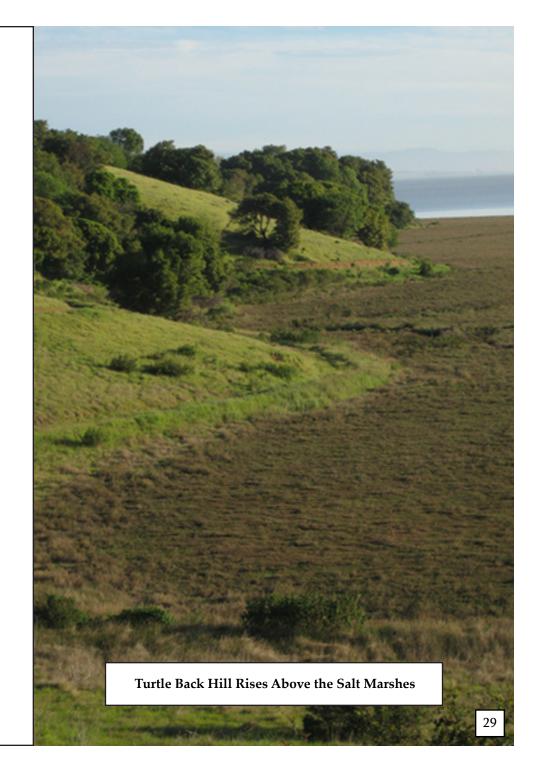
4. Mile 0.5: Fourth Signpost

Rounding the peninsula, the trail goes into a forest of coast live oak, California black oak, madrone, and California bay laurel. Manzanita bushes climb up the steep slopes of the hill, their deep red twisted branches reaching out in all directions. The shadier areas of the forest provide an ideal environment for Bowl-tubed Iris, which often lines the sides of the trail in springtime. In early summer, the delicate purple trumpet-shaped flowers of Ithuriel's Spear peek up above the carpet of fallen leaves. Continue through the forest as views through the trees open up across the marsh again.

5. Mile 0.6: Fifth Signpost

The vast tidal marshes are now visible, stretching along the shore of San Pablo Bay, with the city of San Rafael in the distance. At low tide, the marshes are transformed into mudflats, revealing some of the world that lives underneath the Bay. The mudflats are so dense that they almost seem like solid land, with small sloughs running through them carrying runoff from the hill out to the Bay. Within this mud live millions of creatures that form part of the marshland food chain, including clams, crabs, and shrimp. It is understandable how this area was so highly prized by Chinese shrimp fishermen in the 19th century.

While hiking around Turtle Back Hill, you can listen to an Interpretive Audio Tour which has been created by the California State Parks Department. The audio files can be downloaded from the China Camp State Park website, at http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=26081, and then loaded on to an Ipod or MP3 player.



THROUGH THE FOREST

Shoreline/Bay View Loop Trail

Total distance: 6.9 miles (11.1 kilometers)

Difficulty: Moderate

Take an extended hike or bike ride through the forests of China Camp, with views of the Bay on both sides of the peninsula. This trek involves only moderate elevation changes on trails lined with wildflowers.

1. Mile 0: Start the Hike

The hike starts at the campground parking lot. Day use parking is available for a fee of \$5, in a small lot at the entrance to the campground. Parking is available along North San Pedro Road if the entrance gate is closed. From the parking lot, go into the campground on the path next to the restrooms, cross the footbridge, and turn left just past campsite #1. This will put you on the Shoreline Trail.

2. Mile 0.2: Junction with the Shoreline Trail

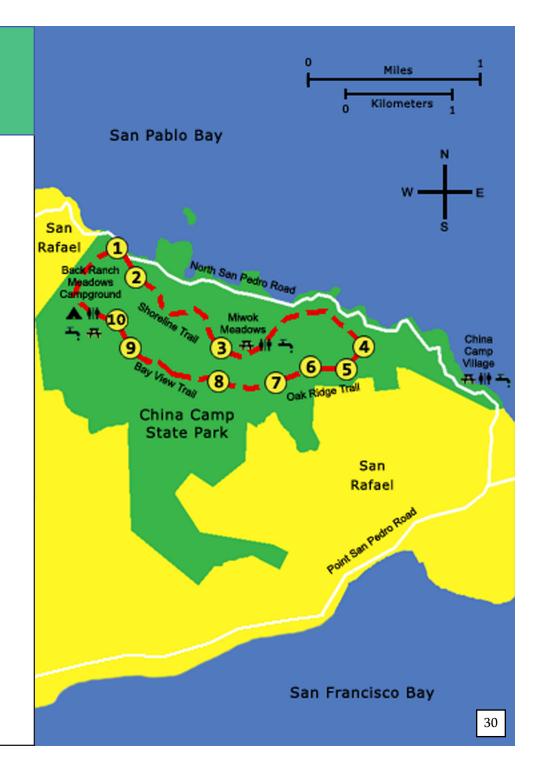
Continue along the Shoreline Trail, the first part of which is easy, mostly level, and accessible to the disabled. The trail winds its way through open meadows and forests of valley oak, coast live oak, madrone, and California bay laurel. After traversing several small hills along the shoreline, the trail curves inland and goes into deeper forest.

3. Mile 1.2: Miwok Meadows

The trail comes back into the open at Miwok Meadows, a large picnic area inland from the open marshland. A small pond next to the meadows is a great place to watch for ducks, egrets, and herons. Beyond Miwok Meadows, the trail goes back into the forest, with some views looking out over the marshes and the small peninsulas that jut out into the Bay.

4. Mile 2.9: Junction with the Peacock Gap Trail

Turn right onto the Peacock Gap Trail and start to make the gradual ascent over the ridge.



5. Mile 3.0: Junction with the Oak Ridge Trail

Continue up through the forest above the ranger station and veer to the right onto the Oak Ridge Trail.

6. Mile 3.6: Junction with McNears Fire Trail

Keep going on the Oak Ridge Trail after it crosses the McNears Fire Trail. The two trails runs parallel to each other for a short distance. The Oak Ridge Trail is the lower one, to the left. It runs along the top of a ridge through meadows that are rich with wildflowers in the spring, although mostly dry in the summer. The views now open up to the southern side of the peninsula, looking down on the Peacock Gap Country Club and the Glenwood neighborhood of San Rafael. In the distance are the towers of downtown San Francisco.

7. Mile 3.9: Cross McNears Fire Trail Again

The Oak Ridge Trail crosses the McNears Fire Trail a second time and then plunges back into forest of oak, madrone, and bay laurel. It goes through some open clearings, which have a profusion of sticky monkey flower in the summertime. This is one of the most common wildflowers in the park, and is recognizable by its orange flowers shaped like the face of a monkey.

8. Mile 4.4: Junction with the Bay View Trail

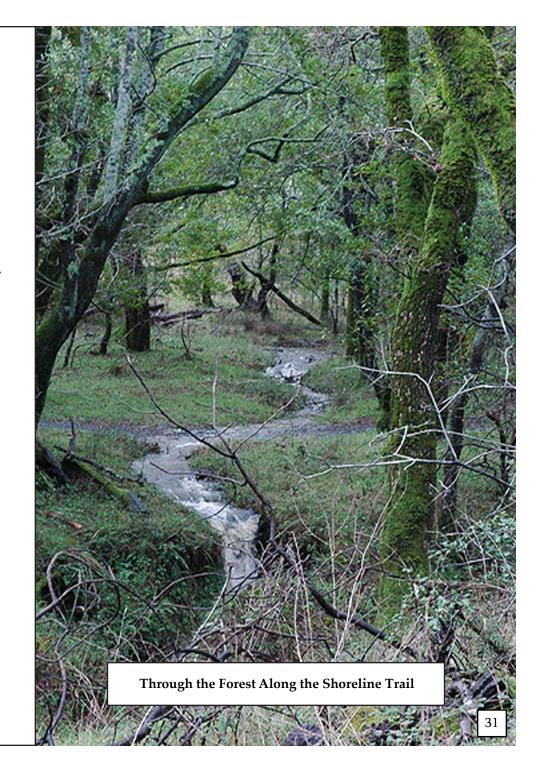
The trail comes to an open clearing, with two large tree stumps. There is no sign here, so take the trail to the right, which runs in between the two tree stumps. This is the Bay View Trail.

9. Mile 5.6: Junction with the Back Ranch Fire Trail

Go to the right onto the Back Ranch Fire Trail. Take it slow along this trail because it is steep in some areas as it winds back down the hill.

10. Mile 6.1: Junction with the Shoreline Trail

Turn left onto the Shoreline Trail, which winds its way through the forest, just above the campground. The Shoreline Trail brings you back to the campground, completing the loop.



HIKE UP THE HILL To the Top of San Pedro Mountain

Total distance: 5.6 miles (9.0 kilometers)

Difficulty: Strenuous

This is a great hike to see China Camp State Park from a bird's eye view. The trail climbs gradually to the top of San Pedro Mountain, where a scenic overlook provides 360 degree views of the park and much of Marin County.

1. Mile 0: Start the Hike

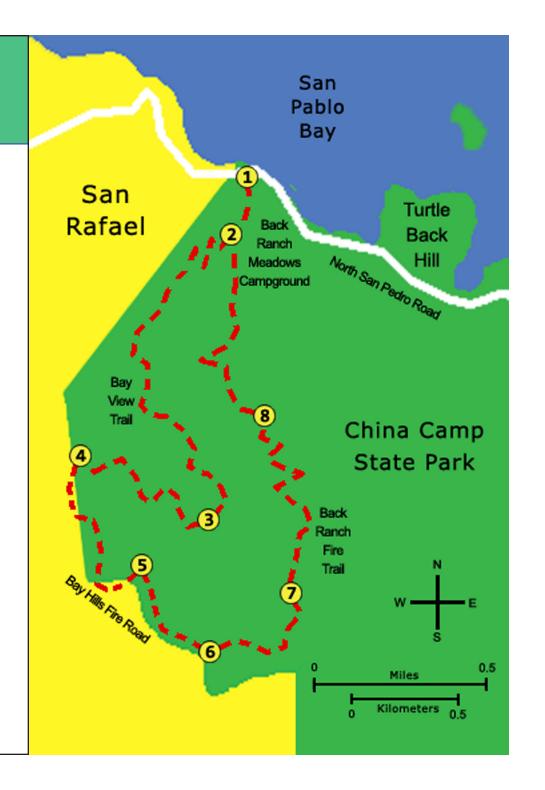
The hike starts near the entrance to the Back Ranch Meadows Campground, on the Shoreline Trail. The trailhead is just to the right as you go past the kiosk at the entrance road to the campground. It parallels the entrance road for a short distance. You plunge immediately into the forest, walking among coast live oak, California bay laurel, and madrone. If it is early morning, you will likely hear the calls of mourning doves and the gobbling of wild turkeys echoing through the forest.

2. Mile 0.2: Junction with the Bay View Trail

Turn right onto the Bay View Trail and start to ascend the hill. The trail continues through forest and makes gradual switchbacks higher and higher. After a short distance, the Bay View Trail meets up with the Powerline Fire Trail. Turn right here and then turn left to get back onto the Bay View Trail. You will cross the Powerline Fire Trail again as you go up the mountain, but stay on the Bay View Trail.

3. Mile 1.8: Junction with the Echo Trail

Turn right onto the Echo Trail and continue up the hill through the forest. The cool shade of the forest provides an optimal environment for many wildflowers, including Indian warrior, shooting stars, blue-eyed grass, star lilies, sticky monkey flower, and woodland strawberries. After a gradual ascent up the mountain, the trail comes out of the forest and meets up with Bay Hills Drive.



4. Mile 2.4: Junction with Bay Hills Drive

Turn left onto Bay Hills Drive, a paved road that is closed to traffic. Follow it up the hill, in the direction of a number of communication towers that mark the highest point on San Pedro Mountain.

5. Mile 2.8: Junction with the Scettrini Fire Road

The junction with the Scettrini Fire Road will be on the right and just past this is a small trail that goes up the hill to the left. You will see a couple of small circular platforms next to a picnic table at the top of the ridge. These platforms are all that remains of an old Nike missile site, a remnant of the Cold War. This is a great place to stop and take in the view. At just under 1,000 feet (305 meters) in elevation, this is the best place around the top of the mountain that is open to the public. After a break to take in the views, go back to the main road. The trail now goes downhill all the way back to the starting point.

6. Mile 3.2: Junction with the Ridge Fire Trail

After a short distance, look for a trail that branches off to the left of Bay Hills Drive. This is the Ridge Fire Trail, which takes you back into the forest. Continue walking gradually downhill until you reach the Back Ranch Fire Trail.

7. Mile 3.7: Junction with the Back Ranch Fire Trail

Turn left onto the Back Ranch Fire Trail, which is steep in some parts, going steadily downhill. Continue on this trail after you pass the junction with the Bay View Trail.

8. Mile 4.8: Junction with the Shoreline Trail

In the middle of a particularly steep stretch of trail, you will come to the junction with the Shoreline Trail, where you will turn left and meander through the forest across mostly level terrain. You will start to see the campground on the right, down below the trail. Stay on the Shoreline Trail until it comes to an end, right at the entrance road to the campground. The total distance of the hike is 5.6 miles (9.0 kilometers).



AROUND AND OVER THE MOUNTAIN San Pedro Peninsula Bike Loop

Total distance: 12.5 miles (20.1 kilometers)

Difficulty: Strenuous

This is a grand loop bike ride around the entire San Pedro peninsula. Most of the ride is on the main paved road of the park, but it also includes the rugged trail that crosses the ridge of the peninsula. This is a challenging ride for mountain bikers, but covers a great overview of China Camp State Park.

1. Mile 0: Start the Ride

The ride starts at the entrance to China Camp State Park, where ample parking is available if you have come to this point with a car. After entering the park, continue to ride on North San Pedro Road, a relatively easy and scenic stretch along the shore of the Bay. You will see the salt marshes to the left and oak woodlands gracing the hillsides on the right.

2. Mile 3.0: China Camp Village

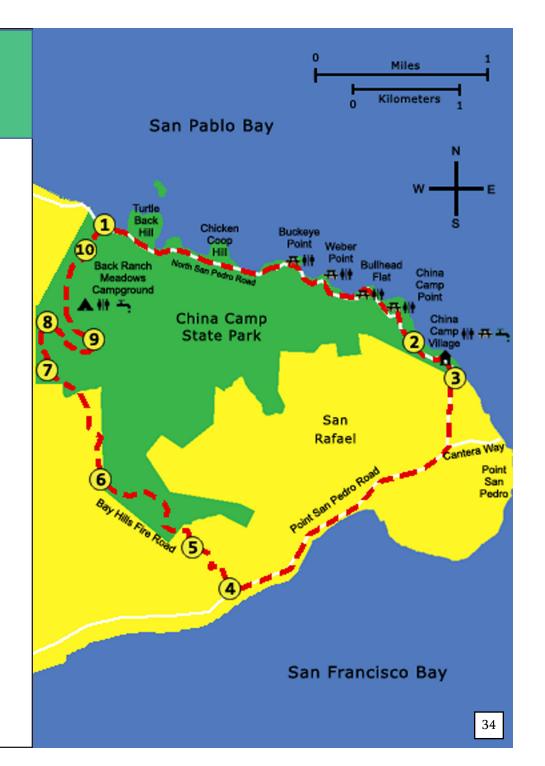
China Camp Village is down the hill and to the left of North San Pedro Road. The beach here is a relaxing place to stop and take a break, enjoy the gentle waves, or take in the historic exhibits of the village.

3. Mile 3.5: State Park Boundary

Riding beyond the turnoff for China Camp Village, continue along North San Pedro Road and you will soon be exiting the state park. The next few miles go through the outskirts of San Rafael, past the old quarry and brickyard at the tip of the San Pedro peninsula, and around to the southern side of the peninsula on Point San Pedro Road.

4. Mile 5.5: Junction with Bayview Drive

Turn right onto Bayview Drive, a narrow residential street that winds up the hill. Continue mostly uphill until you come to the end of Bayview Drive, where a locked gate marks the entrance to the Bay View Fire Road.



5. Mile 6.5: Back into China Camp State Park

Go past the locked gate at the end of Bayview Drive and you are now back in China Camp State Park. The ride is now on an unpaved fire road, climbing back up over the steep ridge of San Pedro Mountain. The fire road crosses briefly into Harry A. Barbier Memorial Park, a San Rafael city park, then back into the state park.

6. Mile 8.5: Junction with the Bayhills Fire Road

The Bay View Fire Road comes to an end at the Bayhills Fire Road. Turn right here and ride up and around the ridge that forms the highest parts of San Pedro Mountain. A number of telecommunications towers are at the top of the mountain, so it is not open to the public. The trail goes downhill for a short distance, passes the Ridge Fire Trail on the right, and then continues uphill again. The remains of an old Nike missile station is off to the right on a small side trail. The round concrete platform in an open clearing is next to a picnic table, with a grand close-up view of Mount Tamalpais, as well as the shoreline of San Pablo Bay.

7. Mile 9.9: Junction with Bay Hills Drive

Just past the Scettrini Fire Road on the left, the trail goes through a gate and turns into the paved Bay Hills Drive. Take this road down the hill to the next junction.

8. Mile 10.3 Junction with the Echo Trail

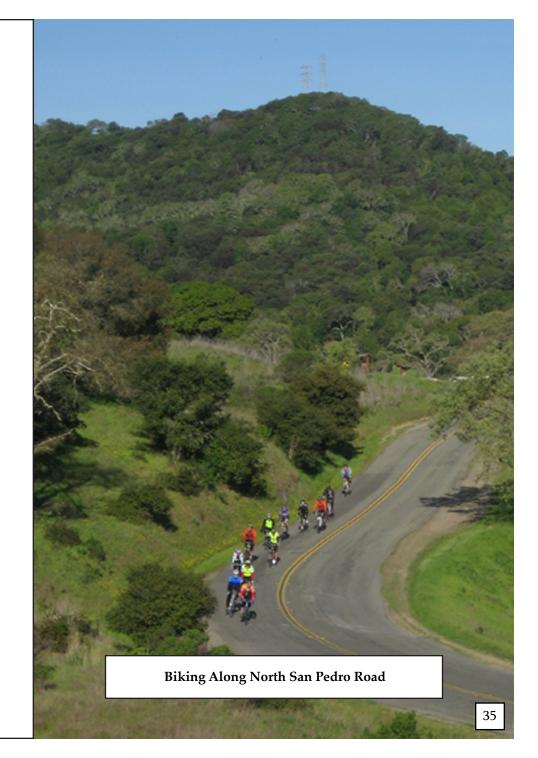
Turn right onto the Echo Trail and go back into the forest.

9. Mile 10.9: Junction with the Bay View Trail

Turn left onto the Bay View Trail, which gradually makes its way back down the slopes of San Pedro Mountain.

10. Mile 12.5: Junction with the Shoreline Trail

Turn left onto the Shoreline Trail and follow it the short distance back to the entrance road for the campground. The trail is mostly level now, a nice and easy way to end a long and challenging ride.







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HISTORICAL BUILDING



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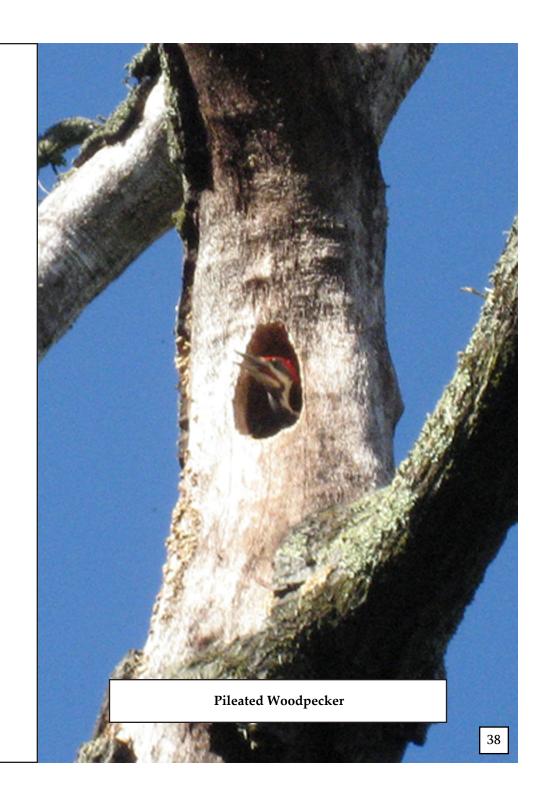
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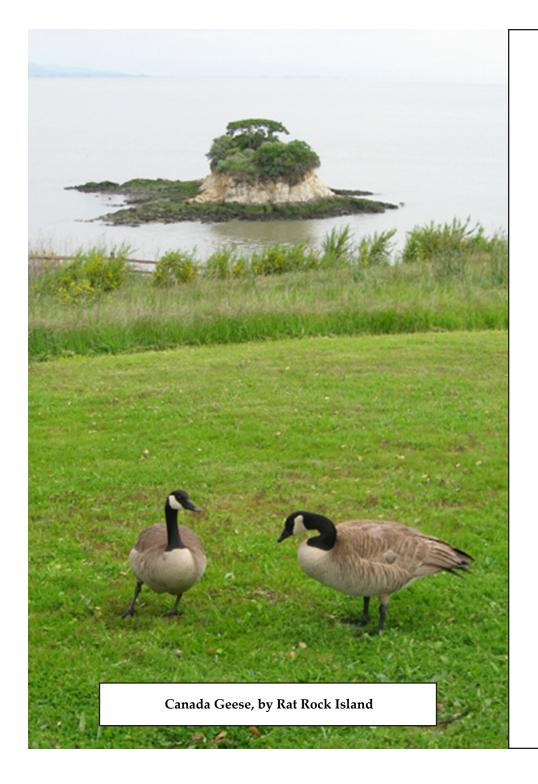
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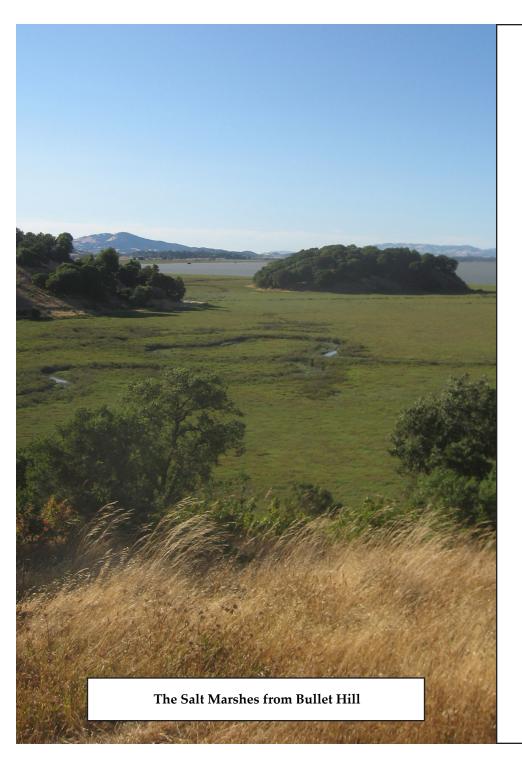
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