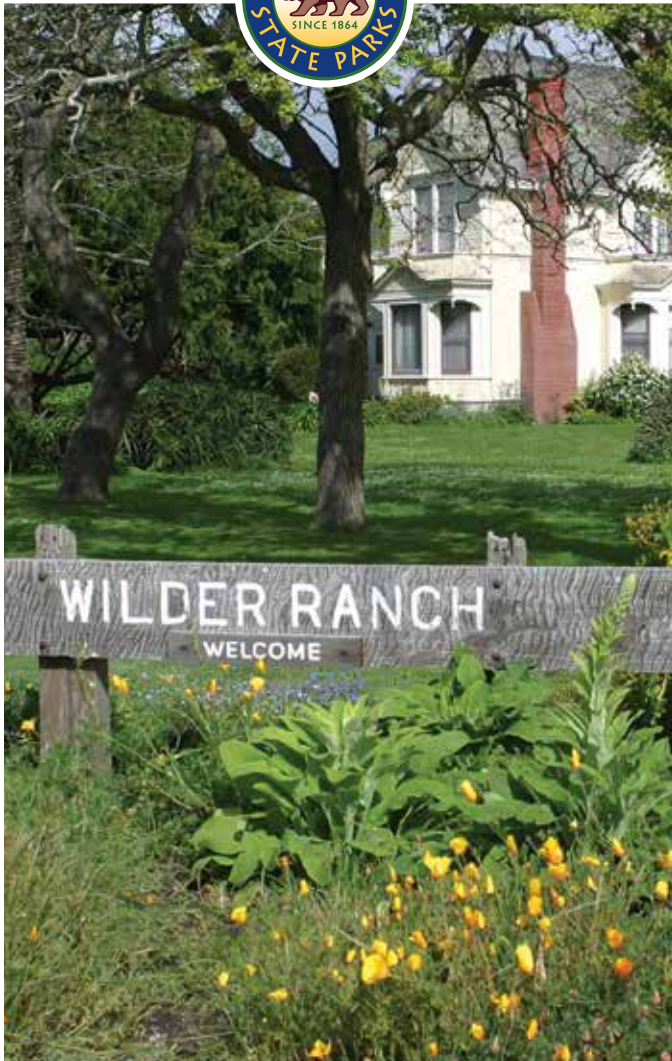


# Wilder Ranch State Park



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(831) 423-9703**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

P.O. Box 942896

Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

For information call: (800) 777-0369

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

### Wilder Ranch State Park

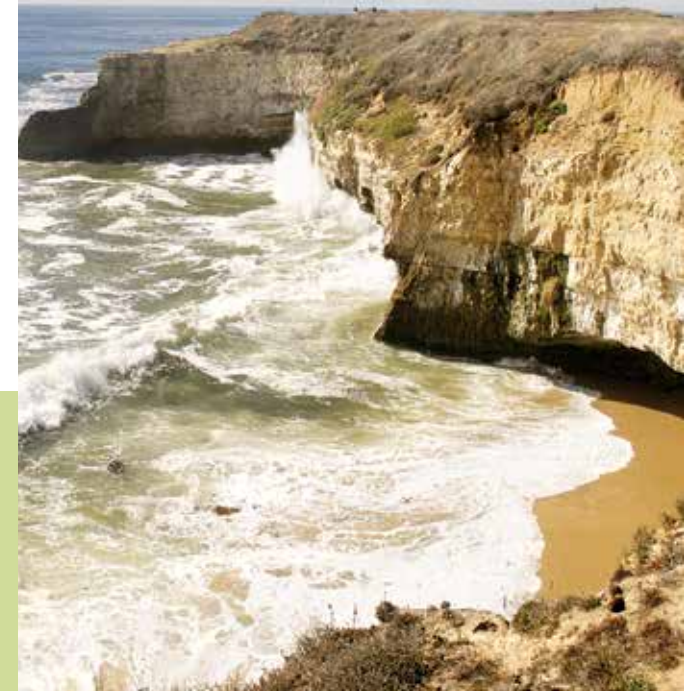
1401 Coast Road

Santa Cruz, CA 95060

**(831) 423-9703 or (831) 426-0505**

© 2009 California State Parks (Rev. 2017)

*Historic Wilder Ranch  
preserves a working  
dairy farm,  
an 1840 adobe,  
and a Victorian farmhouse  
on 7,000 coastal acres.*



**T**he Santa Cruz coastline awaits discovery on Wilder Ranch State Park's 7,000 acres. From the crest of Ben Lomond Mountain, the landscape rolls down ancient wave-cut terraces through the marsh lands of a nature preserve to the seashore. This region's climate has a mild average of 50 to 70 degrees. Coastal weather is unpredictable.

## PARK HISTORY

### Native People

Ohlone Indians made this watershed their homeland for centuries. They built conical homes from bent willow poles and traded local stones, shells, and bone tools with inland tribes.

The Ohlone way of life changed radically after the 1776 expedition of Gaspar de Portolá. More Spanish explorers and Franciscan padres followed after Mission Santa Cruz was dedicated in 1791. The mission's sphere of influence extended north to Año Nuevo Point and south to the Pajaro River valley near Watsonville. The Spanish grazed mission cattle on tribal grasslands and freely used the Ohlone food sources. Eventually, European diseases and the loss of their lands led to a dwindling Ohlone population. Today, Ohlone descendants practice their surviving cultural traditions.

### Rancho del Refugio

From 1791 to 1835, all of the land west of Mission Santa Cruz was called Rancho Arroyo del Matadero ("ranch of the streambed slaughtering ground"), where mission cattle

were butchered. In the 1830s, the land was left to the three daughters of Joaquin Castro and became known as Rancho del Refugio. Maria Candida Castro and her husband José Antonio Bolcoff became Rancho Refugio's first titled owners of record. Bolcoff was a Russian sailor who had jumped ship to become a naturalized Mexican citizen; later he was arrested for smuggling. He built two adobes and one of the area's first sawmills on the rancho. Bolcoff's butter and cheese were well-known in the Monterey area.

The rancho lands were split before a large portion was acquired by Moses Meder in 1854. In the 1850s, Meder constructed a new home, now the front portion of the old farmhouse. He expanded dairy and farming activities and built a creamery, dairy barn, and other farm buildings. Meder's butter sold for \$1 a pound in San Francisco—expensive for the time.



*The Pelton water wheel drives the dairy and farm equipment.*



*Historic dairy complex*

Partners Levi K. Baldwin and Deloss D. Wilder purchased 4,160 acres of the former rancho in 1871 and built a new creamery on the property in the mid-1870s. The partners amicably split the acreage between them in 1885; Wilder obtained the lower portion on Meder Creek.

### D.D. Wilder's Creamery

The Wilder family continued to work the land for five generations over nearly a century. In 1889, innovator D.D. Wilder harnessed water power to drive their equipment with a Pelton water wheel. A San Francisco newspaper credited Wilder with inventing "artificial sunrise" when he electrified his dairy. The dairy's success enabled construction of a new Victorian farmhouse in 1897. The Wilder family ran the ranch until 1969, when property taxes exceeded farm income.



In the 1970s, the land was proposed for a housing development, but Santa Cruz County citizens voted to protect the open space. In 1974 California State Parks acquired the property to preserve the land's natural environment and cultural history.

### NATURAL RESOURCES

Rainwater carves steep canyons through the marine terraces. Douglas-firs and coast redwoods dominate the drainages while coastal prairie covers much of the flatter terrain. Manzanitas, knobcone pines, and chaparral pea grow in drier, sandier inland soils. Grasslands and oak woodlands are home to deer, bobcats, coyotes, and mountain lions. Snowy plovers make their nests on Wilder Beach Natural Preserve, which is closed to public exploration. Harbor seals and sea otters gather where Wilder's watersheds join the Monterey Bay National



*Harbor seals at rest*

Marine Sanctuary. Offshore, dolphins and migrating whales are often spotted.

### PROGRAMS AND RECREATION

The Wilder Dairy Cultural Preserve area—a rodeo arena, ranch buildings, and three restored workshops run by water power—has early farm implements and tools. Docents at Wilder Ranch often dress in period clothing for interpretive tours and living history demonstrations. Call (831) 426-0505 for tours.

**Hiking**—Trails beginning in the lower park at the Cultural Preserve wind along the coastal bluffs near the beaches, tide pools, and sea caves, up into the hills and terraces of the park to 1,800 feet on Ben Lomond Mountain.

**Bicycling**—A 35-mile network of multi-use trails crosses the park. Please walk bikes through the historic area.

**Horseback Riding & Camping**—Equestrians are allowed on all park trails and unpaved roads, except those on the ocean side of Highway One. Six horse-camping sites are available first-come, first-served. Call (831) 423-9703 for access to the equestrian staging and camping area near Dimeo Lane.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Visitors may require assistance to access historic structures via short, ramped entries. Parking and a restroom in the main lot

are accessible. For current information on accessibility and parking, call (831) 426-0505 or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park  
101 North Big Trees Park Rd., Felton 95018  
(831) 438-2396 or (831) 335-4598
- Natural Bridges SB, 2531 West Cliff Dr.  
Santa Cruz 95060 (831) 423-4609
- Santa Cruz Mission SHP, 144 School St.  
Santa Cruz 95060 (831) 425-5849

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization. For information, contact Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks  
144 School Street  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
[www.thatsmypark.org](http://www.thatsmypark.org)

