

Los Osos Oaks State Natural Reserve



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 (805) 772-7434. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting:

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P.O. Box 942896

Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

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Discover the many states of California.™

Los Osos Oaks State Natural Reserve
Los Osos Valley Road
Los Osos, CA 93402

(805) 772-7434 or 772-2694

http://www.slostateparks.com/los_osos_oaks

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At the beginning of the park trail, traffic noise from the busy road dominates. Penetrating deeper into the park, these sounds diminish and give way to birds singing, water trickling and wind rustling through the oaks.



Los Osos Oaks State Natural Reserve protects a 90-acre grove of dwarfed, 800-year-old coast live oaks in an ancient dune habitat. This centuries-old oak woodland protects an unusual variety of plants, animals and biotic communities. The moss-draped, fantastically gnarled trees enchant hikers and visitors.

This Central Coast park is eight miles west of San Luis Obispo and five miles east of Morro Bay.

PARK HISTORY

The First Inhabitants

The ancestors of today's Chumash and Salinan people inhabited the area now encompassed by the natural reserve for thousands of years, adapting to climatic and environmental changes. The earliest residents traveled from the coast to the interior valleys and back.

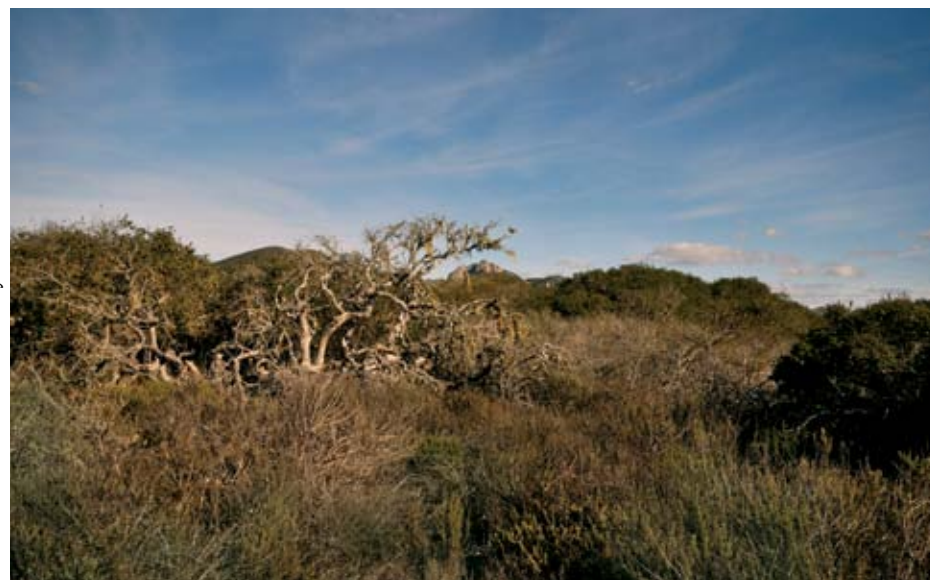


Photo courtesy of Nick Stavros

Coast live oak and dune oak scrub

They subsisted on fish and shellfish found along the coast as well as small and large game, waterfowl, grasses and seeds found inland. Clothing, shelter and tools were fashioned using resources available in the immediate area. Goods that could not be procured or produced locally were obtained through extensive trade networks.

Los Osos

When Gaspar de Portolá's expedition passed through this valley in 1769, the party spotted many California grizzly bears—*osos* in Spanish. The valley then became known

as *Cañada de Los Osos*. In 1772, most of the grizzlies were killed for food to keep the people living at the Carmel mission from starving.

Saving the Oaks

Oak woodlands were once widespread along the California coast, but most fell victim to clearing, grazing,



Photo courtesy of Nick Stavros

Gnarled coast live oak

firewood cutting and development. A campaign was launched in 1971 to preserve these 90 acres of trees as a state reserve. On June 29, 1972—thanks to the Small Wilderness Area Preservation Foundation and grants from Dart Industries, Inc. and the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund—the grove was purchased and turned over to California State Parks.

NATURAL HISTORY

The year-round climate is mild, with winter temperatures from 50 degrees to the low 60s and summer temperatures ranging from 65 to 70 degrees.

Vegetation

Five major plant communities exist within the natural reserve.

Coast live oak woodland—These ancient trees grow in areas with high soil moisture.



The natural reserve paths lead visitors through a protected coast live oak grove.



Docent-led walking tour

The closed-canopy forest has multi-trunked trees 20 to 25 feet high. Their twisted trunks and branches may have lichens and mosses hanging above a sparse understory of miner's lettuce, bracken fern and hummingbird sage.

Dune oak scrub—The smaller, 6- to 8-foot live oak trees in the natural reserve are stunted due to mineral depletion, sandy soil, lack of moisture and location.

Coastal sage scrub—Dense, highly branched, semi-woody shrubs include California sagebrush, black sage, holly-leaf cherry, mock heather and coast buckwheat.

Riparian woodland—Streamside areas at Los Osos Creek feature such tree species as sycamore, arroyo willow, red willow and black cottonwood. Western dogwood and stinging nettle thrive where riparian trees are sparse.

Central coastal scrub—Shallow, rocky soils grow dense-crowned shrubs from three to six feet high. Sticky bush monkeyflower and rash-causing poison oak thrive here.

Wildlife

Coast live oak woodland provides food and shelter for many birds, mammals and insects. More wildlife is visible in spring and fall. The hour after sunrise and the hour before sunset are optimal times for viewing wildlife.

Birds in the grove include acorn woodpeckers, Anna's and Allen's

Great horned owl



hummingbirds, western flycatchers, Northern flickers, California thrashers and California towhees. Mourning doves and Brewer's blackbirds are common grassland species.

Red-tailed hawks, American kestrels, barn owls and great horned owls find their prey in these coastal habitats.

Resident mammals include the dusky-footed wood rat, California pocket mouse, striped skunk, gray fox, bobcat, coyote and opossum.

Dragonflies, butterflies and other insects serve as food for reptiles and amphibians such as Pacific tree frogs, western skinks, Southern alligator lizards and western fence lizards.

RECREATION

The easy, flat unpaved trail system covers about 1½ miles. Hiking trail, program, event and reserve details can be found at www.slostateparks.com.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Morro Strand State Beach
Two miles north of Morro Bay on Highway 1 (805) 772-7434
- Morro Bay State Park
State Park Road, Morro Bay 93442 (805) 772-7434, featuring Morro Bay State Park Museum of Natural History (805) 772-2694
- Montaña de Oro State Park
3550 Pecho Valley Road, Los Osos 93402 (805) 528-0513 or (805) 772-7434

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Except for service animals, pets are not permitted.
- The park is open only during daylight hours.
- Fires and smoking are not allowed.
- Bicycles and equestrians are not permitted.
- The reserve has no restrooms, telephones or facilities for camping or picnicking.
- Poison oak is a natural part of the area. Learn to recognize and avoid it.



This park is supported in part through a nonprofit group. For more information, contact:

Central Coast
Natural History Association
20 State Park Road
Morro Bay, CA 93442

(805) 772-2694 • www.ccnha.org

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES 

Some visitors with limited mobility can negotiate the gentle terrain, but wheelchair access may be impeded by soft, sandy soil.

