

El Capitán State Beach



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) 968-1033 and press 0**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact interp@parks.ca.gov.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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711, TTY relay service

www.parks.ca.gov

El Capitán State Beach
El Capitán State Beach exit #117
from Highway 101
Goleta, CA 93117
(805) 968-1033

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*During fall and
winter low tides,
dedicated surfers
watch “El Cap” for
the elusive west
swell that brings the
hollow, curling waves
of their dreams.*



Lush sycamores and oaks flourish along El Capitán Creek at the entry to El Capitán State Beach. Tall bluff-top groves are visible for miles along the terraced coastline. This extremely popular beach, 17 miles west of Santa Barbara off U.S. Highway 101, is a perfect place to enjoy camping, hiking, surfing, picnicking, and beach walking. At El Capitán, the moderate climate brings cool fog during the summer months. Late summer and fall are sunny and warm; winter storms often break up into crystal-clear days.

PARK HISTORY

Chumash Indians lived here in the village of Ahwin as long as 3,200 years ago. They built their dome-shaped houses along the creek that had scoured out the canyon. Skilled hunters and gatherers, the Chumash are known for their exquisite basketry and for building seaworthy plank canoes (*tomol*) that allowed them to travel to the offshore islands. Some of their beautiful cave paintings can be seen at nearby Chumash Painted Cave State Historic Park.



Spanish explorer Juan Cabrillo “discovered” this area in 1542, claiming it for Spain. In 1782, the Spanish built El Presidio de Santa Barbara—the last royal Spanish fortress constructed in Alta California—to protect the nearby missions and settlers from foreign invasion and attacks by the native people.

For the Chumash, Spanish colonization meant the end of their traditional way of life. Exposed to European diseases against which they had little immunity, their population quickly plummeted.

After Mexico gained its independence from Spain, most surviving Chumash became ranch hands and servants on the new ranchos. Today, a growing number of their descendants are rediscovering their traditional heritage.

“El Capitán”

The first commander of the Santa Barbara Presidio was José Francisco Ortega, who had been chief scout for the Portolá expedition when they discovered San Francisco Bay. When Ortega retired as a brevet captain after 40 years of military service, the Spanish Crown granted him 26,500 acres of land west of what is now El Capitán State Beach, which takes its name from this early Californian.

Ortega’s grandson, José Dolores Ortega, obtained another 8,800 acres of land (including the site of the future state beach) from the Mexican government in 1841.

He and his family lived on Rancho Cañada del Corral, raising cattle and farming until they were forced to sell it in 1866, following years of ruinous droughts.

In 1953, the State of California purchased 111 acres of the former rancho to create El Capitán State Beach, and in 1967, the Legislature approved purchase of an additional 21 acres. Growing threats of development to the lands across the highway from the park led to a public/private fundraising effort in 2002 that raised \$500,000 in seven weeks to purchase 2,500 acres of land known as El Capitán Ranch.

This property was added to El Capitán State Beach, and today the park offers coastal recreation while preserving an important part of California’s environment and history.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

The impressive stands of coast live oaks, sycamores, and willows along El Capitán Creek create a lush coastal woodland.



Black phoebe

California thrashers, and wren bushtits.

The oaks provide food for wildlife, while sycamores and willows provide shade. Band-tailed pigeons, flickers, and scrub jays share the acorns with raccoons, western gray squirrels, and mule deer. The dense sage along the creek is home to black phoebes,

Sea birds include scoters, western and Clark's grebes, gulls, terns, and loons. Long-billed curlews, willets, plovers, and sanderlings walk the narrow beach.

Dolphins may be seen just offshore; the bluff tops offer excellent views of California gray whales during their annual migrations.

Great Basin fence lizards are at home in the sage scrub. Southern Pacific rattlesnakes hunt for various rodents, including the California mouse and the Pacific kangaroo rat. Beneath the woodlands canopy, grasses and herbaceous plants offer shelter to a wide variety of insects, reptiles, and birds. During fall, monarch butterflies decorate the trees; look for clusters of reddish-brown wings with black veins.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Family Campsites—The 130+ site family campground is open all year. A short walk takes you to the beach. Each site has a picnic table and fire ring with a grill; restrooms with hot showers are nearby. Several sites are paved for RVs only. Some sites accommodate trailers and recreational vehicles up to 42 feet in length.

Group Campsites—Five group camping areas, accommodating 40-100 people, overlook the ocean from the marine terrace.



Reservations—Reserve family or group sites by calling (800) 444-7275 or make online reservations at www.parks.ca.gov/elcapitan.

Hike and Bike Campsites—Those on foot or bicycle may register at the park entrance for Hike/Bike camping. Hot showers, restrooms, tables, and barbecues are available.

Hiking—A self-guided nature trail winds through the woodlands on El Capitán Point. The Bill Wallace Trail, named for a coastal protection advocate and former Santa Barbara County supervisor, winds through the park, offering hikers more than ten miles of views with a 1,000-foot elevation gain.

Surfing—Surfing conditions change with the weather. However, at low tides during fall and winter, advanced surfers sometimes find a perfect west or west-southwest swell.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Do not hike along the beach without first consulting a tide chart or talking with a lifeguard. The beach that exists at low tide may disappear when the tide comes in, trapping you against the cliffs.
- Stay away from the cliffs. They are dangerously unstable and may collapse.
- Keep dogs on leashes no longer than six feet and enclosed in a tent or vehicle at night. Only registered service dogs are allowed in park buildings, on trails, or on the beach.
- A parent or guardian must accompany youths under 18 years of age. Any unaccompanied youth must present written consent from the parent or guardian stating the dates of the authorized stay and the name of the park.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Camping—Ten sites have firm surfaces and accessible tables; help may be needed with water spigots and restroom entry.

Trails—A bluff-top bike trail/walkway overlooks the Pacific Ocean and the Channel Islands. Some portions are steep or eroded.

Beach/Shore Access—Ask to borrow a beach wheelchair at the entry station.

For the latest accessibility updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Refugio State Beach, 10 Refugio Beach Road, Goleta, 23 miles NW of Santa Barbara on Highway 101 (805) 968-1033
- Chumash Painted Cave SHP, three miles South of San Marcos Pass Hwy. 154 on Painted Cave Road (805) 968-1033



El Capitán State Beach



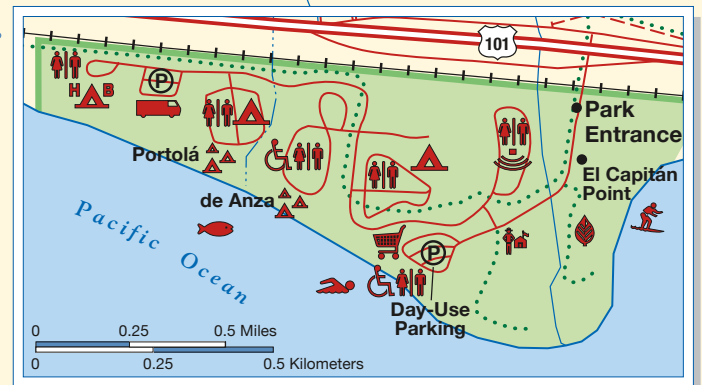
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LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST

EL CAPITÁN STATE BEACH

Legend

- | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|--|-------------------------|--|----------------|
| | Freeway | | Campfire Center | | Parking |
| | Paved Road | | Campground | | Ranger Station |
| | Unpaved Road | | Campground: Group | | Restrooms |
| | Trail: Hike | | Campground: Hike & Bike | | RV Sites |
| | Railroad | | Fishing | | Supplies |
| | Intermittent Stream | | Locked Gate | | Surfing |
| | Accessible Feature | | Nature Trail | | Swimming |



see detail map

Park Entrance

to Santa Barbara