

# Gaviota State Park



## Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation 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.

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**Gaviota State Park**  
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*Gaviota State Park has something for everyone, from the sandy cove where Gaviota Creek meets the ocean to the wild uplands of Gaviota Canyon where a warm sulfur spring bubbles from the Santa Ynez fault.*

**A**bout 30 miles west of Santa Barbara off Highway 101, Gaviota State Park stretches upward from the wind-tossed sea to stands of oak and chaparral. Named by soldiers of the Portolá expedition for the seagulls that make the area their home, this part of the south coast is exceptional in its variety.

Summers are mild, with little rain; winters are slightly cooler. Temperatures depend on where you are in the park. Strong winds often blow southward through narrow Gaviota Pass, occasionally making Highway 101 dangerous to trailers and campers and tent camping a challenge.

### NATIVE PEOPLE

For thousands of years, Chumash territory extended from southern Monterey County to present-day Malibu Canyon and east into today's Kern County. The typical Chumash house was a 12- to 20-foot rounded dome of willow poles, covered with overlapping layers of bulrush or cattails. The Chumash hunted or trapped game, caught fish and gathered shellfish, plants, roots, seeds and berries. They were skilled at beadwork, basketry, woodcarving and cave art—a stunning example of their cave paintings can be seen at nearby Chumash Painted Cave



*Gaviota Creek*

State Historic Park. Noted for their skills in ocean navigation, the Chumash constructed seagoing redwood plank canoes (*tomol*) as much as 30 feet long.

At first the Chumash welcomed what they saw as the material and spiritual benefits of European civilization. The rapid spread of disease, harsh treatment by some of the newcomers, and the loss of their former life ways caused many Chumash to reconsider, but by then it was too late to turn back. Today the Chumash traditions are being rediscovered by many of their descendents.

### EUROPEANS AND AMERICANS

In 1542 Juan Cabrillo, traveling the Santa Barbara-Ventura coast, stopped at what is now Gaviota. In 1769 Gaspar de Portolá and his crew camped in this area as they sailed up the coast looking for the port of Monterey. Father Juan Crespi, who kept a journal of the expedition, noted that “the soldiers know it as *La Gaviota*, because they killed a seagull there.” Gaviota has appeared as a place name in Spanish documents since 1795.

In 1846 Captain John C. Frémont's volunteers marched toward Santa Barbara through the passage now known as Gaviota Pass. However, when he got wind of a planned ambush by the entire garrison of the Santa Barbara Presidio, he led his men over the

more rugged San Marcos Pass and seized the now unprotected city of Santa Barbara.

The 1860s saw stage line service through Gaviota Pass, but the route was abandoned in 1871 when the stage company opened a new route through San Marcos Pass. In 1875 Colonel William Welles Hollister built a wharf at Gaviota to ship lumber, wool, cattle and grain to Atlantic markets.

But the key to future growth along the Gaviota coast was the railroad. In 1900 workers closed one of the last remaining gaps in the Southern Pacific Railroad's Coast Route with an 811-foot trestle over Gaviota Creek. On March 31, 1901, full train service between San Francisco and Los Angeles began.

### NATURAL HISTORY

A variety of elevations, soils and topography combine to form a number of habitats.

**Oak woodlands**, primarily coast live oaks and some valley oaks, provide habitat for California legless lizards, American ravens, Nutall's and downy woodpeckers, broad-handed moles and bobcats.

**Grasslands**, primarily annual grasses and purple needlegrass, shelter such reptiles as western fence lizards, western Pacific rattlesnakes and common king snakes. Bird species include western meadowlarks, turkey vultures and red-tailed hawks. Mule deer, gray foxes, California ground squirrels, striped skunks, coyotes and



California voles are also part of this habitat. **Chaparral and coastal sage scrub** shelter side-blotched lizards, western whiptails, California thrashers, white-crowned sparrows, scrub jays, coyotes, dusky-footed wood rats, and many species that also occupy oak woodland areas. Sensitive species include cactus wrens and San Diego horned lizards.

**Riparian** areas occur along mostly seasonal streams and year-round Gaviota Creek. Destruction of coastal streams has resulted in a number of sensitive



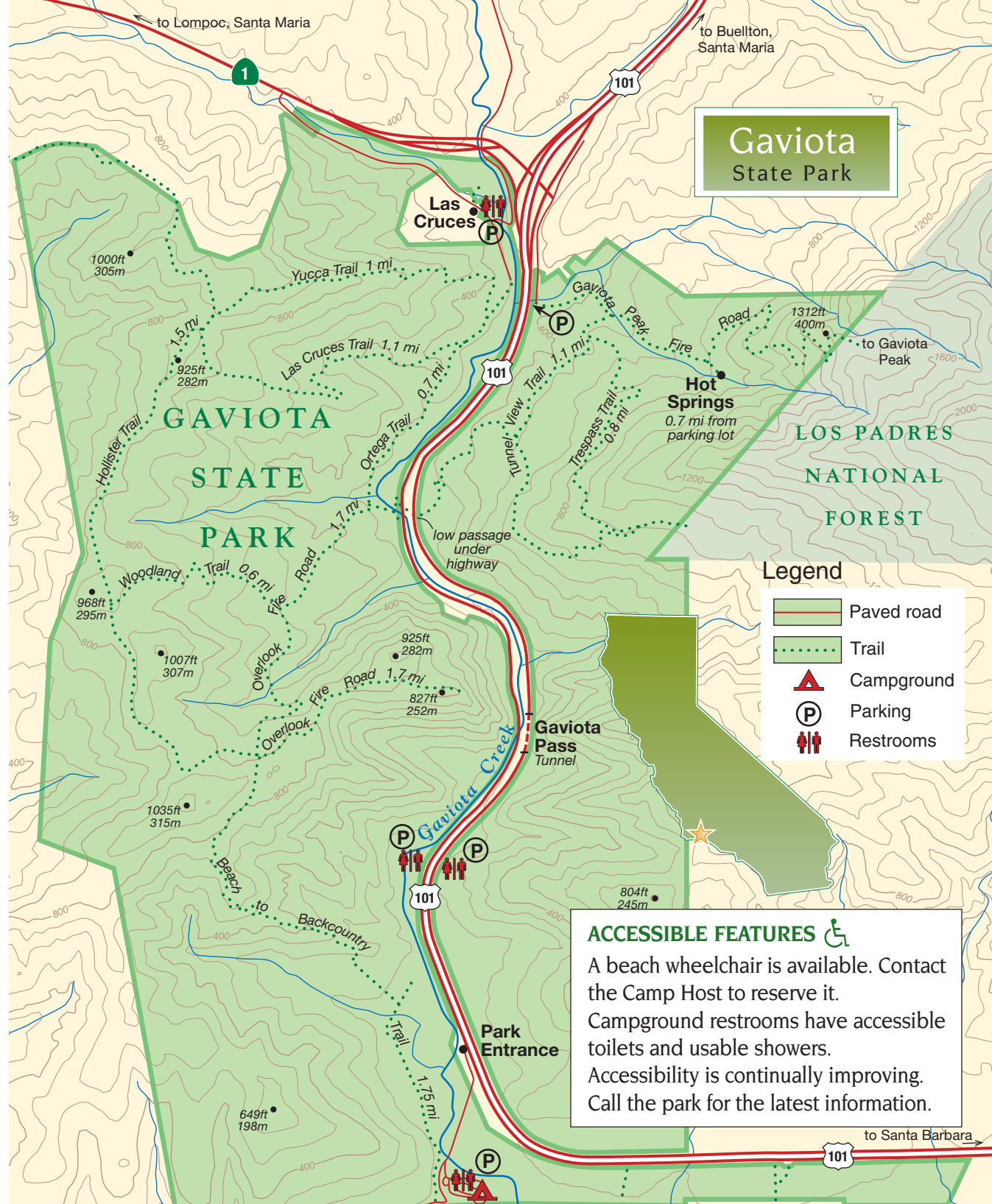
Coyote

animal species, including California red-legged frogs, two-striped garter snakes and yellow-billed cuckoos. Gopher snakes, California pocket mice, various bat species, Anna's hummingbirds, and Cooper's and red-tailed hawks also live here.

**Freshwater aquatic** habitats traverse the park's watercourses. Game fish include rainbow trout and the endangered steelhead.

**Freshwater marshes** are usually associated with riparian areas, giving shelter to common gallinules (also called marsh hens), American coots, red-winged blackbirds, garter snakes, and Pacific tree frogs.

**Coastal strand** features shrubs and low-growing sand plants. Wildlife includes western fence lizards and side-blotched lizards, house finches, California thrashers, white-crowned sparrows and California ground squirrels. The globose dune beetle is a sensitive species.



**Coastal salt marsh**—an endangered habitat—is home to common and snowy egrets, American avocets, clapper rails, willets and western sandpipers. Norway rats and house mice also live here. The endangered tidewater goby is found near the mouths of some streams.

**Marine habitats** are diverse along Gaviota's five-mile coastline. Halibut, surf perch and yellowtail are common in the coastal waters.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Trails

Dirt fire roads and hiking trails lead into more than 2,000 acres of oak woodland and chaparral backcountry. Check with park rangers before starting your hike—conditions change frequently. This is mountain lion country. Safety tips are available from the rangers.

**Overlook Fire Road**—This 3-mile round trip is worth the climb—at the top you are greeted by a sweeping vista of the Channel Islands.

**Gaviota Hot Springs**—From a parking lot about 2.5 miles north of the park entrance, where Highway 1 separates from U.S. Highway 101, a somewhat steep Gaviota Peak Fire Road trail leads to two small sulfur springs which are open to the public.



### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Refugio State Beach, 20 miles west of Santa Barbara off U.S. 101 (805) 968-1711
- El Capitan State Beach, 17 miles west of Santa Barbara off U.S. 101 (805) 968-1711
- Chumash Painted Cave State Historic Park, five miles northwest of Santa Barbara (805) 733-3713

**Gaviota Peak (Los Padres NF)**—The trail to the top of 2,458-foot Gaviota Peak is a strenuous 6-mile round trip. A clear day brings vistas of Point Conception, the Channel Islands, Gaviota Pass and the Lompoc Valley.

### Camping

The 41 developed, first-come, first-served campsites accommodate tents, trailers up to 25 feet and RVs up to 27 feet. Between October 1 and March 31, the campground is open Friday through Sunday only.

### Boating and Fishing

Boating and fishing are popular activities at Gaviota, where the public fishing pier is equipped with an electric boat hoist launching facility. Check with park staff for rules on the use of the hoist.

## PLEASE REMEMBER

**Speed limit**—Maximum speed is 15 miles per hour.

**Dogs**—Dogs must be on a leash no more than six feet at all times. They are not permitted on the beach or on trails (service dogs excepted). Pick up after your dog. Report any dog bites to the ranger or camp host.

**Quiet hours**—Between 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m., radios and other noise are not permitted.

**Checkout time**—Campground checkout time is noon.

**Vehicles**—All vehicles must remain on paved roads and display proof of fee payment in the lower left corner of the windshield.

