

# Fort Humboldt State Historic Park



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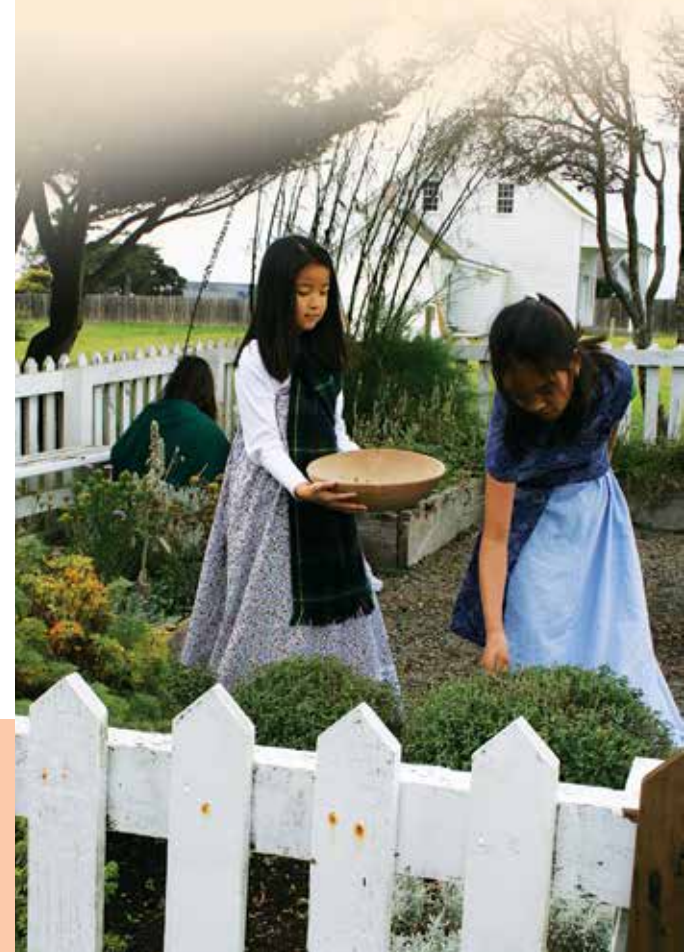


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**Fort Humboldt State Historic Park**  
3431 Fort Avenue  
Eureka, CA 95503  
(707) 488-2041

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*Living History  
events reenact  
the daily lives  
of officers and  
their families  
at Fort Humboldt.*



## Fort Humboldt

### State Historic Park

is built on the edge of Humboldt Bay near Eureka in scenic northwest California. The fort gives visitors a glimpse of pioneer-era military life in the mid-19th century.

### NATURAL HISTORY

The bluff where Fort Humboldt sits is composed of alluvial and marine deposits, sand, and sedimentary clay. Loamy topsoil covers these layers.

The deer and bear that once inhabited the redwoods surrounding Fort Humboldt are now gone—along with the redwoods. Spruce and alder trees grow on the west shoulder of the bluff; willows and berries have filled in the freshwater pond south of the bluff.

Typical of coastal redwood regions, Eureka is foggy year-round, with average temperatures in the 50s and 60s.

### PARK HISTORY

#### Native People

California Indians have lived in the northwestern area for several thousand years. About 14 tribes lived in the redwood forest region later served by Fort Humboldt, including the Wiyot, Yurok, Whilkut, Nongatl, Mattole, Sinkyone, Hupa, Karuk and Yurok people. The Wiyot occupied the area now known as Humboldt



*Fort Humboldt taken from Humboldt Bay, 1860s*

County. Archaeological and historical evidence points to a flourishing Wiyot culture thousands of years old. Primarily hunters and gatherers, they dwelled in an area rich in edible resources.

The village of Tuluwat, on nearby Indian Island in Arcata Bay, was the Wiyot physical and spiritual center. They held annual world-renewal ceremonies at Tuluwat to bring the world back into balance and heal its social discord.

#### Worlds in Conflict

After Major Pierson B. Reading discovered gold at the Trinity River in May 1849, the ensuing gold fever brought the traditional Wiyot way of life to an end. Fortune-seekers were lured to the state. Uniontown (later renamed Arcata, its original native name), Bucksport and Eureka sprang up around Humboldt Bay, and newcomers sought the native peoples' territory. Rather than clearing the redwoods from unoccupied land, settlers took over Indian villages and traditional hunting and fishing sites; many Wiyot died defending themselves and their homes. Violence escalated; bloody battles ensued as vigilantes attacked

the native people. Desperate settlers also appealed for help from the government.

#### Fort Humboldt Established

In January 1853, Fourth Infantry U.S. Army soldiers, led by Brevet Lt. Colonel Robert C. Buchanan, arrived at Humboldt Bay to broker peace. Buchanan selected a fort site on a high, barren bluff overlooking the bay above Bucksport. By 1857, 14 redwood and plaster structures had been built in a "U" shape around a parade ground. Due to its strategic location high on the bluff, no outer walls or palisades were built to protect the company of soldiers.

#### The Military Dilemma

The military troops found themselves acting as mediators between settlers and Indians to resolve conflicts and avoid violence. Many newcomers wanted the indigenous people moved to reservations out of the area.

In an effort to bring about a sustainable peace, seven agreements were signed with California Indians living between Clear Lake and the Klamath River. These treaties were



*Surgeon's quarters*



never ratified by the government, and the tribes never received the land that they had been promised.

When most federal troops departed for the Civil War, prominent local citizens formed a self-proclaimed militia. On February 26, 1860, the militia attacked five separate Wiyot villages over a 30-hour period, massacring several hundred unarmed Indians.

The village of Kutuswalik, within sight of Fort Humboldt, was burned completely. The Army built an 80-foot open corral near the fort to hold both captive Indian prisoners and those who sought refuge at the fort from vigilantes. Fed an unfamiliar diet of hardtack and beans, some native Californians died of dysentery; others were killed in continuing violent outbursts. More than 200 Wiyot people died before the remainder could be forcibly resettled on reservations.

Today, the surviving descendants of the Wiyot have established federal recognition. They have regained portions of Indian Island and are restoring its plundered sacred sites.

### Life at the Fort

A bugle call or drum beat regulated the routine of fort life. Fort Humboldt's supplies, mail, and even soldiers' pay were often delayed for months. Away from family and friends, isolated and lonely, soldiers found that time passed slowly; many deserted.

One unhappy young captain, Ulysses S. Grant, was stationed at Fort Humboldt in 1854. He was a loner, preferring to spend his leisure time at a nearby tavern or riding in the countryside near the fort.

After five months, Captain Grant resigned his commission and went home to farm. He



*Ulysses S. Grant*

later rejoined the Army during the Civil War, soon promoted to colonel and rose to lead the Union troops as general. In 1869, Grant became the 18th president of the United States, serving two terms.

Seth Kinman was a hunter who supplied elk meat to troops at Fort Humboldt and entertained the soldiers with tales of his exploits with grizzly bears. Kinman played music for the soldiers on his fiddle, made from the skull of his favorite mule, "Dave."



*Seth Kinman*

Harriet St. John Simpson, her husband Assistant Surgeon Josiah Simpson, and their children enjoyed their post in the surgeon's quarters from 1854 to 1857. Mrs. Simpson chronicled life at the fort in lively letters to her family back East. Her letters and sketches provide a clear historical record of daily fort life. She often threw parties for the fort's officers and their families,



*Harriet Simpson*

detailing both her menus and her servants' cooking methods.

### Fort Humboldt Today

The fort was abandoned as a military post in 1870. The W. S. Cooper family bought the land with its remaining hospital in 1893. In the early 1920s, Mrs. Laura Cooper donated the property to the City of Eureka to commemorate U. S. Grant's service as the fort's Quartermaster. The City transferred title to the State; Fort Humboldt became a state historic park in 1963.

The period house museum in the reconstructed surgeon's quarters is open for viewing. The herb and flower garden is filled with authentic period plantings. Along the parade grounds, a gravel path connects Native American exhibits with three-dimensional fort-era exhibits and an open-air logging display.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Parking, restrooms, trails and exhibits are generally accessible. The museum is accessible from mostly level paths.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- The park is open for day use only.
- Except for leashed service animals, pets are not allowed in park buildings.

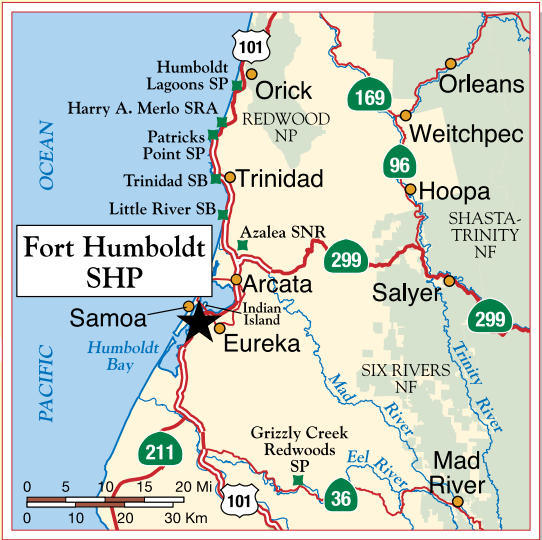
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- Little River State Beach, Crannell Rd. Trinidad 95570 (707) 488-2041

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization.  
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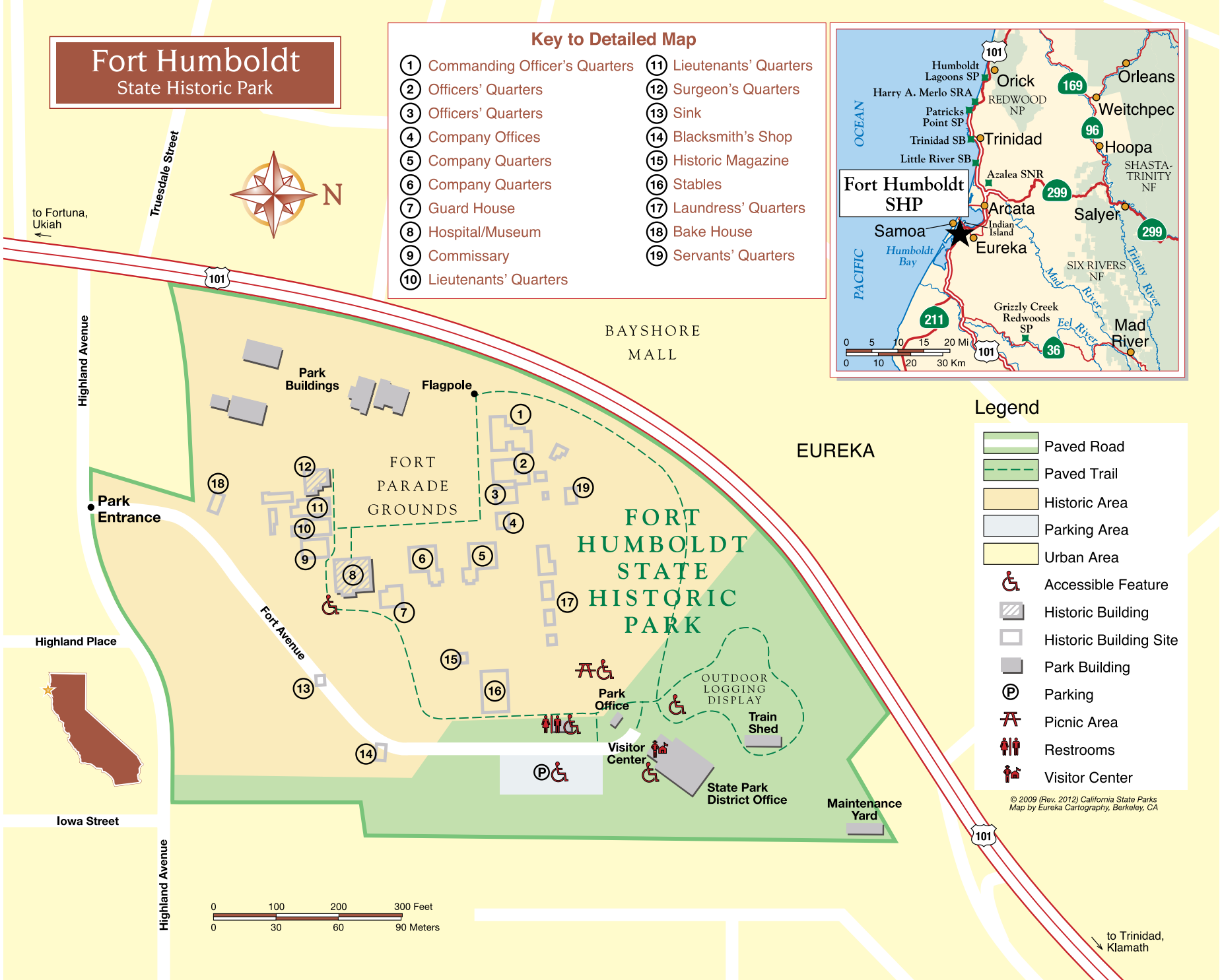
# Fort Humboldt State Historic Park

- ### Key to Detailed Map
- |                                 |                         |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ① Commanding Officer's Quarters | ⑪ Lieutenants' Quarters |
| ② Officers' Quarters            | ⑫ Surgeon's Quarters    |
| ③ Officers' Quarters            | ⑬ Sink                  |
| ④ Company Offices               | ⑭ Blacksmith's Shop     |
| ⑤ Company Quarters              | ⑮ Historic Magazine     |
| ⑥ Company Quarters              | ⑯ Stables               |
| ⑦ Guard House                   | ⑰ Laundress' Quarters   |
| ⑧ Hospital/Museum               | ⑱ Bake House            |
| ⑨ Commissary                    | ⑲ Servants' Quarters    |
| ⑩ Lieutenants' Quarters         |                         |



- ### Legend
- Paved Road
  - Paved Trail
  - Historic Area
  - Parking Area
  - Urban Area
  - Accessible Feature
  - Historic Building
  - Historic Building Site
  - Park Building
  - Parking
  - Picnic Area
  - Restrooms
  - Visitor Center

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Map by Eureka Cartography, Berkeley, CA



to Trinidad,  
Klamath