



# California State Parks

## Video Transcript



### ***Learn to Canoe While Exploring the Navarro River Estuary at Navarro River Redwoods State Park***

My name is Kevin Joe. I'm one of the State Park rangers here in the Mendocino District. This afternoon we're going to go canoeing on the Navarro River. We're at the Pacific Ocean in the mouth of the Navarro River, part of Navarro River Redwoods State Park. The park starts here at the Pacific Ocean, and goes upstream about 14 miles. We're going to take the canoes up only about half a mile to three-quarters of a mile, and this is our opportunity to show people how to do a little canoeing, if they haven't been before—or if they have, brush up on some of those skills. And it's a great time of the afternoon to see some of the wildlife. So we're going to keep an eye out for some interesting birds, or maybe we'll see the seal that we saw yesterday.

The first thing I'm going to do is get life jackets for everybody, including myself, and we'll make sure they fit correctly. Then we're going to take two of the canoes off here—I already got one canoe off. Then we'll go down to the beach there, and we'll practice some paddle strokes before we get in the water. And I'll show you guys how to get in and out of the canoes. So, I tell you what, why don't you guys come on over here, and we'll get life jackets on everybody. Why don't you guys put the paddles into this canoe over here and then we'll just carry that canoe down with all the paddles in it?

Now that we got the canoes down by the water, I want to make sure that everybody's lifejacket fits. The way you can make sure your lifejacket is properly fastened is to make sure all the buckles are buckled into the buckle across from them. Then you want to snug it up tight enough so that you can still breathe, yet if you fell in the water it wouldn't come off over your head. In other words, watch what happens if this is too loose. If I go like this, the lifejacket could come off over my head. So that's why you want to make sure it's snug enough, that you don't fall out.

Now here's a little something you guys can remember next time you go canoeing somewhere. These are actually floatation devices, just like these. But really it's always better to have a jacket-style life preserver rather than one of these because with one of these, with a jacket, you can fall in and forget that you have it on, and it will keep your head above water. Whereas if you only had one of these, you'd always have to remember to hang onto it. We use these to make the seating more comfortable, since you already have your personal floatation devices on here. So these are only really for comfort, although if you went canoeing some other place, they might say, "Here, here's some seat cushions, that's all you need." But always ask for these, these are better. Now, we got everybody divvied up. So why don't you go stand by the canoe that you're going to be in, and I'll give you guys paddles.

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Now you guys watch me, and I'll show you how the paddle works. First we're going to start with the paddle in our right hand. This is the paddle blade here, and you're going to have your knuckles on top, okay? So give yourselves enough room; don't hit each other. Gwen, why don't you step up a couple of steps there? This is called the T-grip, because it looks like a T. The way you hold onto the T-grip is right on top like this. Everybody hold on like this, put it right in front of you. Excellent. Forward paddling—you just put the paddle blade in front of you and pull back, take it out of the water. There you guys go. Now, one of the first things you'll find out is that you don't have to take your paddle way out of the water. You just have to put the paddle blade in the water, and then just take it out right above the water, nice easy strokes, like this. Now that will get you going forward.

One of the jobs of the people in the front of the boats is to be the lookout. And what do you think the lookouts are looking for? Rocks, wildlife, anything interesting, but particularly things that are sticking up out of the river. There's some stumps and some trees that are sticking up so, if Gwen was in front and she said, "Hey, Kevin, there's a stump coming up," and I couldn't turn the boat around the stump, what might we want to do? Back paddle, go backwards. Hold the paddle again with a good grip on the T-grip, put the paddle blade behind you this time, push forward, take it out of the water, and put it behind you again. Very good.

Now after a while you guys are going get tired, so you're going to want to switch sides. So let's switch over to our left hand, knuckles on top, good grip on the T-grip. The reason you always want to hang on to the T-grip is that the T-grip allows you to control the paddle blade. If I hold on down here, I can't control the paddle blade very well, so always hold on to the T-grip. If your arms feel too far apart, don't let go of the T-grip, adjust your other hand so it's more comfortable. On the left side forward paddle, forward paddle you guys, forward paddle. Uh-oh, obstacle, back paddle, back paddle, back paddle, excellent, excellent. So forward and back, there's not too much more to know, except for the people in back who are steering. In this case Lavoncy and Rick and myself are going to steer.

If the rest of you can step back a little bit, we'll give Rick and Lavoncy some extra paddle strokes, so these guys can nicely turn the canoes. Go ahead and hop in the back of your canoes, you guys. Start off with just a little bit of a rudder, and if you need to, you can add a little bit more—but start off with just a little bit of a rudder. Whatever side you rudder on, that's the side the boat's going to go to. So if I rudder on this side, the boat's going to turn to the right. Instead of always turning to the right, sometimes you might want to turn to the left, huh? What could you guys do? All right, let's see you rudder on the left. So we could switch sides, rest the heel of our hand on the edge of the boat, scoot that paddle blade back a little further, we drop it in next to the back of the boat, pull in on the T-grip, right about there, and slowly the boat will turn to the left.

Now I told you I'd teach you two different paddle strokes. You already know the rudder—that'll turn you to the same side that your paddle is on. Now, I'm going to show you the sweep stroke. So let's go back to the right side. The sweep stroke does the opposite of a rudder—that allows you not to have to switch the paddle back and forth in order to turn right and left. So with the paddle on the right side, if we rudder, Rick, which way will the boat go?

RICK: To the right.

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KEVIN: Correct. Now, I'm going to show you the sweep stroke, which will turn the boat to the left if I sweep on this side, the right side. So here's how it starts, as I take the T-grip, I put it in near the middle of my chest and I put the paddle almost perpendicular to the boat straight out. I keep my right arm a little bit bent, not straight out, just a little bit bent, and then I sweep the water toward the back of the boat. Now the trick here is halfway through that sweeping stroke, you take that T-grip, and you push it out away from you. So it starts in by your chest, halfway through the stroke you push it away from you as you pull in with your right hand, and then the other trick is to watch it with your eyes. If you watch the paddle blade with your eyes, your shoulders will turn, too. So watch this. My shoulders turn, I reach all the way to the back of the boat, and this is what happens if I don't watch it with my eyes. I can only go back about this far, so you have to watch it with your eyes and turn your shoulders. You want to do about three or four nice smooth sweep strokes, and that'll turn the boat to the opposite side that the paddle is on. Show me three or four nice strong sweep strokes, you guys. Go ahead, watch with your eyes, ooh—perfect. Couple more strong ones. All right, perfect, you guys. What that will allow you to do is to sweep the boat to the other side. So rudder takes you to the same side that the paddle is on, sweeping takes you the other way. This is what you guys are going to do.

Okay, hold on to the edge of the boat there. Now I'll pretend I'm Domingo. Domingo, step right back there, and I'll demonstrate first. What you guys do is take your paddle and you put it across the edge of the boat in front of where you're going to sit. So if I was Domingo, and I was sitting in front, I would put my paddle like this. Then I would hold on to the paddle shaft and it's stuck in the sand here, so it stabilizes the boat. Lavoncy, you're going to do the same thing, so go ahead and put your paddle across the edge of the boat in front of where you're going to sit. Go ahead, a little bit further forward, toward me. Okay, then what you're going to do is when you hold onto the edge of the boat and your paddle, and you hold on here, you're going to step in like this, and then once you're sitting down, you're going to still hold on like this and then Domingo would get in. Always the person in back gets in first, so I'll hold the boat while you get in. Okay, hold on to the edge of the boat, there you go, hold onto the paddle, okay, go ahead and sit down. All right, and then once you guys feel you're comfortable, go ahead and get yourself comfortable in the seats there.

MAN: No standing up.

KEVIN: Right, no standing up. Now, it's going to take us a few minutes to get the other two boats going, so I don't want you guys going over towards the ocean. The tide's coming in but I don't want you going over there, so stay right over in here, practice going in circles, back paddling, forward paddling. You guys ready?

MAN: Yes.

KEVIN: Okay, I'll give you a little push there. All right you guys, so you guys keep paddling, and I'm going to tell you a little bit about the history of the area here.

As I mentioned before, we're here at Navarro River Redwoods State Park, and we're actually at the very mouth of the Navarro River. In fact, if you look, I'll swing the boat to the left a little, if you look to your left you can actually see out the mouth of the river and you can see the

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Pacific Ocean out there. So this is the very end of the Navarro River, and the park goes up about 14 miles from here. If you went about 20 or so miles, you'd actually get to Hendy Woods State Park, but for today we're just going to explore the estuary which is the lower part here where the salt water mixes with the freshwater and that's why it's the estuary down here. It's a really rich habitat for a lot of animals.

What do we see over on the right there, guys? All those gulls over there, just kind of resting there, and sometimes we'll see them out in the middle of the estuary here. There's also some smaller birds, some shore birds we'll see along the edge—feeding probably. But for right now we're going to keep an eye out for the wildlife and practice some more canoeing skills. How are you doing there, you guys?

WOMAN: Fine.

KEVIN: This area here has had a lot of different things happen over the years. Who do you guys think were the first people to live in this area? The native people in this area were known as the Pomo, P-O-M-O. And the archaeological record, which is kind of all the little bits and pieces of tools and fires and camps that are left over, show that the Pomo people have lived in this area for over 10,000 years. We were just talking about the early people that lived in this area—the Native Americans were called the Pomo. They actually were kind of, in a way, like we are today in the sense that during the summer months they wanted to come over to the coast where it was cooler, but also because they knew it was a good time to collect seaweed and abalone and other shellfish to eat, because they couldn't get that if they lived inland. Seaweed was a good source of minerals, and they would dry it and eat it throughout the whole year. Same with abalone, which are those big-shelled animals that live on the rocks underwater. They would collect mussels off the rocks. Do you guys know what mussels look like? They're kind of black with two shells. So the Native Americans would have seasonal camps over here, and they would harvest a lot of seaweed and other invertebrates and they'd also do some trading, too, because there was a lot of material on the coast they couldn't find inland.

[Inaudible question]

Yes, what are those wooden things? If you look behind us, there are a whole bunch of those wooden things sticking up out of the ground.

[Inaudible response]

Pretty close. They're actually pilings that were used to hold up a wharf that had a railroad on top of it. Why do you think they needed a railroad here at one time? They actually needed it because the road system was not very good.

The first European settlers to come into this area were people after the redwood logs. The logging industry is really what brought the first non-Native Americans to this area, and that'd be in the mid 1800s to late 1800s. They came after the redwood logs because what was going on in California around 1849, you guys?

WOMAN: Gold Rush.

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KEVIN: Yes, the Gold Rush. There was a really big influx of people coming to California, and they needed materials for building railroads, like railroad ties to hold up the tracks, buildings, fences. So up here they were cutting down the big redwood trees for that use. But the roads weren't very good. It would take you about three or four days of hard travel to get to San Francisco over the old roads—it was only about 14 hours by sailing ship, only 14. How long did it take you guys to come up from Richmond?

WOMAN: Three hours.

KEVIN: Three hours. You guys had it easy. In the old days you would get on a sailing ship, and if you were lucky, it wasn't too rough to land at the pier that was at the mouth of the river here. If it was too rough, they'd anchor off shore until it calmed down, which might be a day or two. So it could be pretty tough getting up here. But everything came in and out by ship in the mid to late 1800s. If you were going to come up here and visit at that time, you'd hop on a ship in San Francisco—it'd be a sailing ship in the mid-1800s and a steam schooner later on—but it'd still take you a good half a day to get up here. That's why there was a wharf here. When we get to the island up here, remind me to show you some of the old photographs so you can get a real good idea of what kind of activity was here, because there was a big town on the flat over here.

Hey Lavoncy, see this flat area here on the right between us and that house? There was a big town there and a lumber mill, and I'm going to show you some pictures when we get up to the island so you can see what kind of activity was going on here. After World War II the roadways got a lot better, so all the logs and all the goods that people needed to live by came in and out on the roads like we use today. That's why they didn't keep up the old wharfs all along the coast. Just about every major river had its own sawmill and wharf along here. There was a big boom from about 1850s through the turn of the century, but then, have you guys heard of the Great Depression?

Well the Great Depression, probably your grandparents remember it, it happened in the early 1900s. That's when all the mills closed down because there wasn't much work and much demand for materials. So all these towns got kind of abandoned, and in those days they didn't have good fire departments, and all the buildings were made out of wood. If a fire started, a lot of the old towns burned up that way. That's why you don't see too many old buildings on the coast here, because either they burned down or people scavenged them to make other buildings.

On the left here you guys can see some of the few flowering plants we've got around here. If we're lucky, we might see the state flower. What's the state flower, you guys? All right, the state flower of California is . . . the California poppy. That's that yellow or orangish-looking flower, which we will hopefully see. But I'll tell you one that you can see even from out there in the middle of the river—you see those orange flowers on that bush right there where I'm pointing? Those are, anybody know? No, they aren't the poppies, those ones are called the sticky monkey flower.

Rick sees some poppies up there. Probably the pale yellow ones—those little yellow cups, they're kind of closing up for the night. The poppies that are right on the coast here aren't the

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brilliant orange ones you see inland. They're kind of a coastal variety, which are lower growing and more yellow than orange. Here's another flowering plant that you'll see almost all summer long flowering. See this bush to the left here with the purple flowers on top? Yes, we got some lupine here, and if you were further down the coast, you would see the yellow flowers, which are mostly in Sonoma County. And there's some more of that sticky monkey flower.

Now a lot of the plants that we have in California today are actually brought over accidentally, sometimes on purpose, from Europe. I'm going to describe a plant up here, and you're going to tell me the common name, because it's really easy to figure out. See the yellow flowers kind of straight ahead there on the left? They're kind of tall. Those yellow flowers are a plant that comes from Europe. So it's not native to California. It's an introduced species—probably came with the early settlers during the Gold Rush times. And that one, does anybody know the name of that one? The yellow one. Other than Rick, because I know Rick knows the name of that one.

The yellow flowers there, you guys will know, because it's the same plant that is used to make what you put on hotdogs.

MAN: Mustard.

KEVIN: Yes, so that's mustard up there. That's not actually native to California. One of the things we try to do in State Parks is to preserve the native plants of California. What was that Domingo?

[Inaudible response]

Right. That one was brought over from Europe. One of the reasons why I tell you guys that is that we try to preserve the native California species in the parks because when you go to a town or something, they plant all sorts of beautiful plants but they aren't native to California. One of the jobs of the State Park System is to preserve our heritage of California, which are the native plants and animals. So when you come to the park here, we hope that we can show you some of the native plants and stuff.

If we look over here on the left, what do you guys see on the hillside? A rail from the railroad there. I'm surprised that that one didn't get taken. A lot of the metal from the old mills and railroads were turned into scrap iron just before World War II. Look at that, a beautiful right turn. Look at the water, how glassy it is. This is my favorite time of the day for canoeing because the wind dies down and the water gets all glassy.

Now one thing about the redwood trees—they have very rot-resistant wood. That was one of the other attributes that made it so popular—because it would last a long time if you used it outside, either for railroad ties or for fences or for exterior siding on your house. I was just telling the folks in my boat that that stump right there is kind of a medium-sized redwood tree. How big do you think a really big redwood tree would be if we were looking at the base of it? Twice as big? Maybe three times as big? Well, a really big redwood tree would be about 16 feet in diameter, and most people, if they put their arms straight out, fingertip to fingertip, would be close to six feet.

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This is the only island here at the estuary. I told you I'd show you some old photographs of what went on here during the heyday of the lumbering era. So I'm going to pass out a bunch of these old laminated photographs, and they have little titles on them. For instance, this one here, it shows the Navarro-by-the-Sea building, which we paddled by on the opposite side of the shore, and it shows a little wharf there and some old cars in front. Let me pass this over this way, and once you guys look, pass it around. Then this one here you can see the island, in the top here, and then you can see the town and the mill that was down here. You can see the wharf from those pilings right along the north side of the river there. You can see the wharf all the way out to the ocean there, and you can see that this island here was a big garden at one point. Here is a close-up of the wharf with a steam schooner tied up taking on some cut lumber. Here's that one, and here is another one again showing a closer view of the town and also of the wharf. This one is from around the 1880s, and the top one is from 1907. That's a pretty long time ago. But we still see some of the pilings. And here's a good view of the old bridge. The current bridge is still upstream where people can cross the river, but in the old days there was a bridge just downstream from the island here. We might see the abutments of the bridge that went across the island at one point, too. There's that one.

Now, as you guys are looking at that I have two more items here. These are actually color Xeroxes of some of the native flowering plants here. Which one is the state flower, you guys?

WOMAN: Yellow.

KEVIN: Yes, this one here. So you guys can take a look at these. I'll kind of point them out real quick. The names are down here. This is the Douglas iris. Then we've got the seaside daisy down here, which is right on the coast usually. Remember this one, the sticky what? The sticky monkey flower. And the Indian paintbrush. Yes, if you touch it, it's a little sticky. Here we've got, the white one's the yarrow, and then the bush lupine, which we saw back there, the purple one. And of course our beautiful state flower, the California poppy.

That big tree wasn't here last winter. It came down in some of the big winter storms. If you guys came here in like January or February during a big storm, where it rains for like three or four days straight, the river level would be probably about almost to the top of the main trunk of that tree right there. Further up the highway it actually floods the roadway. So in the wintertime we get a big change in the river from all the water that comes down. It brings a lot of trees down and moves the sand and gravel around. But it's just part of what happens in the wintertime here.

I told you guys about some of the early settlers, so let's skip ahead in time a little bit. We have the logging industry I was telling you about, and that peaked, then it declined right around the Great Depression. Then, after World War II, it of picked up again, but the next big event on the Mendocino Coast here happened in the late 60s and early 70s.

So what kind of people do you think were coming up here in the late 60s and early 70s?

[Inaudible response]

That's right. Now what do you think the hippies were after up here?

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WOMAN: Peace and quiet.

KEVIN: Peace and quiet. That's right. In fact, that's why a lot of people still come up here is because it's a rural area. It's very beautiful and there's a lot of peace and quiet. So a lot of the young people in the late 60s and early 70s, what people commonly call the hippies, they came up this way to reinvent themselves, live out in the country, raise goats, chickens, have a big garden, go "back to the land," so to speak. There's still a lot of those people that came here in the late 60s and 70s. They still live up here today, although there are fewer of them raising goats. A lot of them still have great gardens, though.

Domingo, do you see these big concrete things here? What do you think those were for?

Well, in one of the pictures we saw a bridge coming across the island, and that's the old foundations that helped hold the bridge up that went across the river. There's the swallows, flying around again. You know, one of the things I really like about having a canoe is you can get to places where nobody else is. Because you can't walk along the shore here, it's too thick. And to get to the island you'd have to swim there otherwise.

Well, we're looking toward the mouth of the river there, and you can see the ocean there. To me it looks like one is higher than the other. So which is higher, you guys, the ocean or the river?

VISITORS: Ocean.

KEVIN: Yes, but it's not coming in as fast as you would think with it looking higher, but when the swell is really big, it really is a funny sight to look out there and see the ocean look that much higher than the river. Today the tide's coming in, so we don't have to worry about getting washed out of the mouth there. All right, Lavoncy, we'll see you on shore.

LADY: You cheated.

KEVIN: Who cheated? Nice smooth strokes, you guys. Nice smooth paddle strokes.

Well, we had a nice evening paddle on the Navarro River. Like I mentioned before, my name is Ranger Kevin Joe, here at the Mendocino District, Navarro River Redwoods State Park. Hopefully you got a feeling for what it's like to come out on a trip with us on the beautiful Navarro River. So come visit one of the many state parks this summer. We hope to see you out here at Navarro River Redwoods State Park sometime and take you canoeing.

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