



California State Parks

Video Transcript



The Natural and Historical Diversity of Fremont Peak State Park

Good Morning, I'm Ranger Brett Reid, welcome to Fremont Peak State Park. Today we're going to do the Carmen Trail, which is right down in this ravine. We're going to start by walking down the road, go up past the observatory, and then down into the trail. We should see some oak trees, some red-tailed hawks, other birds, and we're going to come up the other side here. We'll be up right around 3,000 feet from there, and then we might be able to get a view of the Salinas Valley from that point on. Any questions? Well, let's go down the road here.

In 1846, while California was still a part of Mexico, Army Captain John C. Frémont of the topographic engineers led an expeditionary force of 60 men into the Salinas Valley and to the top of Gavilan Peak. Frémont and his group were there to explore and survey the area, however the group's make-up was clearly an armed force. The peak was a strategic location—from his encampment Frémont could see anyone approaching for miles. Long suspicious of Frémont's motives, Mexican Commandant General José Castro ordered him to leave California immediately. In defiance, Frémont quickly built a log stockade at the peak and raised a U.S. military flag.

Right over here on our right is our weather station, it has a thermometer. There's a rain gauge over here on the shop, and we can keep track of the weather up here.

VISITOR: Do you guys get snow?

BRETT: Yeah, usually maybe once or twice in the wintertime, we get a little bit of snow that sticks around for a couple days.

Castro's orders were supported by the U.S. counsel in Monterey, and, in a hand-delivered letter, Larkin told Frémont that he had to leave the area. So in the middle of a windy night after his hastily erected flag was blown over, Frémont gathered his troops and abandoned Gavilan Peak. During the Mexican-American war, Frémont led the California Battalion, but in 1847, U.S. General Stephen W. Kearney censured him for his conduct in California. So Frémont was arrested, court-martialed, and found guilty of mutiny. President James K. Polk later removed the charge of mutiny, and Frémont became the U.S. Senator representing California's Mariposa area. And in 1856 he conducted an unsuccessful campaign for president. The Native Sons and Daughters of the Golden West placed a commemorative plaque on Fremont Peak in 1926, and this area became a state park in 1936.

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The northern slopes of Fremont Peak are covered in manzanita, scrub oak, coyote brush. On southern exposures, open grasslands are green in spring and golden brown in the summer and fall.

So, where we started the walk was at about 3,000 feet, maybe a little lower. We probably dropped down to about 2,500 down in here, and we'll go back up and actually the summit is about 3,159 feet. A bit of a climb now, so take your time and stop if you need a break.

Sometimes you can see turkey vultures above the canyons and hawks that gave the Gavilan mountain range its Spanish name.

VISITOR: Will it pretty much dry up in here in the next couple of weeks or does it stay green?

BRETT: No, by mid-summer it's pretty much all brown. This is really the nicest time of year as far as the flowers go. It gets very dry up in here.

Here we are at Fremont Peak State Park at the summit—3,159 feet—where the flag was first raised on California soil by John C. Frémont in 1846.

You can see the Monterey Bay out in the distance with the city of Monterey and Pacific Grove, off to the left and then closer in is the city of Salinas. Right down in there you can see the city of San Juan Bautista, and then further out on the horizon is the city of Gilroy, and over to the left, or more towards the north, you can see the city of Watsonville, and Santa Cruz off on the other side of the Monterey Bay.

So that finishes about a mile. We started by going past the observatory, came down the side of the hill through all the wildflowers, and then entered the oak trees down in the shade. Came up through, saw lots of different kinds of trees, got some shade in the hill climb back on up. So that's pretty much it. Did you have good time?

VISITORS: Yeah. Thank you.

BRETT: Well, thanks for coming out.

Running Time: 06:08
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