



California State Parks

Video Transcript



Lake Oroville State Recreation Area: A Recreation Wonderland

Hi, my name is Ginger Chew, and I work for the California Department of Parks and Recreation as a Park Interpretive Specialist. Welcome to the Lake Oroville State Recreation Area—a recreational wonderland. We're going to begin here at the Lake Oroville Visitor Center, which is jointly run by the California Department of Parks and Recreation and the California State Water Project. We'll be looking at some recreational opportunities today. We'll be looking at the natural aspects of this area, and this is a great place to begin. The area is rich in cultural diversity, Native American and Gold Rush history. Please join us, and let's begin our tour . . .

This is a stop on the pathway on the way into the visitor center. We have historic items here and displays—the acorn-pounding process, one of the first processes. Eventually the path will bring us into the Lake Oroville Visitor Center/Maidu Museum where we'll go into this process more in detail. This will be an area where the Maidu women would sit for long hours and pound their acorns into an acorn flour. It then has to go through a leeching process. This takes a lot of time and patience, and the leeching process washes out the tannic acid so that you can eat the acorn meal. Many times the village women would sit and sing songs as they pounded acorns, and this would tend to pass the time a little bit better in this long process.

Welcome to the inside of the Lake Oroville Visitor Center. This is the lobby area. We have interpretive items on sale here by the Bidwell Bar Association, a cooperating association for state parks. We also have our new fish tank. These are fish species found right here in Lake Oroville—we have red-eye bass, spotted bass, large-mouth bass, bluegill, red-eared sunfish, green sunfish, warmouth, and more to come. Please come and see our newest exhibit in the visitor center lobby.

Our next stop will be the Maidu exhibit here in the visitor center. This is in honor of the old ways of living of the Maidu people before European influence. This exhibit is in a diorama-type setting. It was put together by California Department of Parks and Recreation staff, a Maidu Exhibit Team, which consists of Maidu elders, and a lot of volunteer hours. Please join us.

This is our Maidu basket display. Baskets were used by the Maidu people for many different purposes. They cooked in these baskets, in the coiled and twined techniques were used for weaving. Some of the designs that you see, the darker designs, are made with redbud, which has been split, the bark. A lot of the foundations of the baskets here were begun with willow. They could store in these baskets; they gathered. This is a large burden basket, and it was used to gather acorns in the fall and nuts and seeds and roots.

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Here to my left we have a Maidu dwelling, which is made of cedar bark for the outside, and a wild grapevine is tied around the top to secure the bark. On the inside are lodgepole pines.

Over here we have our Maidu lady who is smoking fish—salmon—and she's trying to shoo the little scrub jay away. She's wearing a Maidu skirt, traditionally weaved of wild Indian hemp or tule, and she's wearing pine-nut necklaces from the foothill pines. She's also wearing an abalone shell necklace, which would have been traded with a coastal tribe. Most often the coastal tribes would have traveled inland for trading, as opposed to the Maidu traveling over to the coast.

This is our Maidu elder basketweaver. The mannequins made here—the models were Maidu people living in this area. Mary was a respected elder. She taught many people how to weave baskets. She's holding the foundation of a basket, and you can see her basket materials are surrounding her. In front of Mary is another grinding rock where they would pound the acorns. Once the acorns had been pounded into a meal, they were then laid on top of leaves—grape leaves or pine needles, like you see here—and then water was slowly poured over the top. This would leech that bitter tannic acid, so the acorn meal could be edible.

Here we have Jack, our hunter, and he's using a traditional Maidu bow. The Maidu men were known for their fine bow making, and they traded with a lot of surrounding tribes for their bows and arrows. He's wearing a quiver on his shoulder, which is the bag that holds the arrows. He's wearing a netted hunting cap, which kept his hair back as he was moving through the bush and hunted for many different animals in the area.

Deer were the number one source of protein. Every part of the deer was used. The horns were used for making tools and scrapers. The back muscle of the deer was used for making sinew or a thread for sewing. The skins, of course, were used for clothing. The meat was eaten. There was no waste of anything that they took from the earth.

They also had mallard ducks, great blue herons. These animals all lived in the creeks and rivers and streams of this area. This is a great blue heron—lives in the marshes in this area, and it was hunted. Many of the animals in this area were hunted with nets or traps. They weaved baskets for traps for a lot of the different bird species in the area.

The Maidu used the cattail fluff, for stuffing pillows and Maidu footballs, which the outside is made of deer hide, and for making blankets. But the number one thing that cattail fluff was used for, after it fluffs away it's very absorbent, so it was put between two pieces of weaved material and it was used for diapers.

This is a votive pocket gopher. The meat was eaten and the fur was used for making different materials. They were normally caught with a trap.

Our state bird—the California valley quail. The Maidu ate the meat, of course. The top notch feather that you see on this cute little bird was used in some of the ceremonial wear that the Maidu would put together.

California gopher snake—these are found in the valleys, in Sacramento Valley and the foothill

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areas, of the Sierra Nevadas. The meat was eaten.

Red-shafted flicker—the beautifully colored feathers that you see were sometimes used in some of the basketry work, sometimes in some of the clothing, and sometimes in the ceremonial wear, as well. And of course, the meat was eaten.

This is a red-tailed hawk. As you can see, it does not have red feathers at this time in its life. It's in an adolescent melanistic phase, which means that it's changing from a child into an adult. The meat was eaten, and the feathers were used in Maidu wear.

This is a golden eagle. Just as the red-tailed hawk, its feathers were used in some ceremonial Maidu wear. We have a lot of these eagles still living in this area. We also have four nesting bald eagle couples that live around our lake.

This is a mountain lion. It is the number one predator in Northern California. We used to have grizzly bears here, and, of course, that was the number one predator. The Maidu hunted the grizzly bear and the mountain lion. They used the skin for clothing and for blankets, and they ate the meat. The bones were used—sometimes the ulna portion of the leg bone of the mountain lion was used for the gaming bones when they played grass games.

This is a western rattlesnake. You can see that it is a poisonous snake because it has a triangular shaped head. This is one way of recognizing a poisonous snake in Northern California is by the shape of its head. If it has that triangular shape, then that means it is a venomous snake.

This is a black-tail mule deer. Of course the Maidu would use the skin for clothing and blankets. The back muscle was used as sinew for sewing. It's a type of thread. The antlers were used for scrapers and other tools. The deer hooves were made into deer-hoof rattles, which are used in the Girls Rites of Passage Ceremony.

We're standing here in front of the Jim Beckwourth exhibit. Jim Beckwourth was a mountain man, a trader, and he also blazed the Highway 162 path through the Sierra Nevadas. It was an alternative route. The City of Marysville hired him to blaze this trail. This was around 1841, when we had a lot of immigrants coming into California. He had a trading post in Portola—up above Portola, actually, in the little town of Beckwourth.

Every year here at the visitor center we have a butterfly display. Today is the day that we are going to set them free out into nature where they belong. We get them as caterpillars and then they go into a chrysalis phase. They're in that phase anywhere from seven to fourteen days and then it gets cramped in that chrysalis and they decide that they want out. So they come out as butterflies. They are liquid feeders now so they have a proboscis and they drink nectar. These are painted lady butterflies. I have a lot of school groups that come through, and this is a favorite of theirs.

This is Lake Oroville Dam. Construction started in 1962, and it was completed in 1967. It took about a year for the lake to fill after they completed the dam. It's the tallest dam of any in the United States, it stands at 770 feet from its base to its top. It's 6,920 feet across the top, and it was built with earth-filled materials. A lot of the tailings from the gold dredges were used for

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the building and construction of this dam. It has 3½ million acre feet, and all forks of the Feather River feed into it. The Sierra Nevadas cradle the waters.

Lots of recreation. We have salmon derbies. We have a lot of bass tournaments—there are a lot of bass in this lake. We have shoreline fishing, swimming, and of course, you can boat up the middle fork and see the Feather Falls, the sixth highest falls in the United States—it's 640 feet tall. And now we're going down, we're going to cross over the spillway. This is Table Mountain that you see in front of us, the flat mesa.

This is the spillway—this is where the water is released at times of high water levels. It flows back down into the Feather River. This is the Spillway Launch Ramp Recreation Unit. This is newly renovated. We have picnic tables and lawn and covered ramadas and an eight-lane boat launch facility.

There is a trail system that goes along the shoreline. It's back up and over and is about five miles long right now—they're continuing to work on that—Lake Oroville trail crews. This is one of the entrances to the Brad Freeman Trail. This is a mountain bike trail, and it takes you along the diversion pool areas. This is the outlet from the lake, so it flows along the natural flow of the Feather River, and eventually it will meet the afterbay waters and it will go back down into the Delta and eventually out to the San Francisco Bay.

This is the spillway. When the lake level is very, very high, sometimes they need to open the spillway gates and release water. This goes down, meets the Feather River, flows down over the barrier dam near the fish hatchery, and then continues on out to the north and south forebays.

This is the new Bidwell Bar Suspension Bridge. It's in place of the historic Bidwell Bar Suspension Bridge, which was built in 1856 and would now be under water if it were left as they filled the lake. The forks of the Feather River were an area where they did lots of gold mining and the old suspension bridge was an area where they found gold. John Bidwell found gold at Bidwell's Bar. That would have been right out about where you see the point over here. In 1848, a few months after Marshall found gold at Sutter's Mill in Coloma, John Bidwell had a group of surveyors and Native Americans who found gold here on the Feather River and they named the town after him, Bidwell's Bar. The Bidwell Bar Bridge is an historic monument that is over at Bidwell Canyon, which you can see the marina straight across from us. Two historical landmarks over there—the historic Stone Toll House where the gatekeeper would stay and the historic reconstructed Bidwell Bar Bridge.

This is the middle fork of the Feather River, the entryway up into the Feather Falls area. Right now, since the lake level is where it's at, we're almost at full pool. We're almost at 900 feet. You can get up to the base of the canyon where you can see about the top two-thirds of the falls. The south fork takes you up into some awesome water-skiing areas. A lot of granite formations, so you have a lot of decomposed granite, which makes awesome sandy beaches, and there's some good fishing spots in that area for bass and salmon and catfish.

Next we'll be heading to the day use beach area at Loafer Creek. Our wonderful trail system connects the campsites here at Coyote Campground with the day use area. Our trail system is open to equestrians, hikers, and mountain bikers.

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Welcome to the Loafer Creek swimming area. We have a big grassy lawn behind me with lots of shade trees. We have barbecues and picnic tables, a very large changing facility and restroom facilities. As the summer continues and the hot weather temperatures and they start to release some of the lake waters, we'll have more of a sandy beach here at Lake Oroville Loafer Creek Recreation Area.

Next we're heading to the Lake Oroville Visitor Center tower. It stands 47 feet, and it's accessible by stairs. This will give us a really good panoramic view of the Sacramento Valley, the Sierra Nevadas, the foothills, Table Mountain, Baldrock, the main body of the lake, and, of course, the dam.

We're looking out across the main body of Lake Oroville. To the north is the slot which will eventually take you up to the north fork of the Feather River and the west branch. The west branch has our newest campsite facility, it's called Lime Saddle, and it has 16 RV campsites and 30 tent campsites. It is situated on the beautiful shores of the west branch of the north fork of the Feather River. The Feather River canyons cradle the waters of Lake Oroville, and the dam holds the water back.

This body of water that you see in the valley is the North Forebay Recreation Area. We have a beach and a lawn and horseshoe pits. It's open to non-motorized vessels, so you can take canoes and kayaks. It's a beautiful area to view waterfowl and fish—a lot of salmon and trout caught in the north forebay area. Then as you continue out and over, you'll see the south forebay, which is the larger body of water. That's open to motorized vessels. We hold jet ski races there and high speed motor boat races. Eventually you will come out to the afterbay. This is a body of water that's used to warm the water up before it goes out for irrigation purposes to the rice farmers. You can also boat on the afterbay and fish there.

Just over the treetops you can see the saddle dam area. This is an area that is a little bit higher in elevation than the dam, so that's what a saddle dam is, it protects the water from overflowing at that point. There is also an area near the saddle dam where equestrians can pull their trailers up and park, enter into the trail system, and ride the Loafer Creek Loop and the Roy Rogers and the Dan Beebe Trail. Those areas are around the Loafer Creek area and the Loafer Creek Horse Camp.

We're looking at a few of the houseboats that are moored at the Bidwell Canyon Marina. It's a private marina and it offers ski rentals and boat rentals and houseboat rentals and fishing boats.

Thank you for taking this tour of the Lake Oroville State Recreation Area. We hope you've enjoyed it. Please come visit, and see for yourself why Lake Oroville is truly a recreational wonderland.

Running Time: 23:34
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