

Armstrong Redwoods...Giants of the Forests

By Wendy VanHatten

Wander among Giants. Marvel at larger-than-life Icicles growing hundreds of feet above the floor. Stand next to a 1,400 year old Colonel. Have your photo taken with Parson Jones, a giant at 310 feet.

Then reflect at the absolute quiet.

Looking for an accessible place to view a living reminder of the magnificent primeval redwood forest that covered much of Northern California before logging operations started in the 19th century? Armstrong Redwoods SNR, located near Guerneville in northern California, is just such a place.

What makes these redwoods special?

Sequoia sempervirens, or more commonly known as the coast redwood, are the tallest living thing on our planet. Living to be 500 to 1,000 years old, growing to 12 to 16 feet in diameter and standing 200 to 250 feet tall some of these trees have even survived over 2,000 years. And that's through drought, fires and logging.

Needing over 55 inches of rain per year to survive, these are considered temperate rainforest vegetation. As coast redwoods they grow from southern Oregon to central California, extending not more than fifty miles inland, where the coastal fog has its influence. When conditions are right...enough rainfall...these giants can grow an additional two to three feet a year!

Now...look up. Can you even see the sun? Probably not. Some light does filter through. But the forest floor is lush and damp and full of ferns, clover, mushrooms, streams, needles and multiple plants. Those needles at the top do get exposed to sun light and dry heat in the summer. To compensate for this, redwoods grow treetop needles with tight spikes to conserve moisture. Their lower branches have flat needles to catch additional light that may sneak through the dense canopy.

Walk through a tunnel in the trees. You would think it would disintegrate or fall prey to insects. Nope. Fallen redwoods and ones partially destroyed by fires can still survive. In fact, redwoods are naturally resistant to insects, fungi and fire because they are so high in tannin and don't produce any resin or pitch.

Once again, listen to the quiet.

Occasionally birds can be heard and now and then a lonely woodpecker is trying hard to make a dent. Since there isn't much food for birds and squirrels, you won't hear much chatter. It is quiet...beyond quiet.

Take a hike...there are hikes for all levels of hikers. Nature trails with an easy stroll through the grove, wheelchair accessible walks, moderate two to three mile hikes with a 500 foot climb or strenuous five to nine mile hikes with over a 1500 foot climb are all worth the time. Temperatures range widely. As you can imagine, it is cool in the forest with little direct sun. Head to the Forest Theater, a large outdoor amphitheater, and once again enjoy your serene and rejuvenating visit among these inspiring giants.

Looking for a place to take in the beauty and natural value of our redwood forests? Visiting northern California should include a visit to at least one such place. This grove offers solace from the hustle and bustle of daily life, offering every visitor great inspiration and a place for quiet reflection.

If You Go:

The reserve is located three miles north of Guerneville on Armstrong Woods Road. From Highway 101- coming North or South- take the River Road exit (in Santa Rosa). Go west on River Road until you reach Guerneville. At the second stop light make a right hand turn onto Armstrong Woods Road. This road will end in the park. If you park in the parking lot and walk in, there is no charge to visit or hike.

For more information, call 707-869-2958 or visit <http://www.parks.ca.gov> and look for Armstrong Redwoods.