

## THE REDWOOD STATE PARKS OF HUMBOLDT COUNTY

(Summary by Kathleen Wade)

The coast redwood sequoia sempervirens, a tree old as Christianity and at one time flourishing on three continents, is today confined to a narrow zone along the northern California coast, and among its finest stands are those in Humboldt County. The gravity of the threat of their destruction by extravagant commercial lumbering is witnessed in an 1882 prediction that the redwoods were doomed to a fate similar to that of the Indian and the elk. However, thanks to the efforts of far sighted individuals and organizations, coördinated by the Save-the-Redwoods League, a movement for their preservation began after the world war. By collecting funds and receiving donations of groves as memorials to prominent persons, and by arousing public interest, the League succeeded in reserving seven state parks in southern Humboldt County along the Redwood Highway in the basin of the South Fork of the Eel River, and one on the northern coast in Prairie Creek basin.

These two areas are alike in several respects, but deserve separate treatment. Humboldt Redwoods State Park, proper, is the largest of the southern group, and within its bounds is the Williams Grove State Park, and to the south there are five other state parks. Alexander, Lane, Holbrook,



Whittemore and Richardson's groves. All of these have wonderful examples of redwoods in almost pure stands on the flats, as in Bull Creek, Dyerville Forest, and mixed with other trees on the slopes. A luxuriant, mossy undergrowth throughout features spectacular ferns, rhododendrons, redwood lilies, and myriads of other plants. The region was once the home of the Sinkyone Indians whose culture blended Californian and northwestern traits.

Both sections have shared in the story of Humboldt County as a typically American colony, uninfluenced by Spain or Russia, and both have been in relatively isolated parts of a region which was, in itself, outside of the world current until the discovery of gold on the Trinity River in 1849.

The quest for an easy route to these mines led to the development of the early discovered but long neglected Trinidad and Humboldt bays. Such was the motive behind the first expedition through the South Fork district, which opened the difficult old Sonoma trail, vividly described by the 1851 expedition of Redick McKee, the Indian agent. The latter's peace mission failed, and bloody wars raged from 1860 to 1865. Despite such handicaps some hardy spirits did take up homesteads and form settlements along the South Fork. Stock and grain raising were the chief industries, and the colorful lumber enterprise was another element in the region's story.

The northern section although differing in the fact



that it has a more varied, almost tropical, flora and another aboriginal element, has many factors in common with the south: splendid sequoias, a background of an isolated American homestead site, and early routes. The latter were opened in 1828 by such fur-traders as Jedediah Smith. Gold, too, affected it. Its discovery in the sands of Gold Bluffs in 1851 caused intense excitement, followed by bitter disappointment when the deposit proved difficult to work. Prairie Creek is unique as the last habitat of the once abundant Roosevelt Elk.

Such are two samples of primeval America, which the state hopes to preserve.



Parks, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14

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The Humboldt County's primeval forests, sheltering the Indian, the redwood, and the elk, remained virtually undisturbed until the Trinity gold rush of 1850 opened the way for the homesteader and lumberman. These exterminated the Indian, and only the timely creation of state parks prevented destruction of the latter two elements.