

S.P. #20

ARMSTRONG REDWOOD STATE PARK

(Summary by George Tays)

Armstrong Redwood Grove is a 395.4 acre tract of land with a fine stand of redwood trees in Sonoma County. It is situated some seventy miles north of San Francisco, about three miles north of Guerneville near the Russian River. Its geographic location is latitude $38^{\circ} 31'$ north, longitude 123° west. The grove is on level ground making it a most desirable and ideal spot for a public park.

Exploration in this vicinity began very late. Not until 1821, when Captain Luis Arguello and his expedition were returning from the upper Sacramento Valley, did white men see the Russian River Valley. Further exploration waited until M. G. Vallejo carried on his Indian campaigns in this region between 1836 and 1842. By 1845 several large land grants had been made and ranches had settled the valley that this region became well known.

During October 1846, Lieutenant Joseph Revere from Sonoma traveled through this park region. In February 1850 four members of Dr. Josiah Gregg's expedition to Humboldt Bay returned through these woods almost dead from starvation to Mark West's home at Santa Rosa. After 1850 many people took up the land and timber claims. One of these tracts for 420 acres was acquired by James B. Armstrong, who later

gave it to the county as a park.

Formerly this country was occupied by Pomo Indians, a peaceful, wealthy, hunting and fishing folk, and the most skillful basket makers in California. They hunted the few species of large animals in the vicinity, such as elk, deer and bear, but there was an abundance of smaller animals. The park area is also very rich in bird life, with such species as quail, doves, wrens, warblers, hawks, sparrows and many kinds of water fowl.

The flora of the park is also varied and profuse. Among the wild flowers are found buttercups, columbines, jump-ups, wild rose, coast lily, fawn lily, lupine and rhododendrons. The trees are represented by such kinds as the willow, cottonwood, black oak, tan oak, white fir, lowland fir, knobcone pine, big leaf maple, madroña, California laurel, and redwood.

Colonel Armstrong loved his grove so well that he refused to sell it and after 1892 tried to deed it to the State for a public park but legal technicalities prevented the acceptance of the gift. At his death in 1900 his heirs made other attempts, and failing, finally donated 400 acres to Sonoma County as a park. In 1910 the legislature passed a bill authorizing the purchase of the park for \$100,000 but Governor Gillett refused to sign it. Thereafter nothing was done until 1934, when the State Park Commission bought it

from the county for \$60,000.

Since then it has been developed greatly by the building of camp sites, tables, stoves, benches, trails, and the piping of water. In September 1936, a great outdoor theater was completed, and in May 1937, the community house was dedicated. With these facilities the \$60,000 State Park has become a popular recreation center in Sonoma County.

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Armstrong Redwoods, 395.4 acre tract near Guerneville, seen by Luis Argüello 1821, also Valléjo, Revere and others by 1846. James Armstrong acquired it after 1850, offering it to California as park 1892-1900, later gave it to Sonoma County. Purchased for \$60,000 and developed as State park by Park Commission 1934.