

SP #19

KRUZE RHODODENDRON RESERVE STATE PARK

(Summary by George Tays)

The Kruze Rhododendron Reserve State Park consists of a strip of coast lands some two miles long and half a mile wide, containing about 600 acres. This tract was a gift from Mr. Edward Kruze of San Francisco in 1934. It lies along the county road which leads through the Kruze ranch from the coast highway to the little village of Plantation. Its location is on the northwest coast of Sonoma County, some ten miles north of Fort Ross or three miles south of Stewart's Point, in approximately latitude $38^{\circ} 36'$ north longitude $123^{\circ} 24'$ west. These lands are notable almost entirely because of the splendid growth of rhododendrons which bloom there from April to June.

This part of the coast was seen by such famous navigators as Cabrillo, Ferrelo, Drake, Gali, Cermeñon, and Vizcaino, between 1542 and 1603. Then after a lapse of 170 years it was again observed by the seamen, such as Juan Perez, Heceta, Bodega y Cuadra, La Pérouse, Malaspina, Vancouver, Martinez, Winship, and finally the Russians between 1774 and 1812.

When the Russians established their posts at Bodega Bay and Fort Ross in 1812, they became the first white men to explore the land of the present state park.

At their departure in 1842, John A. Sutter bought Fort Ross and claimed the land. The Mexican government, however, granted it to a German, Ernest Rufus in 1844. Thereafter it was known as the German Ranch. This grant contained about 17,580 acres or some five square leagues, and in 1847 Rufus sold a large part of the ranch to Charles F. Glein and Henry Hägler, who held it several years and disposed of it to William Beihler. The new owner had much trouble with squatters and Sutter between 1854 and 1861, finally resorting to the law in order to dispossess them. About 1870 Beihler sold the ranch to other parties, and it finally came into the possession of Mr. Kruze.

At that time most of this area was forested with a good stand of redwood, which was logged about fifty years ago, and now only a second growth remains. However, the gulches and the hillsides are covered by a fine covering of rhododendron shrubs, which transform the landscape into a mass of blossoms during the spring. It was in order to preserve these wild flowers in their natural state, and prevent the destruction of the plants by people who wished to pick the flowers that led Mr. Kruze to offer this land to the State as a park.

He was ready to make the gift in 1933, but the State Park Commission hesitated to accept it because of the administrative difficulties and lack of funds. Finally after many

months it was accepted. This park does not lend itself for development of camp sites and recreation as there is but little level land. But as a scenic attraction during blossom time, however, it is well worth frequent visits. Furthermore, the rugged coast has a beauty all of its own.

S.P. # 19

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The Rhododendron State Park containing some 600 acres, was donated to the State by Edward Kruze, to preserve the beauty of these flowering plants, by preventing their destruction at the hands of those who would pick the blossoms. It was accepted by the State and created a park in 1934.