

Natural Bridges State Beach



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (831) 423-4609. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting the following:

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS
P. O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

For information call: (800) 777-0369
(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.
711, TTY Relay Service

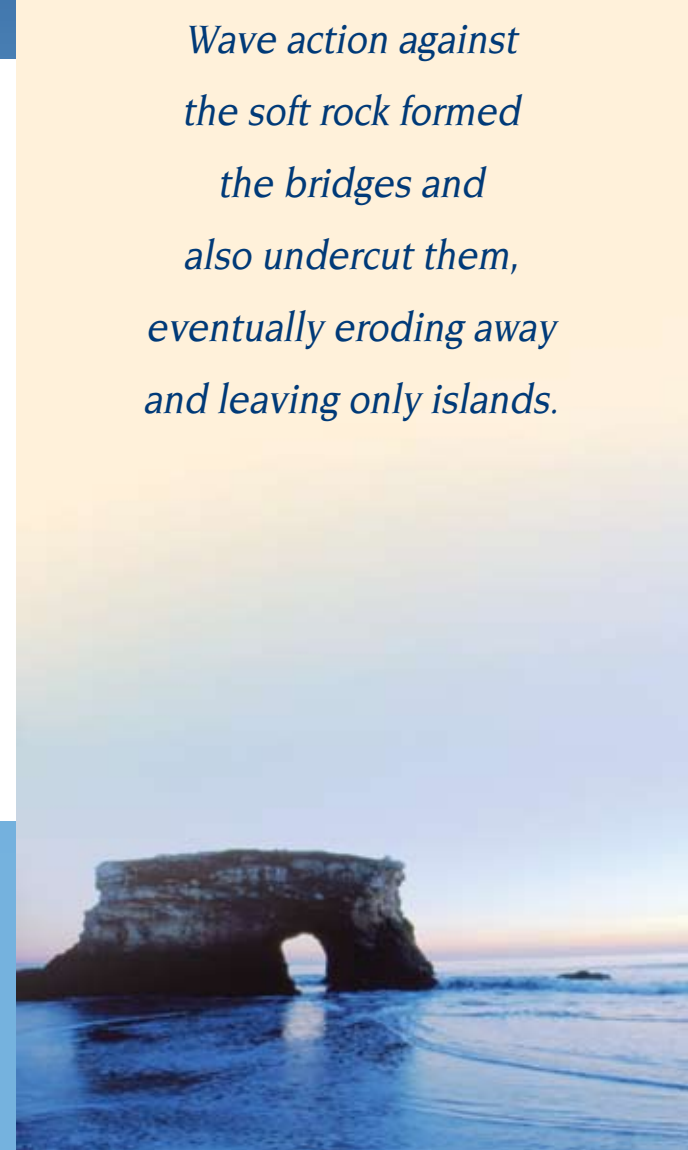
www.parks.ca.gov

Discover the many states of California.™

Natural Bridges State Beach
2531 West Cliff Drive
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 423-4609

Photography by California State Parks and John L. Goldberg

In the early 1900s, the three arches carved by nature out of a sandstone cliff inspired the naming of Natural Bridges. Wave action against the soft rock formed the bridges and also undercut them, eventually eroding away and leaving only islands.





Natural Bridges State Beach is a

magnificent oasis of natural beauty located between the edge of the ocean and the outer limits of Santa Cruz.

During fall and winter, Natural Bridges is home to one of the largest monarch butterfly over-wintering sites in the Western United States. Each year, from the boardwalk in the Monarch Preserve, you can see thousands of monarch butterflies clustered in the eucalyptus trees.

A demonstration milkweed patch next to the visitor center provides food for monarch caterpillars. If you look closely, you can often find the bright green chrysalids (cocoons) hanging under the fence railing. Public monarch tours are offered on the weekends.

Spring brings warmer weather and low tides for viewing anemones, crabs, urchins, sea stars and other sea life. Moore Creek flows down to the ocean through a large area of coastal scrub meadows and along riparian, freshwater marsh and dune habitats on its way to the sea, forming a wildflower-covered wetland in the sand.

Summer offers opportunities to sunbathe, swim, surf, sailboard and enjoy the beauty of this special park. The beach is an excellent vantage point for viewing the remaining natural bridge, as well as shore birds, migrating whales, seals and sea otters.

Since coastal weather conditions can vary quickly, layered clothing is advisable.



The last remaining natural bridge

PARK HISTORY

The Natural Bridges State Beach land area has changed ownership many times. The first people to inhabit this 65-acre area were small groups of central coast natives—later called Costanoan and eventually Ohlone—semi-nomadic people who hunted marine mammals and inland game, supplemented with fish, shellfish, edible roots, shoots, acorns, nuts and seeds. The coastal Ohlone also cultivated medicinal plants and herbs. Skilled craftspeople, they fashioned tools from native stones and shells, crafted prized shellfish jewelry and wove intricate baskets.

Spanish colonists later took over the natives' traditional lands. When the Spanish missionaries and soldiers brought the Costanoans into the mission system, the native population was nearly decimated

by European diseases to which they had no resistance. By 1834 this area was governed by newly independent Mexican authority, and Mexican citizens used the land for cattle grazing. After the Mexican-American War, California became one of the United States. In subsequent years the land supported a dairy farm, a hotel, a brussels sprouts farm, housing for workers at the nearby Antonelli Mill Pond, a South Seas movie set and an unfinished housing development. The State of California purchased the area in 1933 and facility construction began in 1954. Until the 1970s, open space surrounded the park. Over the years, development has increased ten-fold, making the park a diamond in the rough among its urban neighbors.



Visitors enjoy the eucalyptus grove.

THE MONARCH PRESERVE

In 1983 California State Parks established the monarch grove as a natural preserve so that future generations of monarchs—and people—may find sanctuary here. As the days begin to grow shorter following the fall equinox, monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) throughout the western United States begin a daring journey of up to 2,000 miles to seek sanctuary from winter's cold. The eucalyptus grove at Natural Bridges State Beach is one of many groves monarchs travel to along the California and northern Baja coastline. Here they find ideal conditions—a temperate climate, shelter from the wind, and sources of food



and water. During the cold fall and winter, monarchs cluster by the thousands in the eucalyptus, intertwining their legs among the branches to resemble a clump of leaves. Upon closer inspection, one can detect delicate gossamer wings—black and orange with a tan underside—and understand that these creatures are clustering for survival, and to avoid being dislodged from their companions by the wind and rain.

A wheelchair- and stroller-accessible boardwalk leads visitors into the heart of the grove with minimal impact on the habitat. When the air temperature rises above 55 degrees, the butterflies may burst from their clusters, floating through the trees and into the surrounding area in search of flower nectar and water. Near the end of winter, the monarchs mate and leave for inland locations in search of native milkweed plants, where the female butterflies will lay their eggs.



Clustering monarchs



Carefully examining life in the tide pools

TIDE POOLS—LIFE ON THE EDGE

Life is most often thought of as occurring on the land or in the water. In the tide pools, where plants and animals live within the nexus of land and sea, extreme conditions are the rule of daily life. Forces of gravity—created by the interplay of the earth, moon and sun—cause the tides. Twice each day the tide uncovers pools of all sizes teeming with sea stars, hermit crabs, urchins, kelp and many more species. Survival in this habitat requires adapting to rapid changes in temperature, water salinity, pounding surf and human activity. On your adventure to the tide pools, please leave all plants and animals attached to the rocks. Prying them off may harm or kill them.

NATURAL BRIDGES OR FALLEN ARCHES?

In the early 1900s, three arches carved by nature out of a mudstone cliff inspired the naming of Natural Bridges.

The arches were formed millions of years ago when water, silt and clay sediment combined with one-celled marine plants called diatoms. Heat and pressure solidified the mixture into a soft stone that formed three arches.

Wave action against the soft rock formed the bridges and also undercut them, eventually wearing them away and leaving only islands. The outermost arch fell in the early part of the 20th century and the inner arch broke during a storm in 1980. Only the middle arch remains, but it is being slowly eroded by the waves.

The health of the park's natural resources is at the mercy of the visitors who come to this special place. Historically, families drove horses and buggies onto the three arches to enjoy picnics. Today, the last remaining arch is a fragile and unique treasure. Do not climb on the arch. View it from a distance and appreciate its unique wonder. Keep the park a vital habitat for the many varieties of wildlife that make Natural Bridges their home—walk gently and remove nothing.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Natural Bridges State Beach is a haven for the outdoor enthusiast. Its small, sheltered pocket beach is ideal for relaxing and playing in the sand, enjoying the sun and wave watching. Frequent afternoon winds encourage shoreline kite flying and welcome sailboarders for an exhilarating sail on the bay. Large winter swells are popular with experienced surfers and boogie boarders. Trails offer hikers an opportunity to stroll through the Monarch Butterfly Nature

Preserve and the Moore Creek Estuary. Nature lovers can participate in a guided walk with a park naturalist. Runners and bicyclists frequent the park's main road. For those just wanting to enjoy a quiet family picnic, there are numerous picnic tables and barbecue stoves in the picnic area. The sun setting over the bay makes a spectacular ending to a wonderful day. Bring your family to Natural Bridges State Beach for a day of stimulating outdoor entertainment.



Giant green sea anemone

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Monarch Butterfly Tours

11 a.m. and 2 p.m. on weekends during fall and winter. Meet at the visitor center to learn about monarch butterflies and their miraculous life cycle.

Tide Pool Explorations

Offered throughout the year during times of low tide.

Guided Nature Walks

Offered year-round. Topics vary and may include wildflower and bird walks, wetland explorations and more.



Moore Creek

SPECIAL EVENTS

Welcome Back Monarchs Day

From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the second Sunday in October, welcome the monarch butterflies back to Natural Bridges with music, food, games, guided walks and the annual appearance of Monarch Man and Monarch Woman.

The Migration Festival

From 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on the second Saturday in February, learn about the journeys of the many animals that migrate to and through Natural Bridges and the surrounding area. Educational booths, guided walks, entertainment, games and more make for a day of fun and discovery.

In addition to these activities, organized groups of ten or more may schedule guided walks on weekends by calling (831) 423-4609. School group walks are offered on weekdays by appointment.

Docent Training Classes

Volunteer docents conduct guided walks, host the visitor center and assist with special events. Contact the visitor center to apply for the next docent training class.



Dune plants



Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks

These dedicated volunteers provide a vital link between Natural Bridges and the community by funding school and visitor programs, special events and interpretive exhibits and publications. To find out more or to become a member, visit the Friends web site at www.thatsmypark.org or call (831) 429-1840.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

Wilder Ranch State Park

2 miles north of the Santa Cruz city limits
(831) 423-9703/426-0505

Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park

5 miles north of Santa Cruz on Highway 9
(831) 335-4598

Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park

Downtown Santa Cruz on School Street
(831) 425-5849

The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park

4 miles north of Aptos on Aptos Creek Rd.
(831) 763-7062

Twin Lakes State Beach

At the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor
(831) 427-4868

Lighthouse Field State Beach

(831) 429-2850

New Brighton State Beach

4 miles south of Santa Cruz on Highway 1
(831) 464-6329

Seacliff State Beach

5 1/2 miles south of Santa Cruz on Highway 1
(831) 685-6500

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Boardwalk into the eucalyptus groves, with a level lower portion and numerous rest stops along the way
- Two picnic tables, one adjacent to accessible parking
- Visitor center, including restrooms, interactive and interpretive displays and videos (some with large print formats and scripts available)
- Beach viewing platform adjacent to the overflow parking lot and entrance station

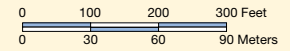
PLEASE REMEMBER

- Natural Bridges State Beach is open year round from 8 a.m. to sunset.
- Surf Safety—Enter tide pools only during periods of low tide. Often there is no lifeguard on duty and the surf can be unpredictable. Hazardous rip currents and large waves can appear out of nowhere and sweep unsuspecting visitors out to sea. The beach and tide pools are known for their incredible beauty, but they can also be extremely dangerous. Do not run on the wet rocks of the intertidal area, and never turn your back to the waves. Check with the lifeguard or at the entrance station or visitor center before entering the ocean and the tide pool areas.
- Collecting—Do not disturb the butterfly clusters in any way. The park's natural wonders are protected by law. Leave them in place for everyone to enjoy.
- Stay on designated trails to protect plants, to prevent erosion and to avoid poison oak and stinging nettles.
- Dogs are allowed on a six-foot leash in the parking lots and picnic areas only. Dogs are not allowed on the beach and trails.
- Bicycles are permitted only on paved roads.
- Fires and glass containers are not allowed on the beach.
- Alcoholic beverages are not allowed in the park, unless a special event permit has previously been obtained through the California State Parks sector office at (831) 335-3455. Permit applications must be made at least 30 days before the event date.
- Do not smoke, ride bikes, roller skate, skateboard or bring dogs into the grove.
- Speak quietly while you enjoy this natural wonder.














www.santacruzstateparks.org

Natural Bridges State Beach



Legend

-  Paved road
-  Unpaved road
-  Trail
-  Boardwalk/Ramp
-  Beach Area
-  Accessible Feature
-  Showers
-  Parking
-  Picnic Area
-  Restrooms
-  Viewpoint



to Santa Cruz Boardwalk →

Natural Bridge
(Please stay off)