



Foundation Document Overview

Pinnacles National Park

California



Contact Information

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Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance. The following fundamental resources and values have been identified for Pinnacles National Park:

- Landforms and Geologic Faults Reflecting Past and Present Tectonic Forces
- Scenic Views and Wild Character
- Talus Caves
- Opportunities for Research and Study
- Native Species and Ecological Processes

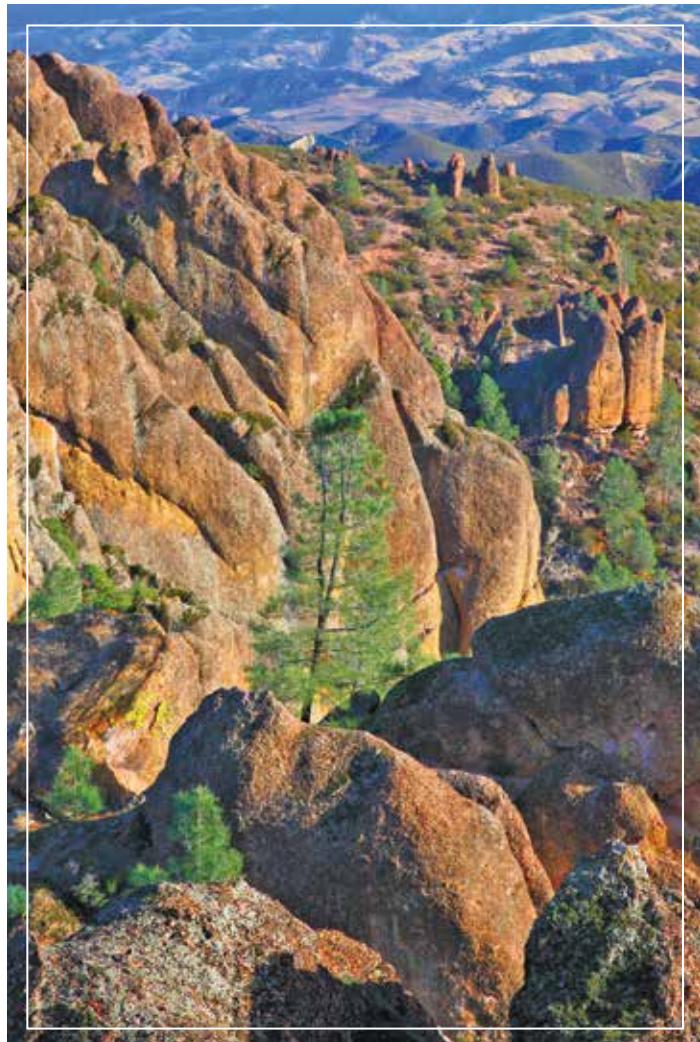


Photo by Gavin Emmons 2011

Interpretive Themes

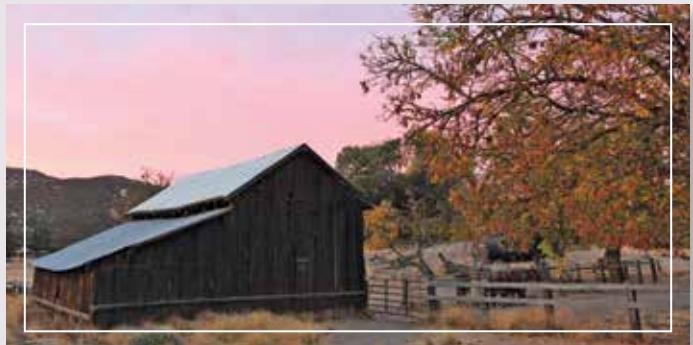


Photo by Paul G. Johnson

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Over millions of years, the power of volcanism, erosion, and plate tectonics created and transformed the Pinnacles Volcanic Field into the dramatic canyons, monoliths, and rock spires seen today. The offset of the Pinnacles Volcanics from the identical Neenach Volcanics 200 miles to the south provides key evidence for the theory of plate tectonics.
- The enclosed dark spaces of Pinnacles' rare and extensive assemblage of talus caves, formed by massive rocks falling into narrow canyons, offer shelter, create habitat for bats and other specialized cave species, inspire legends, and encourage exploration and adventure.
- Pinnacles' remote pristine central California wilderness beckons primitive recreation, solitude, adventure, challenge, and connections to the natural elements.
- Extreme diversity of moisture, temperature, and soil composition at Pinnacles support a remarkable complexity of biotic communities in unusual proximity; a relatively undisturbed ecosystem that allows natural processes to continue, providing sanctuary for present and future life.
- The Pinnacles landscape and resources reflect influences of a succession of people with diverse worldviews, cultures, and technologies.

Cover photo by Gavin Emmons 2011

Purpose

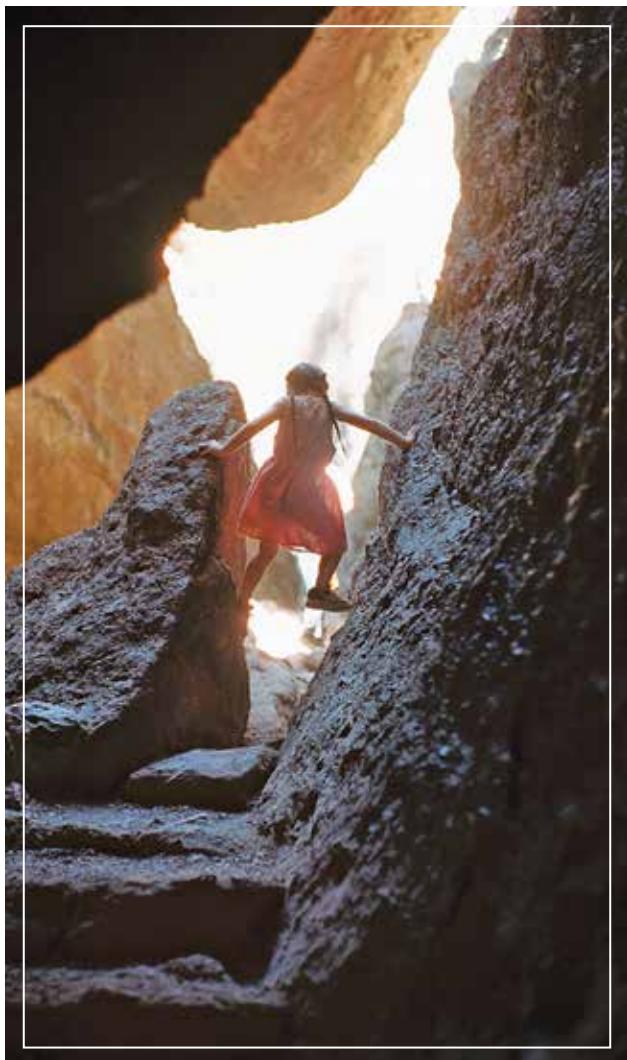


Photo by Lenore Thierry

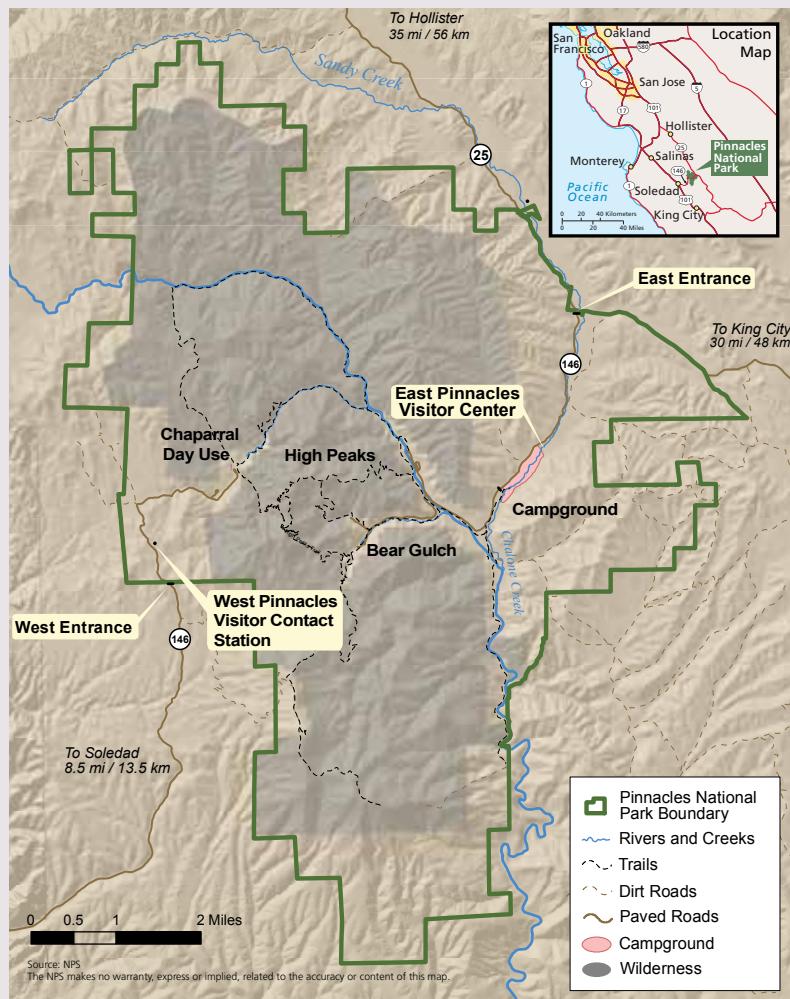
The purpose of PINNACLES NATIONAL PARK is to protect the Pinnacles Volcanic Formation, talus caves, associated lands, and ecosystems for their scientific, educational, and cultural values, by caring for their natural processes and wild character while providing opportunities for public enjoyment and understanding of these resources.

Significance

Significance statements express why Pinnacles National Park resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

1. Pinnacles National Park contains a remnant of an ancient volcanic field that was split and offset approximately 200 miles by the movement of two continental plates and provided key evidence for the theory of plate tectonics.
2. Pinnacles National Park contains the most extensive assemblage of accessible, rare talus caves within the national park system and cares for the natural processes and ecosystems within.
3. The Hain Wilderness protects the natural character of central California's native ecosystems and provides opportunities to experience wilderness in a region of expanding urban development.
4. Intact ecological processes and communities of Pinnacles National Park, including oak savanna, rocky cliffs, and riparian and chaparral ecosystems, provide a refuge for the diverse native flora and fauna within the Gabilan ecoregion.
5. The American Indian archeological and ethnographically significant resources of Pinnacles National Park are preserved within their ecological context and provide opportunities to study and continue traditional practices and resource management.
6. Historic properties associated with early pastoral, resource extraction, and agricultural economies of the region are preserved within their rural context and provide opportunities for understanding aspects of life and land use practices from the early period of American settlement in California.
7. The history of Pinnacles National Park includes significant grassroots conservation efforts by local residents and the work of federal unemployment relief programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps.
8. Pinnacles National Park plays a key role as a reintroduction site for the California condor, fostering public understanding and scientific research with the goal to one day remove this species from the federal Endangered Species List for the benefit of future generations.

Description



Pinnacles was established as a national monument in 1908 to preserve and protect the remnants of ancient volcanic processes that formed a portion of the Gabilan Mountain Range. In 2013, Pinnacles was redesignated as a national park.

Pinnacles' proximity to the San Andreas Fault along the boundary of the Pacific Plate and the North American Plate provides a lesson in plate tectonics. The Pinnacles Rocks are part of the Neenach Volcanic Field that was active 23 million years ago, 195 miles southeast. The extensive San Andreas Fault split the field as the Pacific Plate crept north, carrying the volcanics now seen at Pinnacles.

Another geologic attraction includes the talus caves. Deep, narrow canyons were transformed into caves when huge boulders toppled from above and wedged in the canyons before reaching the ground. These boulders became the ceilings of the talus caves that host several kinds of bats and cave-dependents species.

Comprising 80% of the park's vegetation, the chaparral ecosystem is made up of mixed shrub species quilted together over the land. Interspersed on the landscape are woodland,

riparian, grassland, and rock and scree habitats. This intricate mix of habitats, topography and microclimates in turn support a rich fauna – especially of birds, reptiles, and bees. These species of the central California coastal mountains also thrive because of its long-term protected status and the surrounding private rangelands compatible with sustaining a diversity of wildlife. In addition, the vast open spaces allow Pinnacles to host one of five reintroduction sites for the endangered California condor. In the spring, wildflowers decorate the land and bird populations expand with migrants. Solitude, dark night skies, and deep quiet are the norm. These varied landscapes, wildlife and wildflower viewing, and sense of solitude attract rock climbers, hikers, and picnickers who in turn contribute to the local economy.

At the time of European colonization in the 18th century, Pinnacles was occupied by the Chalon and possibly Mutsun subgroups of the Ohlone people. The Spanish mission system had a dramatic impact on American Indians in the region. A combination of diseases and conditions under the Spanish missionaries decimated indigenous populations and their cultures. By the time European American settlers arrived during the middle of the 19th century, most native lifeways associated with the area had been lost. Between 1810, when the last of the Chalon are believed to have disappeared from the area, and 1865, when European American settlers arrived, this landscape was largely abandoned to wilderness, probably for the first time in millennia.

Schuyler Hain, a local homesteader, became known as the “Father of Pinnacles,” leading tours up through Bear Valley and into the caves. Hain spoke to groups and wrote articles urging preservation of the area. His efforts proved fruitful when President Theodore Roosevelt established the monument in 1908.

From 1933 to 1942, the Civilian Conservation Corps constructed many long-lasting infrastructure projects including creating or improving trail systems such as the dramatic Steep and Narrow trail that winds through the High Peaks. They constructed the dam that forms the Bear Gulch Reservoir and modified the trail into the caves, adding concrete steps and guard rails.

During the 1960s, the Mission 66 initiative enabled development of visitor facilities on the west side. In 1975, approximately 13,000 acres of the park were designated as wilderness. In 2002, 2,700 additional acres of wilderness were designated.

Several boundary expansions increased the park's size from its original 2,080 acres to 27,000 acres today. The Pinnacles Ranch and Bear Valley School lands added significant natural and cultural resources that have deep meanings to native peoples and descendants of homesteading families.