

# Pinnacles

National Monument  
California  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

## Official Map and Guide



Cover photo by Frank S. Balthis  
Small inset photos left and center by Chuck Richards

If you climb at Pinnacles, make sure that you, like the climbers

in the cover pictures, are properly equipped. After your climb be sure

that all the climbing apparatus is removed from the rocks.

The difference is immediately apparent. You know at once why this park is called Pinnacles. Here you face spires and crags that bear no resemblance to the surrounding smooth, round hills. Abruptly, the pinnacle rock formations dominate the scene.

These rocks are the remains of an ancient volcano. Or rather they are part of the remains, for the rest of this volcano lies 195 miles to the southeast. Sound intriguing? It is all part of the story of the San Andreas Rift Zone, which runs just east of the park, and the geological forces that have shaped the face of the landscape in this part of Califor-

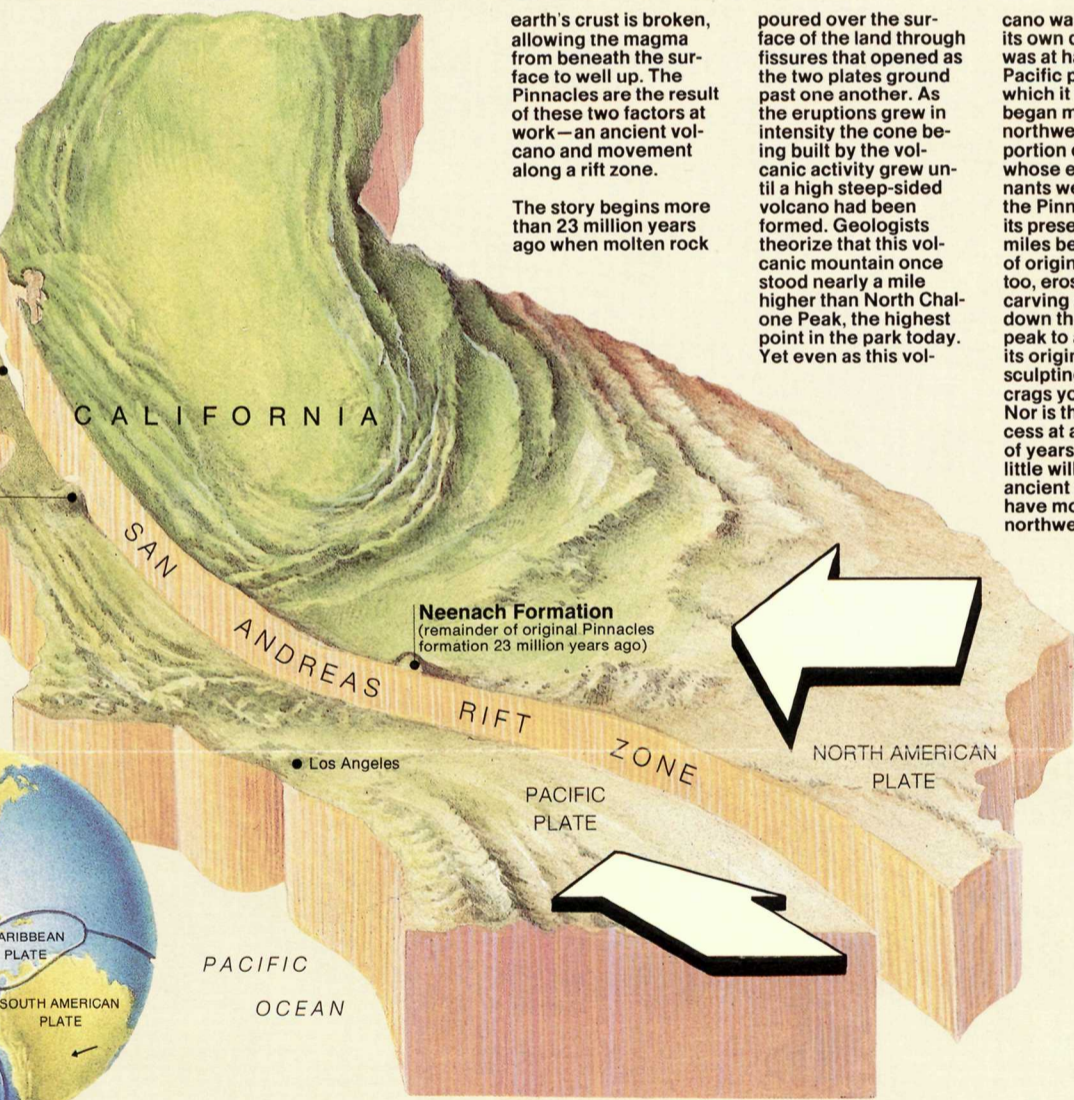
nia for millions of years. It is the story of heat, frost, water, and wind wearing at the rock.

Pinnacles is also the story of the chaparral, of the plants and animals that make up this community. The chaparral and the distinctive geological features are the reasons why Pinnacles was set aside as a national monument by President Theodore Roosevelt on January 16, 1908. The initial development was undertaken by the Civilian Conservation Corps and took place from 1933 through 1942. Many examples of the Corps' work can be found throughout the park today.

Pinnacles is also a place for rejuvenation and enjoyment. People come to hike the many trails that lace the park, climb the sheer rock walls, explore the caves, picnic, and camp. Pinnacles can be enjoyed at any time and at any season, but a favorite time for many is spring when the cool rains of winter turn the trees and shrubs a lush green and a multitude of colorful wildflowers covers the hills. The hot, dry summer turns the green hills to a golden brown. Fall brings quiet and the lowering light of late afternoon. Visit for a day or for as long as you wish to discover Pinnacles' many moods and faces.

## A Land in Transition

The San Andreas Rift Zone, a series of faults, lies just east of the park. It was created when the Pacific plate collided with and wrenched off a portion of the North American Plate (see diagram at right). Geologists know that rift zones are likely places for volcanoes to occur, for here the



earth's crust is broken, allowing the magma from beneath the surface to well up. The Pinnacles are the result of these two factors at work—an ancient volcano and movement along a rift zone.

The story begins more than 23 million years ago when molten rock

poured over the surface of the land through fissures that opened as the two plates ground past one another. As the eruptions grew in intensity the cone being built by the volcanic activity grew until a high steep-sided volcano had been formed. Geologists theorize that this volcanic mountain once stood nearly a mile higher than North Chalone Peak, the highest point in the park today. Yet even as this vol-

cano was being formed, its own destruction was at hand, for the Pacific plate upon which it was located began moving off to the northwest. In time the portion of the volcano whose eroded remnants we now know as the Pinnacles reached its present location, 195 miles beyond its point of origin. All the while, too, erosion was at work carving and breaking down the once mighty peak to about a third of its original height, sculpting the spires and crags you see today. Nor is the geologic process at an end. Millions of years from now what little will be left of this ancient volcano will have moved off to the northwest.

### Plate Tectonics

Geologists have for many years tried to explain why it looks like the eastern coast of South America would neatly fit into the coast of West Africa and why

rocks on different continents were the same. Recently the theory of plate tectonics, sometimes called continental drift, has emerged. Basically it says that

the Earth's skin is not one single covering as we might expect but is made up of a series of plates (diagram above left). Imagine for a minute that the Earth is

like a basketball: the grooves on the ball are like the junctions of the plates. Both Earth and basketball appear to be composed of a single covering. But unlike the

basketball, which is one continuous piece, the lighter plates of the Earth's surface float over the heavier interior. Pressures from the interior sometimes force

one plate to bump into, pull away from, or move alongside another. Scientists believe that this is what has caused the Pinnacles to make its northward journey.

Illustration by Robert Hynes

## Plant and Animal Communities

At first glance the slopes of Pinnacles appear covered with dense, uniform brush. A closer look reveals a more complex association of plant communities. Along the watercourses live-oaks, buckeyes, and sycamores grow. Blue oak woodlands and grasslands occur on the deepest soils. Elsewhere, expanses of

olive green chamise, buckbrush, and manzanita are broken here and there by patches of low California buckwheat. This is the chaparral. And in the continuation and rejuvenation of this plant community, fire is an important factor. When the dense shrub cover burns, light, nutrients, and water begin working on all the seeds

that have laid buried. For some seeds the hard outer protective coats are cracked by the heat and begin germinating even before the soil has completely cooled. Some plants resprout from roots that can survive the heat of fire and appear amid a carpet of wildflowers. As the brush grows it shades out the smaller plants,

so that fewer appear each year, but seeds remain dormant in the soil, awaiting the next fire. As these plants have adapted to survive fire, so have they developed ways to survive the long summer drought in these steep, coarse, erodible soils that do not hold water. Plants take advantage of the winter rains, grow rapidly in the

spring months, and then lie dormant during the hottest part of the year. Changes in the plant community bring corresponding changes to the animal and bird populations. New growth provides forage for blacktail deer. Rabbits and rodents consume seeds and herbs. Gray fox, bobcats, mountain lions, owls, hawks,

snakes, and other predators prey on the smaller animals and birds drawn to the new food supply. Animal populations also run in cycles. When any species becomes too plentiful for its food supply, a period of readjustment sets in, the numbers decline, and the cycle begins again.

California poppy



Meadow in bloom



Owl's clover



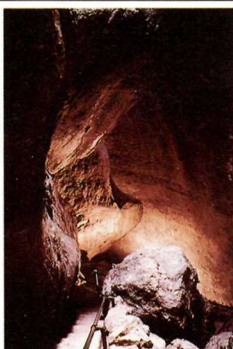
Fire in the chaparral



# Exploring Pinnacles



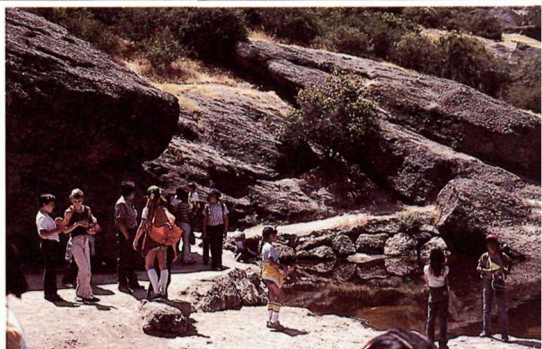
Picnickers listen to a ranger.



Steps lead down into a cave.



Hikers can enjoy the view.



Students hike near the reservoir.

The east side of the park is 5 miles off Calif. 25. The west side can be reached from Soledad off U.S. 101. There is NO road connection between the east and west sides.

## HIKING TRAILS

**HIGH PEAKS.** Strenuous; steep trail with excellent views; begins at visitor center, ends at Chalone Creek; 5 miles.

**CONDOR GULCH.** Strenuous; begins at visitor center; good views of pinnacles; connects with High Peaks; 1.7 miles.

**MOSES SPRING/BEAR GULCH CAVES.** Moderate; leads from visitor center to reservoir passing over caves or through caves; self-guiding; 1 mile.

**CHALONE PEAK.** Strenuous; long climb from reservoir to the highest point in the park; vistas from peak; for hardy climbers; 3.3 miles.

**BEAR GULCH.** Moderate; access between visitor center and Chalone Creek; pleasant shaded walk along canyon bottom; self-guiding; 1.2 miles.

**BENCH TRAIL.** Easy; access to park facilities from Pinnacles Campground, Inc., via Chalone Creek; 1.3 miles.

**OLD PINNACLES.** Easy; access between Chalone Creek and Balconies Cliffs along

Canyon bottom; easy route across park via Balconies trail; 2.3 miles.

**BALCONIES TRAIL.** Moderate; access between Chaparral Campground and Balconies cliffs and caves; good overall examples of park features; self-guiding; 1.4 miles.

**JUNIPER CANYON.** Strenuous; access from Chaparral ranger station to High Peaks via Tunnel Trail to Scout Peak or Hawkins Peak; excellent views; 1.8 miles.

**TUNNEL TRAIL.** Moderate; 1.2 miles. With High Peaks segment creates a 1.9-mile loop through the peaks; excellent views.

**NORTH WILDERNESS.** Very strenuous; connects Chaparral Campground with North Fork of Chalone Creek; unmaintained; for experienced hikers only; 7.6 miles.

## Further Information

For more details write: Superintendent, Pinnacles National Monument, Paicines, CA 95043.

## INFORMATION AND SAFETY

Keep in mind that hazards exist here that you may not find elsewhere. □ Stay on established trails. Shortcutting causes severe erosion, and slips or falls can result from poor footing. Wear stout shoes with non-slip

soles. □ Caves have low ceilings and very slippery rocks. Use flashlights. Caves can be dangerous when flooded. Check for and obey all closures. □ Carry one quart of water per person when hiking. □ Dogs are not permitted on the trails. In picnic areas and parking lots, dogs must be on a leash. □ Technical rock climbing is only for the trained and properly equipped. □ Be alert for poison oak. □ Obey posted speed limits and watch for people and wildlife on the roads. □ Hunting is prohibited. □ Do not feed or harm wildlife and stay a safe distance away. Even rattlesnakes are harmless when given room and left alone. □ The Bear Gulch Visitor Center, picnic area, restrooms, the Chalone picnic area, the Chaparral ranger station, restrooms, and campground are all accessible for the handicapped. Check at the visitor center for more accessibility information.

## PROTECTING THE PARKLAND

Occasionally some park areas are closed for rehabilitation and erosion control. An area is closed when either of these symbols, which show the climbing areas and trails, has a slash through it. Please respect these signs.

