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## Forest Bathing in California

by A GUEST WRITER on [2016/05/12](#)  
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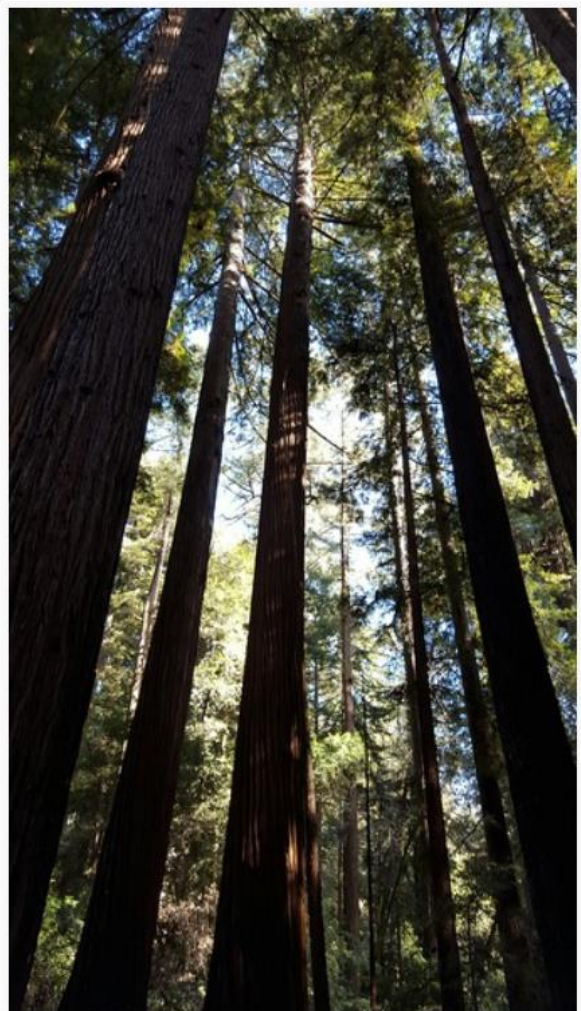
We've often talked about the importance of **staying healthy on the road** by eating right and maintaining some sort of exercise routine. Today's guest contributor, Jacqueline Louie, is taking it one step further by telling us how a visit to California's beautiful parks can offer a peaceful experience that's just as beneficial to our mental and physical well-being.

'Forest bathing' is a popular practice in Japan that's believed to benefit people's overall well-being. Indeed, [research](#) has shown that spending time in nature lowers stress and enhances the immune system. Of course, there are plenty of national parks in the US to lose yourself in gorgeous landscape. For anyone visiting [California](#) soon, here are a few great spots that can add an injection of nature and the peace into your travels.

### Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park

It's easy to get up close with the redwoods at [Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park](#), which covers more than 4,600 acres of ancient forest and open land in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park is "just a magical place to experience," says Sandra Rogoza, who made a recent stop at the park with me and my sister, Siri, en route to Santa Cruz. "The air is so fresh. It's very therapeutic and soothing. It's so tranquil, and the majesty of the trees is awe-



Like giants in the sky. (Photo by Sandra Rogoza)

inspiring. Even in the interpretive center, counting the number of rings and how old those trees are, is amazing.”

Sandra also speaks highly of the park’s Nature Center, with its helpful, friendly staff, and detailed interpretive information, imagery and interactive displays on the park’s history, flora and fauna.

A variety of trails will take you into the woods. One of the easiest is the flat and shaded Redwood Loop Interpretive Trail. Starting off from the Nature Center, you can stroll the entire trail in a leisurely hour to hour-and-a-half; and stop for a picnic next to an enormous hollowed out tree.

“Several species of insects, animals and plants thrive here that aren’t found anywhere else in the world,” says Alan Roberts, a San Francisco resident who has spent several days exploring Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park.

“I would recommend that you take three days or so to really ‘do’ Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park. It truly is like no other place I’ve been.”

### **Where to stay**

If you’re into camping, Alan recommends the campground, which is located not far from the Nature Center. “You can tent camp or RV camp, although there are length limits for RVs. There is running water, and restrooms are located throughout the campground. At some sites, located in open areas, the stargazing is as good as it can possibly get.”

Because Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park is situated in the Santa Cruz Mountains, temperatures can get very warm during the day, and very cold at night. “Bring warm and cold weather clothing: you’ll need it,” Alan says.

### **Castle Rock State Park**

An approximately 45-minute drive from Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, [Castle Rock State Park](#) is known as the Gateway to the Santa Cruz Mountains. Home to coast redwood, Douglas fir and madrone forest, Castle Rock encompasses canyons, creeks and sculpted sandstone outcroppings and boulders, offering 32 miles of hiking and horseback riding trails, and all kinds of interesting opportunities for rock climbing and bouldering.

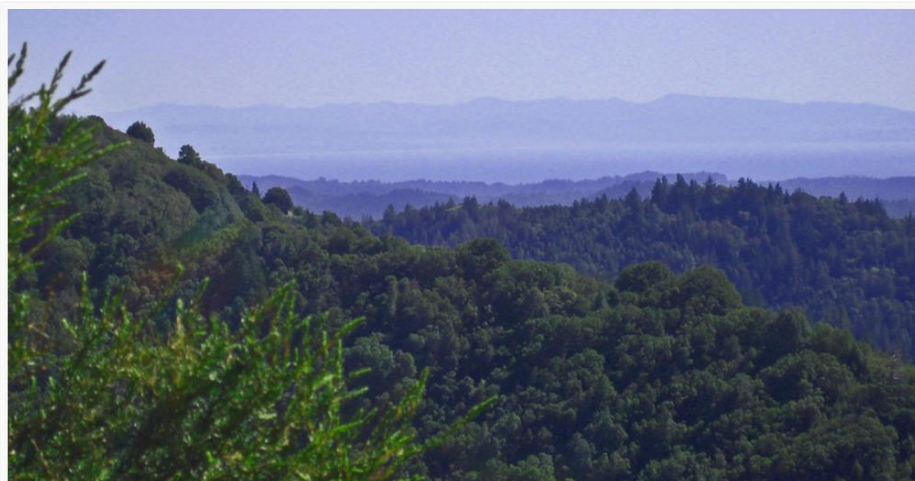


Happily exploring Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park.



Looking out over Castle Rock. (Photo by Rose Nelson)

“You see all this interesting geology, beautiful plants and amazing views,” says Rose Nelson, state park interpreter for Castle Rock and Portollo Redwood State Parks. “You get phenomenal views. On some days, you can see out to Big Sur.”



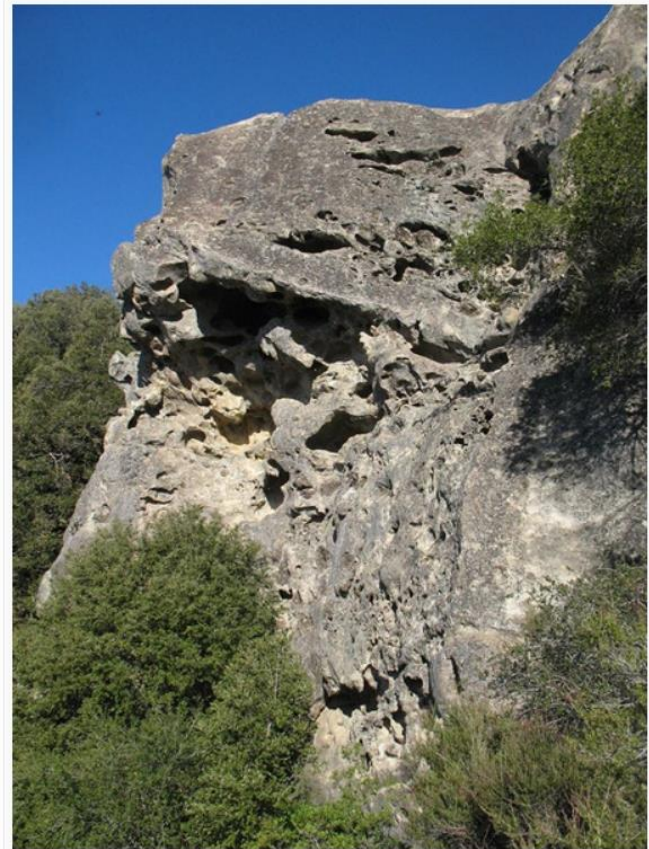
Beautiful green views. (Photo by John Abe)

Whether you’re looking for something strenuous – like the 29-mile Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail, which starts out in Castle Rock, and continues through Big Basin Redwoods State Park before reaching the Pacific Ocean – or a leisurely stroll, Castle Rock is a special place for hikers, backpackers and rock climbers alike.

## Mount Burdell, Marin County

In springtime, Mount Burdell boasts one of the best wildflower blooms in Marin County. “It almost comes in waves – it changes the whole mountain with the colors,” says Marin County Parks open space park ranger, Michael Warner.

An open space preserve in Marin County with oak woodlands and savanna grasslands, Mount Burdell rises nearly 1,560 feet from Novato Valley and offers sweeping views of the San Francisco Bay area. “It’s a pretty pristine area. It’s probably how most of Northern California would have looked 200 years ago,” Michael says.



Well-known climbing spot, Goat Rock. (Photo by Doug Brown)

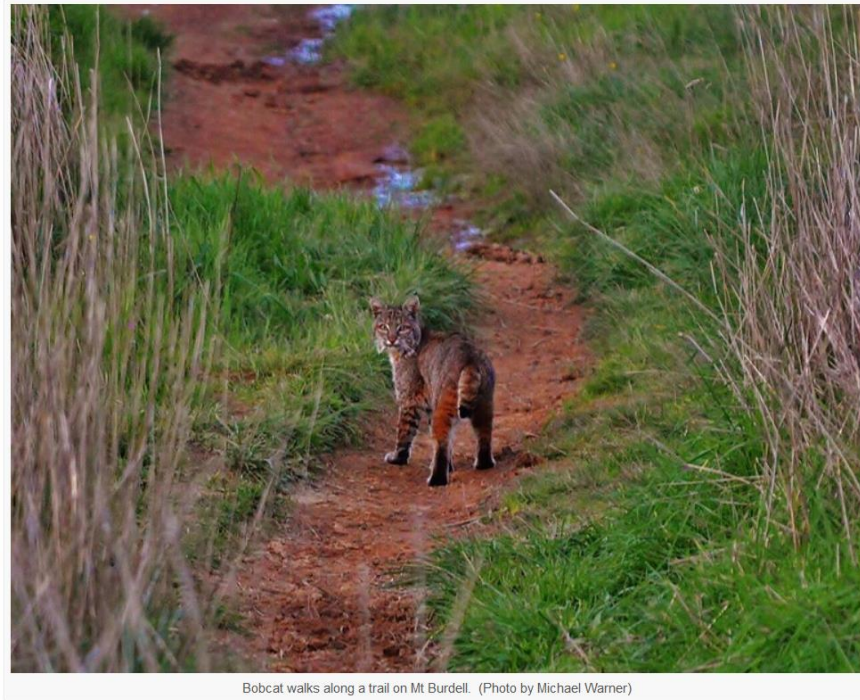


Sunset on Mt Burdell near San Carlos Fire Road. (Photo by Michael Warner)

Mount Burdell has lots of different loop options to explore. Cycling is allowed on the main road, and horsebackriding is allowed on roads and trails. Dogs must be kept on a leash (with the exception of the maintained fire road, where off leash is permitted).

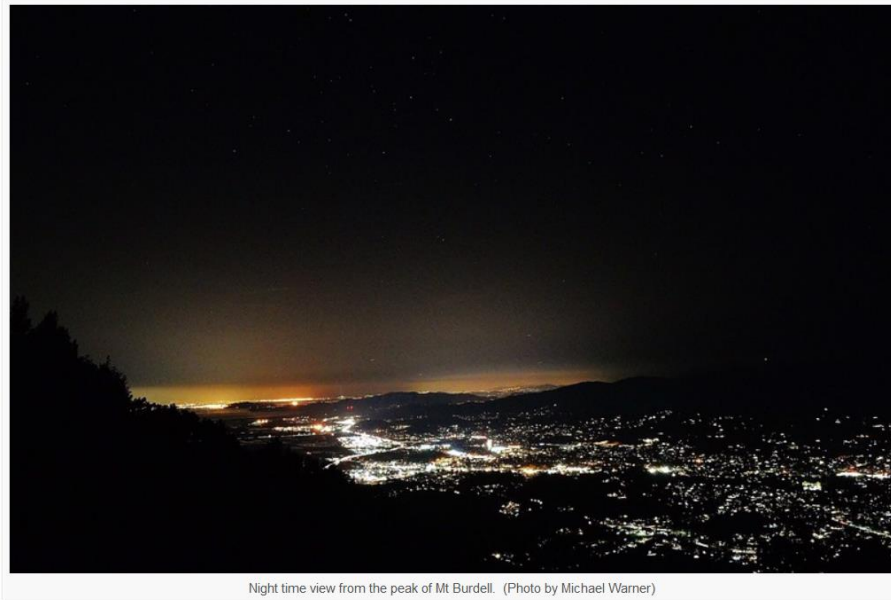
Siri describes Mount Burdell as “a great place for a variety of terrain, with lots of grassland and some forest, and great views of Novato. There are walks that are mostly flat, or walks that have elevation gain. Ranchers graze some cows there, but if you don’t bother them, they don’t bother you. And there are tons of birds. They like the oaks and buckeyes. ”

Birds that call Mount Burdell home include woodpeckers, hawks, kites and owls. Other critters that live here include badgers and bobcats.



Bobcat walks along a trail on Mt Burdell. (Photo by Michael Warner)

If you’re planning to visit during the summer, “it’s important to get out early in the morning, because Mount Burdell is south facing, and it gets really hot, really early,” Michael says.



Night time view from the peak of Mt Burdell. (Photo by Michael Warner)

Mount Burdell is open 24 hours, which means if you're so inclined you can go for a nighttime stroll, or come out to view the stars. Marin County Parks is offering astronomy nights: in early May (Saturday May 7), to view the Eta Aquarids meteor shower; as well as in August, to view the Perseid meteor shower. For more information on these and other events, please visit [their website](#).



### About Jacqueline Louie

Jacqueline Louie, a freelance writer based in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, has a keen interest in outdoor adventure travel, other cultures, and anything to do with music and the arts.