

Castle Crag Wilderness Area

Mt. Shasta & McCloud Ranger Stations - Shasta-Trinity National Forest



The 1964 Wilderness Act established a National Wilderness Preservation System intended to preserve unique wild and scenic areas of America's public lands. The Act defined wilderness as "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." Preserving the wilderness quality of these unique lands while accommodating increasing recreation use is a tremendous challenge for National Forest Managers. The USDA Forest Service has, available to the public, several Recreation Opportunity Guides which address the topics of Wilderness Ethics, safeguarding yourself against Giardia, and how to deal with bears, rattlesnakes and poison oak. If you plan on visiting the wilderness, please pick up copies of these publications and make yourself familiar with them.

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that most people come to the wilderness to escape other people. Therefore, it is important to observe a basic tenet of the wilderness code of ethics... and that is to respect other visitors rights to peace and quiet and in so much as possible, an unobstructed view.

Castle Crag Wilderness

The Castle Crag Wilderness was established in 1984 with the passage of the California Wilderness Act. This 10,500 acre addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System, along with lands within Castle Crag State Park, contains towering granite spires, steep sided canyons, and a few alpine lakes. Most of the area is covered by high brushfields and rocky outcrops with a few wet meadows in the creek headwaters. Mixed conifer forests can be found on the north, east and west facing slopes.

Geology

Castle Crag is actually a part of the vast Klamath Mountains Geological Province that includes much of northwestern California and Southwestern Oregon. Rocks within the province consist predominantly of volcanic and sedimentary types. However, large granitic bodies called plutons intruded into many parts of the province during the Jurassic around 65 million years ago. Castle Crag is one of these plutons.

As is common throughout the Klamath Mountains, the Castle Crag area underwent several periods of glaciation. Much of the area was under ice as little as 13,000 years

ago. As a result, several lakes can be found in and around the western section of the Castle Crag Wilderness. Among them are Castle Lake, Gray Rock Lake, Timber Lake and Little Castle Lake.

History

For thousands of years, Wintu Indians living around the base of Castle Crag regarded this formation with awe and superstition, rarely if ever venturing up into its heights. Early European fur traders and explorers who camped at the mineral springs at its base along what was then known as the Destruction River (Sacramento River) knew it as the Devil's Castle. During the Gold Rush relations between the miners and Wintu Indians strained to the breaking point resulting in what was called the 1855 Battle of Castle Crag. The primary location of this battle was at the very northwest end of the Crag between what is now known as Battle Rock and Castle Lake.

It was the completion of the Stage Road and Southern Pacific Railroad though that really opened up this country. Mining and lumbering flourished and tourists began to flock to the resorts that sprang up around the highly mineralized springs. Chromium mines operated in one part of the Crag until the 1950s. The resorts were popular destination points until the advent of the automobile. Little remains of the mining and resort business and most of the mines have been swallowed up by the reemerging wilderness. A few historic buildings dating from the resort era can still be found in the Castella area. In 1933, concerned citizens who wanted to see Castle Crag preserved, succeeded in acquiring much of the land that became Castle Crag State Park. Castle Crag Wilderness was set aside in 1984 and is administered by the US Forest Service.

Plants and Animals

Trees of the area range from mostly live oak in the lower elevations to red fir, Jeffrey pine and weeping spruce (also known as Brewer spruce) near the Crag summit. Mixed conifer forests include western yew, Port Orford cedar, incense cedar, sugar pine, ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, white fir and lodgepole pine. Broadleaf trees in the area include such species as bigleaf maple, vine maple, black oak and Pacific dogwood. Poison oak is common at the lower elevations.

Shrubs include western azalea, ledum and tanoak in the moist areas. Dry slopes are dominated by greenleaf manzanita, pinemat manzanita, wedge leaf ceanothus, whitethorn and snowbrush.

The area contains over 300 varieties of herbaceous wildflowers. Indian rhubarb (elephant ears), leopard lily, cobra plants and yellow monkey flower can be found in the moist areas. Cycladenia, yarrow, aster and eriogonum are found on drier sites. The Castle Crag harebell (*Campanula shetleri*) is a flower found only in the Crag.

Birds of the Castle Crag area include scrub jays, Stellar jays, ravens, warblers and other common woodland species such as sparrows, towhees, nuthatches and wrens. Hawks, golden eagles and peregrine falcons are also known to inhabit the area.

Reptiles common to the area are western fence lizards and the western rattlesnake. Rattlesnakes in the area are not nearly as aggressive as their more southern cousins but hikers should still keep a wary eye out for them as they hike trails in the Crag.

Mammals include the common ground squirrel, gray squirrel, coyote, black tail deer, bobcat, mountain lion and black bear. Pine martins and fishers also inhabit the area but are seldom seen.

Hiking in the Crag

There are 27.8 miles of developed and maintained trails within the Castle Crag Wilderness, accessed by 9 designated trailheads. The Castle Dome Trail, Indian Springs Trail, Root Creek Trail and Bob's Hat Trail are accessed from within Castle Crag State Park. The Little Castle Lake and Mt. Bradley Trails are reached from Castle Lake. The Gray Rock Lake Trail is reached by an unmaintained natural surface road that branches from Forest Road 26 along the South Fork of the Sacramento River.

The Pacific Crest Trail courses for 19 miles through the Crag and offers spectacular views of the surrounding country. The PCT can be accessed from the Soapstone Trail and the Gumboot Saddle Trailhead, both of which are reached from Forest Road 26. The PCT is also accessible from the Dog Trail off of Whalen Road and from the Soda Creek exit on Interstate 5.

There is no trail through the spires of the Crag and although the rock formations look tempting to rock climbers and other recreationists, safety factors would limit this activity to only a few areas. Most of the Crag formation exhibits a geologic process called exfoliation which is a peeling off and crumbling of the surface of the ancient granitic rock. Exfoliation leaves very unstable surfaces which are unsafe for climbers.

A few cautions

Water

Good drinking water can be scarce in the Crag during the summer months. Plan ahead, especially when hiking

during periods of warm weather and carry sufficient water for your needs. If you need to refill your containers, pump your water using a purifier that will filter out the microscopic organism giardia (*Giardia lamblia*). The cystic form of giardia may be found in mountain streams and lakes and may be contracted from unfiltered or untreated drinking water. The Forest Service offers a Recreation Opportunity Guide describing giardia in detail and methods for dealing with it.

Poison Oak

If there was ever an irritating plant, this is it! It normally appears as a shrub or vine growing at elevations below 5000'. The leaflets grow in groups of three and appear bright green and waxy in spring and early summer. By late summer and fall the leaflets have usually turned a dull yellow or red. The Forest Service offers a Recreation Opportunity Guide that describes Poison Oak and methods for dealing with it.

Rattlesnakes

They can appear anytime and anywhere. Use caution when hiking in the Crag area and keep an eye out for them. The variety that lives in the Crag is not particularly aggressive but will strike if they feel threatened. The Forest Service offers a Recreation Opportunity Guide that describes the Western Rattlesnake and how to deal with it.

Ticks

Ticks are common on warmer brush covered slopes during winter and early spring. Commonly attaching themselves to passing hikers, their bite can result in a painful sore and possible infection with Lyme's disease. Keep in mind that it is much easier to remove a tick before it embeds its head under the skin than after. Check yourself frequently and investigate any tickling sensation on the skin.

Black Bears

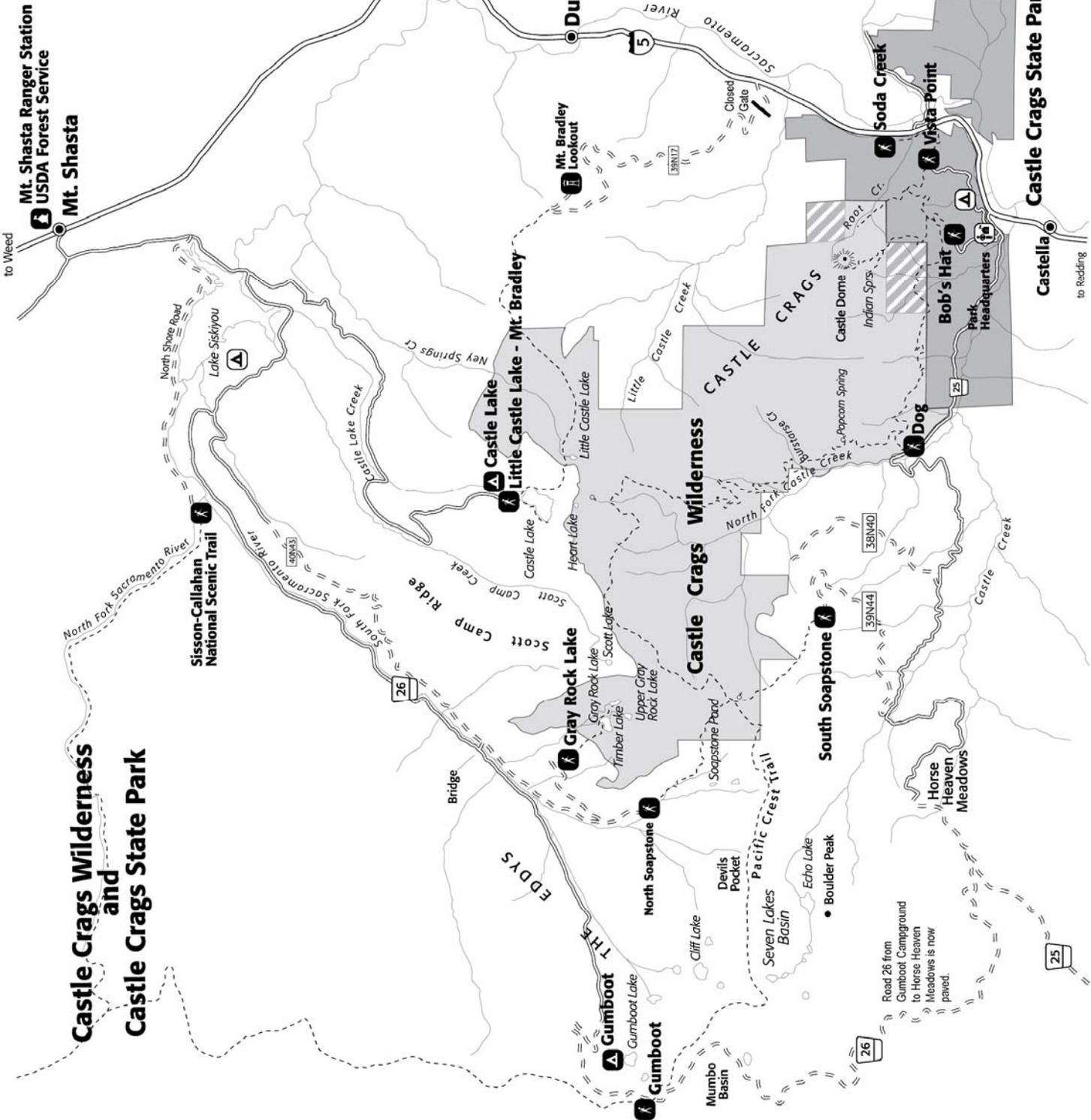
Contrary to their name, most black bears in the area are brown, cinnamon or even blonde in color. They are common throughout the Crag and surrounding country and can be a real problem. If you hike or camp around this area there are some specific considerations that you should give to bears. These considerations are outlined in a Recreation Opportunity Guide offered by the Forest Service.

Castle Crag State Park

A portion of Castle Crag State Park is adjacent to and within Castle Crag Wilderness. Restrictions applying to the State Park lands include:

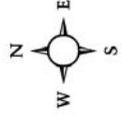
- Camping in designated sites only
- Campfires, barbecues and gas stoves are allowed only in designated areas
- Smoking only in designated campgrounds
- No hunting or firearms within the State Park boundaries

Castle Crags Wilderness and Castle Crags State Park



LEGEND

- Trailhead
- Campgrounds
- Ranger Stations
- Lookout
- Castle Crags Wilderness
- Castle Crags State Park
- Castle Crags State Park lands within the Wilderness



SCALE in miles
0 1 2 3 4 5



For more information

Contact any of the following for more information concerning Castle Crags Wilderness and Castle Crags State Park:

Mt. Shasta Ranger Station

204 West Alma Street
Mt. Shasta, CA 96067
(530) 926-4511 (voice)
(530) 926-4512 (TDD)

McCloud Ranger Station

Box 1620
McCloud, CA 96057
(530) 964-2184 (voice)
(530) 964-2692 (TDD)

Forest Headquarters

Shasta-Trinity National Forest
3644 Avtech Parkway
Redding, CA 96002
(530) 226-2500 (voice)
(530) 226-2490 (TDD)

California State Park Ranger

Castle Crags State Park
Castella, CA 96017
(530) 235-2684

World wide web:

fs.usda.gov/stnf

Emergency Telephone Number:

To report Forest Fires and ALL other emergencies, dial 911

A note about climbing

The open granite faces of the Crags are strikingly beautiful and are a natural attractant for climbing. Indeed, this has to be one of the most popular areas for recreational climbers in the north state. As noted earlier however, this particular type of intrusive granitic rock is constructed of layers much like the layers of an onion. These layers are subject to the natural forces of weathering and on a regular basis “exfoliate.” Exfoliation is a loosening or cracking and subsequent separation of granite sheets, small and large. These loosened sheets of rock literally fall victim to the natural forces of gravity and the slightest addition of weight can set them sliding and tumbling. A misplaced step can spell disaster for the unwary. If you have to climb, climb with caution and always with a partner. As a safety precaution let someone know where you plan on climbing and when you expect to return.

All Are Welcome

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