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John Muir's favorite sequoia grove, east of Porterville



BILL ROWN

When John Muir roamed the Sierra Nevada, he believed the *Sequoiadendron giganteum* grew "more irrepressively exuberant" the farther south he traveled. The finest stand of all towered near the southern edge of the tree's range, on the North Fork of the Tule River. "In the northern groves," he wrote, "there are comparatively few young trees or saplings. But here for every old storm-stricken giant there are many in all the glory of prime vigor, and for each of these there is a crowd of eager, hopeful young trees and saplings... seemingly in hot pursuit of eternal life."

Muir's favorite grove is today enshrined in Mountain Home Demonstration State Forest, one of four demonstration forests managed by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. About 8 crow-flying miles from the southern border of Sequoia National Park, 4,500-acre Mountain Home and Balch Park, the 160-acre Tulare County park it surrounds, receive much less attention than their famous neighbor. This means that in

Redwood pillars tower over horseback visitors to Mountain Home; state forest contains 5,000 specimens of old-growth sequoia, countless younger trees



State forest's 4,500 acres lie 40 miles northeast of Porterville

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Boulder-strewn Wishon Fork of Tule River flows through eastern portion of forest

Uprooted redwood starts off Forestry Information Trail, supplanted before settlers arrived in these mountains, it sheltered Indians and trappers, then became turn-of-the-century tourist attraction

Zalud House in Porterville is repository for a long lifetime's worth of furniture, art, and San Joaquin Valley history

September (except for Labor Day weekend) the great trees should stand in the near solitude that suits them best.

Gateway to Mountain Home is Porterville, 15 miles east of State Highway 99. It's about 2½ hours north of Los Angeles and 4 hours south of the Bay Area. From there, go 17 miles east on State Highway 190, passing the little resort town of Springville. Drive north on County Road 137 for 3½ miles, then east 18 miles on Bear Creek Road, which tests your steering skills as it narrows and winds higher into the big trees.

Yokuts used this land as their summer home, leaving numerous bedrock mortars. They may have left larger basins, or may not have; the origin of the deep "Indian Bathtubs" continues to spark arguments among observers. You can put your two cents in after you've viewed the indented stone near Sunset Point Campground.

Also within the forest is Hedrick Pond, once the site of a lumber mill, now stocked with rainbow trout; fishing is allowed with a California license.

You'll find six car camps in Mountain

Home offers hour-long (\$30), half-day (\$25), and all-day (\$40) rides through the state forest. You can also book two- and longer pack trips into the Sierra. For details, write to the Pack Station, Box 852, Springville 93265, or call (209) 532-2227 or 539-3908.

Mountain Home is also entry point for longer treks into the Golden Trout Wilderness and Sequoia National Forest. From Shake Camp, it's 7 miles to Summit Lake, 10 to lakes Hockett and Maggie. Wilderness permits (required) can be ob-



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Gateway to Mountain Home is Porterville, 15 miles east of State Highway 99. It's about 2½ hours north of Los Angeles and 4 hours south of the Bay Area. From there, go 17 miles east on State Highway 190, passing the little resort town of Springville. Drive north on County Road J37 for 3½ miles, then east 18 miles on Bear Creek Road, which tests your steering skills as it narrows and winds higher into the big trees.

The forest headquarters is open 8 to 5 Mondays through Saturdays, but it isn't always manned. You can get maps, trail information, and a guide for a 9-mile driving tour at Balch Park headquarters, the Balch Park Pack Station, or at some of the forest campgrounds.

Oliver Twist, Methuselah

Starting in the 1880s, the area's sequoias tempted San Joaquin Valley settlers, both as a source of income and as a retreat from summer heat. While loggers balanced on springboards to saw, wives and children picnicked, played, and christened the surviving trees; the Oliver Twist sequoia was named for its unusual spiral bark, Methuselah and Adam for their age and stature. (That they, too, were not eventually logged is due to a bust in the timber industry and eventual establishment of the state forest.)

Another giant, Hercules, suffered the indignity of being hollowed out for use as a souvenir stand, but, because only dead heartwood was removed, it survives today. The group of trees in which it stands, 53-acre Adams Memorial Redwood Grove, was added to the forest two years ago with help from the Trust for Public Land.

The sequoias are the main draw, but Mountain Home and Balch Park contain other points of interest. The Yaudanchi

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You'll find six car camps in Mountain Home: Hedrick Pond (14 sites), Sunset Point (4), Shake Camp (11), Frasier Mill (50), Hidden Falls (6), and Moses Gulch (11); the latter two are on the banks of the Tule River. All have piped water but not trailer hookups; all are available, free, on a first-come basis. An 80-space campground in Balch Park costs \$4 a night (no hookups; no reservations). You should secure food against the occasional mooching bear.

On foot and on horseback

Forest trails are maintained and well signed. Near the entrance to Balch Park begins the 1-mile Forestry Information Trail, which despite its snore-inducing title is more interesting and more ambitious than most park nature trails; pick up a guide at forest headquarters.

A good, easy hike begins across the road from Frasier Mill Campground and climbs gently 1 mile to Bogus Meadow; return the way you came. The Loop Trail begins and ends at Shake Camp, ambling for 2 miles past sequoias that include the Adam tree. From Shake Camp, you can also take a trail 2 miles downhill to Redwood Crossing, where fallen redwoods bridge the Tule River—a fine place to stop for lunch.

Another good way to see Mountain Home is on horseback. Through mid-October, weather permitting, Balch Park Pack Sta-

tion offers hour-long (\$10), half-day (\$25), and all-day (\$40) rides through state forest. You can also book two-day and longer pack trips into the Sierra. For details, write to the Pack Station, Box 852, Springville 93265, or call (209) 532-2227 or 539-3908.

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Back down the hill in Porterville . . .

Porterville itself boasts a pleasant Main Street and a city museum housed in a Spanish revival style Southern Pacific station. The museum contains much ranching memorabilia and many Indian artifacts. At 257 North D Street, it's open 10 to 4 Thursdays through Saturdays, and also, after Labor Day, from noon to 4 Sundays. For more details, call 784-2053.

At Morton and Hockett streets stands the Zalud House, built in 1891. Unlike restored homes furnished with items trucked in from other people's parlors and attics, this one holds only the multitudinous belongings of its owner, Pearle Zalud. Daughter of a Porterville tavern keeper, she became a pianist, artist, and world traveler—and never, apparently, threw dolly or doodad away.

The house and adjoining garden—open 10 to 4 Wednesdays through Saturdays and 2 to 4 Sundays—give a good idea of how a well-to-do small-town California family lived in the earlier part of this century. Admission is 50 cents adults, 25 cents children. For more information, call 784-1400, ext. 604.