

Fort Tejon State Historic Park



Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



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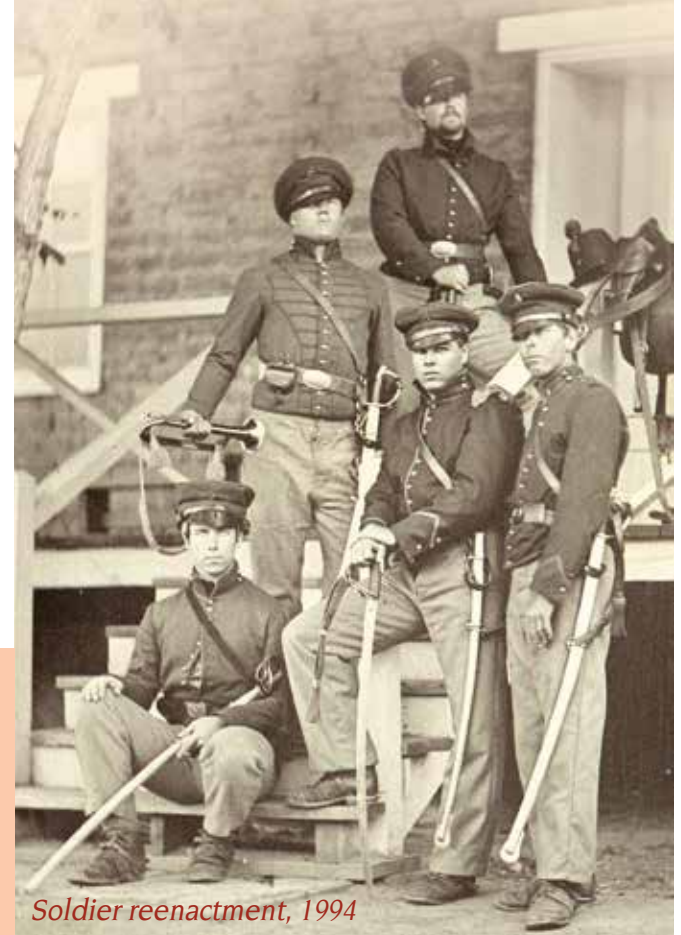
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*Walk among Fort
Tejon's buildings, sites,
and ruins. Imagine the
lives of the soldiers
and civilians, and
understand the struggles
of early life in California.*



Soldier reenactment, 1994

At the top of Grapevine Canyon, the adobe buildings of Fort Tejon State Historic Park guard a beautiful, tree-lined meadow.

Between 1854 and 1864, this U.S. Army fort protected people in the surrounding region from the social and cultural conflicts between American settlers and California Indians.

Fort Tejon, at an elevation of over 3,500 feet, is situated in the rugged Tehachapi Mountains near Tejon Pass on I-5. Summer temperatures are often in the high 80s and can exceed 100 degrees. Winter temperatures can dip to freezing, with the possibility of snow. Grapevine Canyon is known for occasional strong winds.

EARLY HISTORY

Prior to the establishment of Fort Tejon, the Emigdiano group of Native Californians called this area home. An inland group of the coastal Chumash people, the Emigdiano lived in a large village at the bottom of Grapevine Canyon and had one village, Sausu, along Castac Lake. Unlike the coastal groups, they had little contact with European explorers and settlers before the mid-1800s.

Founding of a Fort

The gold discovery drew thousands of people to California in the 1850s. Confrontations between the Emigdiano, would-be miners, and land-hungry settlers were frequent. The U.S. government tried to mitigate the situation by establishing reservations, including the Sebastian Reservation at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley in 1853.



Living History program participants

In July 1854 Lieutenant Alfred Latimer and a small detachment of dragoons established a camp at the reservation. However, the new camp lacked water, forage for horses, and timber for construction. That August, Major J.L. Donaldson, the Quartermaster, moved the post to the top of Grapevine Canyon, 17 miles southwest of the reservation. This site contained everything necessary to sustain a large military outpost.

The First U.S. Dragoons arrived on August 10, 1854, and began construction of more than 40 military buildings. A small civilian community developed just south of the fort to provide supplies and labor to the military. In 1858 the Overland Mail Company established a station in the sutler's (trader's) store at the fort.

The Camel Experiment

During the late 1850s, the U.S. Army experimented with camels, hoping to improve transport across the arid west; in 1859 camels were brought to Fort Tejon, where the Army took charge of them.

Because the animals were in poor condition and expensive to feed, the camel herd was transferred after less than a year to the Los Angeles Quartermaster Depot. There they were used in a failed experiment to cut the expense of messenger service between Los Angeles and Fort Mojave. The animals were then moved to the Benicia Army Arsenal and eventually sold at auction.

The Closure of Fort Tejon

For almost ten years, Fort Tejon provided a source of employment, protection, and social activities for local residents. The foremost duties of the dragoons stationed here were to protect and control the native Emigdiano living on the Sebastian (also known as the Tejon) Reservation, and to deter raids by the Paiutes, Chemeheuvi, Mojave, and other desert-dwelling groups. The dragoons' wide-ranging patrols covered most of central and southern California and sometimes extended as far as Utah.



Volunteer portraying a dragoon.

With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the dragoons were sent to guard Los Angeles and later transferred east to fight in the war. In the summer of 1862, violence erupted between the encroaching white settlers and the Owens Valley Paiute, who wanted to protect their lands. Three cavalry companies of California Volunteers forcibly moved the Paiute to the Sebastian Reservation, but the authorities there refused to accept responsibility for them. In 1863, several hundred of these Indians were brought to Fort Tejon, which was then being used by the California Volunteers. With little or no food, clothing, or other support, the Indians' ranks were thinned by disease, starvation, and desertion until the summer of 1864, when they were transferred to the Tule River Indian Reservation. That year the U.S. Army closed Fort Tejon, formally ending its career as an active military post.

FORT TEJON TODAY

In 1940, through the persuasive efforts of Kern County citizens, the Tejon Ranch Company deeded five acres—the fort's parade ground, the foundations, and remnants of the original adobe buildings—to the State of California as a state park. Restoration began on the adobe



buildings in 1947 and continues to this day. The original barracks building, the reconstructed officers' quarters, and various other structures stand as reminders of Fort Tejon's military history.

NATURAL HISTORY

The plant and animal life here is unique, due to the park's geographical location at the confluence of several ecological regions, including the Mojave Desert, the Central Valley, the Sierra Nevada, and Southern California. The natural vegetation is dominated by oak woodlands that provide forage and shelter for a variety of wildlife, including the endangered California condors, scrub jays, and red-shafted flickers who feed on acorns.

The presence of a year-round creek in an otherwise arid climate attracts many animals to the park. The riparian woodland and freshwater marsh along Grapevine Creek are home to myriad birds and reptiles. Almost all of the mammals found in the area—including blacktailed deer, blacktailed hare, Beechey ground squirrels, bobcats, badgers, and opossum—frequent these wetlands during the summer for water.

The park's meadows and grasslands are home to insects, seed-eating birds, and small mammals. As a result, the area is fertile hunting ground for raptors, coyotes, and gray foxes.

Reconstructed Quatermaster building



California poppies are among the many wildflowers found in the park.

The land the park sits on is highly active geologically. This area experienced one of the greatest earthquakes ever recorded in U.S. history. In 1857, an earthquake of approximately 7.9 to 8.2 magnitude struck here along the San Andreas Fault, leaving an amazing surface-rupture scar more than 220 miles long.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Various buildings and exhibits, including the visitor center, officers' quarters, picnic tables, restrooms, and parking near the visitor center/park office are all accessible. An interpretive trail around the historic grounds is generally accessible.

Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov> or call the park.

PLEASE REMEMBER

- The park is open daily from sunrise to sunset. The visitor center and historic buildings are open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- The park is closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.
- Contact the park for information on scheduled Living History demonstrations.
- State law prohibits disturbing or removing any natural, cultural, or historic features in the park.
- Stay on designated trails or mowed areas.
- The park has no designated hiking or bicycle trails.
- Do not drive off designated roads.
- Pets must be kept on a leash.

Fort Tejon

State Historic Park



Legend

	Freeway
	Paved Road
	Interpretive Path
	Park Buildings
	Historic Sites
	Accessible Feature
	Bridge
	Locked Gate
	Campground: Group
	Parking
	Picnic Area
	Ranger Station
	Restrooms



FORT TEJON

STATE HISTORIC PARK

This park is supported in part through the Fort Tejon Historical Association
 P.O. Box 895, Lebec, CA 93243
www.forttejon.org

Post Cemetery

Group Camp

NO PUBLIC ACCESS

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Hungry Valley SVRA, 5301 Peace Valley Rd., Gorman 93243 (661) 248-7007
- Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland SP 20998 Lancaster Road, Lancaster 93536 (661) 942-0662
- Tule Elk State SNR, 8653 Station Road Buttonwillow 93206 (661) 764-6881

