

GUIDE TO THE AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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Park History

Año Nuevo State Park contains roughly 4,444 acres of natural, cultural, and historical resources. Located in San Mateo County, the park lies within the Santa Cruz Mountains region and is roughly 25 miles south of the city of Half Moon Bay and 25 miles north of the city of Santa Cruz. The park is accessible by car via State Highway 1.

The area now called "Año Nuevo State Park" was home to the Quiroste tribe, one of 50 bands comprising the Ohlone group, for thousands of years. Nestled between the rocky Pacific Coast and the forested Santa Cruz Mountains, the Quiroste tribe prospered from its proximity to valuable resources, most notably Monterey chert used for making tools and olivella shells used as regional currency. Before European contact, the Quiroste tribe was among the wealthiest in California.

The Spanish first encountered and named the area in 1603 when ship captain Don Sebastian Vizcaino and his chaplain Father Antonio de la Ascension explored the area around Monterey. Sighting the area on January 3, the priest called the promontory "*Punta de Año Nuevo*," or "New Year's Point." The Spanish did not return until 1769, when Gaspar de Portola, leading an overland expedition in search of Monterey Bay, rested at what is today called Whitehouse Creek before "discovering" San Francisco Bay. In 1791, as scores of indigenous coastal Californians were forced into *La Misión de la Exaltación de la Santa Cruz*, the Quiroste led a brave but unsuccessful charge against their Spanish captors. The rebel leadership was summarily executed and the majority of the Quiroste people, along with hundreds of other Ohlones, died from the disease, exhaustion, and violence so prevalent in the mission system.

Under the Spanish, the area served as grazing lands for Mission Santa Cruz's multitude of cattle. Following Mexican independence, Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado granted the 17,753-acre "Rancho Punta de Año Nuevo" to Don Jose Simeon de Nepomuceno Castro in 1842. In 1851, Castro's heirs sold the rancho to Tennessee emigrant Isaac Graham, who leased the land to other cattle grazers. Facing financial hardship, Graham lost the land at public auction to John H. Baird in 1862. Baird sold it five months later to Loren Coburn, who had also acquired Rancho Butano directly to the north.

That same year, Coburn leased 17,763 acres to a prominent northern California dairy family, the Steele Brothers, giving them the option to buy 7,000 acres south of Gazos Creek when their 10-year lease expired. George Steele, along with his brothers, Isaac and Edgar, cousin Rensselaer, and partners, Horace Gushee and Charles H. Wilson, erected five ranches on the property: Green Oaks, Pocket Dairy, Cascade Ranch, White House Ranch, and Cloverdale Ranch. The Steele Brothers prospered throughout the 1860s, selling cheese and butter to neighboring San Francisco, establishing other dairies in San Luis Obispo County, and running sawmills at Año Nuevo before dissolving the company in 1872. The Steeles continued to operate dairies separately into the 1920s, before the price of dairy products plummeted and most ranchers began growing row crops.

In 1878, Isaac Steele's daughter Effie married Vermont-born Civil War veteran Edwin Dickerman. The couple received a portion of Isaac's ranch and continued to operate a dairy and raise livestock. The Dickermans' adopted daughter, Flora, ultimately married distant cousin Jay Steele and remained at Dickerman Ranch until her death, at which point portions were granted to the State of California.

Shortly after beginning their lease, the Steeles granted William W. Waddell a right-of-way across their property to construct a wharf and landing. By 1864, Waddell completed a 700-foot pier 500 yards west of Año Nuevo Creek to serve deep-water schooners. Waddell's Landing soon sprang up adjacent to the wharf and included a lumber yard, warehouse, store, and other buildings. The wharf and landing stood until a storm destroyed them in 1880; they were never rebuilt.

Owing to the rise in shipping and the dangerous conditions of the rocky coastline, in 1870 the U. S. Lighthouse Service installed a foghorn on Año Nuevo Island and a lighthouse at Pigeon Point. Officials installed an additional light to the warning system in 1890, a five-story steel tower in 1914, and a new fog signal with full-time island Coast Guard personnel in 1939. In 1948, owing to advances in radar technology, the Coast Guard replaced the station with an automatic buoy. The island's facilities have since fallen into a state of extreme disrepair so the island is currently closed to the public (**Figure 1**).



Figure 1. Año Nuevo Island, January 19, 2011. Catalog # 090-P71826.

In 1955, endangered northern elephant seals revisited Año Nuevo Island for the first time in 100 years. Seeking to protect the rare marine mammals, the State of California purchased the island along with mainland access in 1958. Three years later, the first pup was born on the island. Owing to overcrowded rookeries further south, in 1967, the first bachelor elephant seals arrived on the mainland followed shortly thereafter by females. Seven years later, the first mainland birth was recorded, and the population has risen steadily up to the present day. The northern elephant seals' mating

season, the park's busiest time, occurs between December and March. Visitors are encouraged to make reservations in advance.

Originally naming and classifying the acquisition "Año Nuevo Beach State Park," California State Parks reclassified the 1,300-acre property as a state reserve in 1963 and, through later legislation, a state natural reserve in 2004. In 1994, Gazos Creek Angling Access was added to the park unit. In 1985, the State purchased the 2,900-acre Cascade Ranch, site of the Steele Brothers' historic dairy farm, and classified and named the property "Año Nuevo State Park" in 1999. In 2008, California State Parks combined the two park units and created two internal units—the 925-acre Año Nuevo Coast Natural Preserve and the 225-acre Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Coastside State Parks Association, the California State Parks Foundation, the San Mateo Coast Natural History Association, UC Santa Cruz, Cascade Ranch Historic Farm, and the Amah-Mutsun and Muwekma tribes, preserves and interprets a wealth of natural, cultural, and historical resources at Año Nuevo State Park. In addition to its internationally renowned northern elephant seal population, the park's coast natural preserve also houses other pinnipeds such as Steller sea lions, California sea lions, and harbor seals (**Figure 2**). Further inland, endangered species—California red-legged frogs, San Francisco garter snakes, and California brown pelicans—find refuge. The park also contains approximately 40 prehistorical archaeological sites in addition to numerous historic properties: the Dickerman/Steele Brothers Dairy Barn, which currently houses the Visitor Center and the Marine Education Center; historic ranch buildings in various stages of rehabilitation; deteriorated Año Nuevo Island light station buildings and structures; and various pieces of water infrastructure, such as dams, reservoirs, and irrigation channels constructed in the early twentieth century (**Figure 3**). The park is available for day-use only.



Figure 2. Elephant Seal with Año Nuevo Island, January 19, 2011. Catalog # 090-P71871.



Figure 3. Steele Brothers Creamery, February 3, 2010. Catalog # 090-P67450.

Scope and Content

The Año Nuevo State Park Photographic Collection spans the years 1948-2011, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1960-1970, 1980-1990, 2002, and 2010-2011. There is a total of 354 cataloged images including 39 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 194 35mm slides, and 121 born-digital images. Photographs originated primarily from California State Parks staff.

The collection mainly depicts the park's northern elephant seal population, both on Año Nuevo Island and on Bright Beach. Females, bulls, and pups are shown engaging in different activities: sleeping, swimming, trumpeting, fighting, molting, and mating. Other marine mammals—sea lions and harbor seals—as well as shorebirds and various waterfowl like the California brown pelican are also depicted.

The collection also shows several aerial, landscape, and ground views of the coastal park's natural and built features. There are several photographs depicting the Pacific Ocean, coastlines, the peninsula, sand dunes, hills, trees, Año Nuevo Bay, Año Nuevo Point, and Cove Beach. Of the built environment, there are numerous images of the old Año Nuevo Island Coastguard Station with its lighthouse and tower, the remains of Waddell's wharf, barns, Cascade Ranch, the Steele Brothers' Dairy Ranch, ship fragments, the old creamery, the park's Visitor Center, and the Dickerman-Steele House.

Also shown are park employees and volunteers engaging in park business. Some images include ranger Defensive Tactics Training, guides interpreting resources for visitors, rangers facilitating Equal Access Tours and Guided Seal Walks, and several interpretive panels on display.

Although the Año Nuevo State Park Photographic Collection showcases the park's premier resource, the northern elephant seals, and illustrates several historical resources, it lacks depictions of the park's cultural resources. Focusing primarily on the coast natural preserve and Cascade Ranch, the collection would benefit from images of the Quiroste Valley Cultural Preserve as well as any other location that conveyed the Quiroste tribe's importance to the area.

Related Collections

Año Nuevo State Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

California Dairy Industry History Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Kenneth S. Norris Papers, UC Santa Cruz: University Archives.

Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, National Archives and Records Administration: Various Locations.

Steele Ranch Records, Stanford University: Manuscripts Division.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Aerial view

Año Nuevo Bay

Año Nuevo Island

Año Nuevo Point

Bright Beach

Bull

Cascade Ranch

Cove Beach

Defensive Tactics Training

Dickerman-Steele House

Elephant seal(s)

Guided Seal Walks Tour

Harbor seal(s)

Lighthouse

Pier

Sea lion(s)

Steele Brothers' Dairy Ranch

Visitor Center