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ABOUT THE BIKING AND HIKING GUIDE

Biking and Hiking the American River Parkway is a guide to the natural and cultural history of the 32-mile Jedediah Smith Memorial Bicycle Trail. Many of the animals, places, and trails described were familiar to Nisenan, the native tribe of the southern Maidu, fur trappers, explorers, pioneers, gold miners, Pony Express riders, railroad men, and settlers. For the last hundred years, bicycling and hiking enthusiasts like yourself have shared in the adventure. The guide is designed so that you can begin your journey at any location.

Information about the trail is presented in seven chapters, each describing a section of the trail, unique stops, sidetrips, and convenient access points. Detailed maps precede each section. New in this edition, on pages xii and xiii, is detailed information about horse staging areas, and icons mark horse staging areas on all section maps. As the text follows the trail in a “west to east” direction, the term “up the trail” means farther east, or upriver. Mileage readings and the maps will help you if you are using the guide traveling the opposite direction. An odometer comes in handy but is not necessary. Miles are marked on the trail and on occasional “You Are Here” maps.

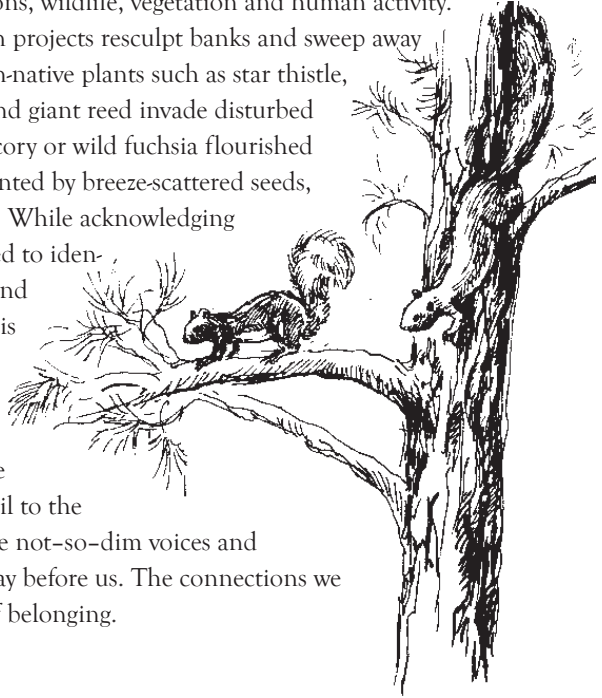


THE AMERICAN RIVER PARKWAY

The American River Parkway is abundant with ever-changing plants and creatures: towering oaks, colorful wildflowers, migrating chinook salmon, waterfowl and song birds, black-tailed deer, pipevine swallowtail butterflies, and even an occasional coyote, mountain lion or bald eagle. It is a work of art in progress, designed and redesigned by weather and seasons, wildlife, vegetation and human activity.

Storm waters and restoration projects resculpt banks and sweep away vegetation or even the trail. Non-native plants such as star thistle, Spanish broom, pampas grass and giant reed invade disturbed areas. Where plants such as chicory or wild fuchsia flourished for years, other vegetation is planted by breeze-scattered seeds, birds, squirrels or even humans. While acknowledging these changes, we have attempted to identify typical locations for plants and animals. The rest, and the best, is up to you.

So stop for a moment and hear the woodland chorus. Discover the tracks of the coyote and deer or follow a twisting trail to the lodge of the beaver. Listen to the not-so-dim voices and songs of those who came this way before us. The connections we share create within us a sense of belonging.



THE JEDEDIAH SMITH MEMORIAL BICYCLE TRAIL

The Jedediah Smith Memorial Bicycle Trail, named for the famous fur trapper and explorer, is a “recycled” concept. The first American River bicycle trail was built in 1896 by the Capital City Wheelmen, an early cycling club. The cinder path coursed along the south side of the American River from Sacramento to the town of Folsom. Bicycle enthusiasts and business people from both Sacramento and Folsom provided the financing for the trail. When farming traffic and rainy winters damaged the path, parts were replaced with decomposed granite. This improved surface allowed a new biking speed record of one hour and two minutes for the 20 miles between Sacramento and Folsom.

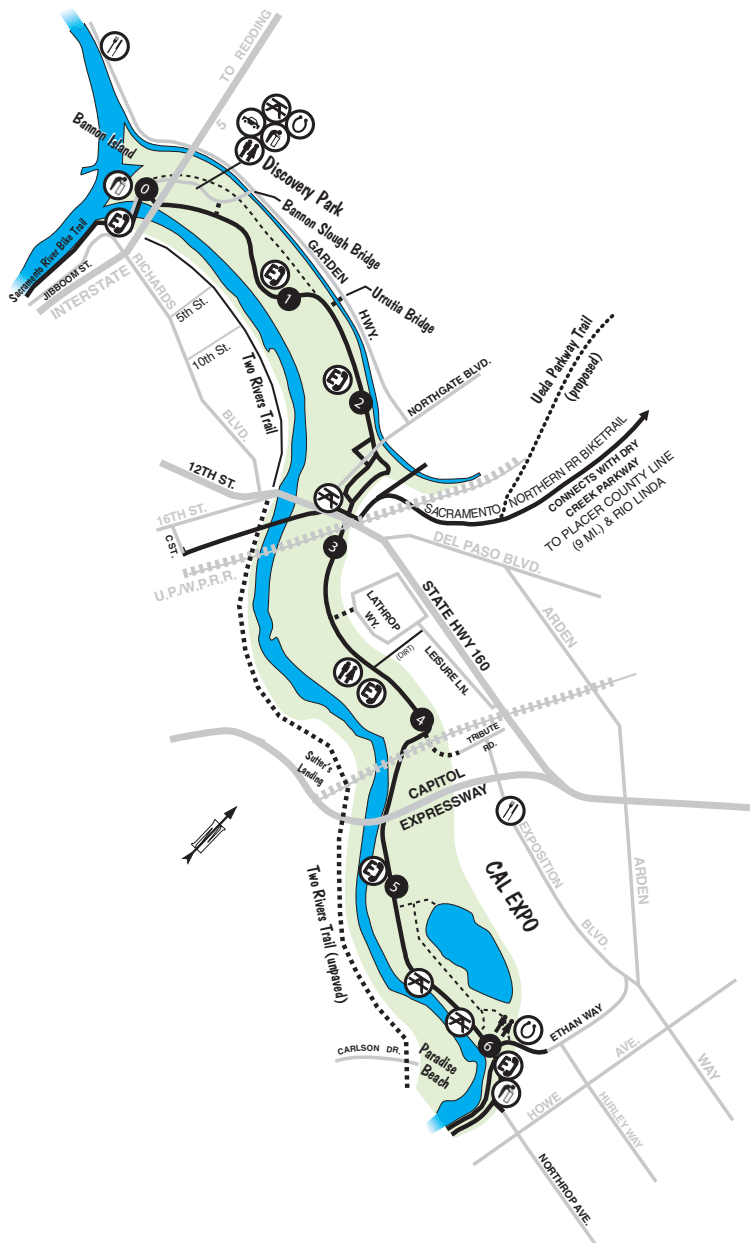
The arrival of the automobile caused bicycling to take a back seat. The bicycle trail disappeared until public support in the 1970s created the Jedediah Smith Memorial Bicycle Trail in the emerging American River Parkway. Today the average bicyclist can travel the almost 32-mile trail from Discovery Park to Beals Point in two to four hours, with a total climb of about 480 feet.



RANDY SMITH

Whether bicycling solely on the trail, or using it to commute to nearby destinations, the trail and your bicycle are a ticket to smog-free, calorie-burning transportation and adventure.

DISCOVERY PARK TO CAL EXPO



DISCOVERY PARK TO CAL EXPO

Miles 0-6



Discovery Park can be reached from the south by taking Richards Boulevard to the Jibboom Street Bridge and from the north by taking the Garden Highway to the Bannon Slough Bridge.

The six miles in this section of the Parkway introduce you to a unique area of the bicycle trail. The almost yearly flooding that inundates parts of these first few miles creates a swamp-like presence. You emerge at Cal Expo in a grasslands habitat—an elevation gain of about 15 feet at the high point near Mile 5. Along the way, you pass by the former locations of two Nisenan villages, Jedediah Smith’s camp, John Sutter’s landing, plus early bridge and ferry crossing sites. On the south side of the river, a paved section of the Two River Trails, opened in 2006, follows the river for a mile and two-thirds from Jibboom Street at Tiscornia Park at the confluence, to Highway 160 at N. 12th Street. The trail continues (unpaved as of 2011) for another four and a quarter miles from N. 12th Street to the “H” Street bridge, near CSU-Sacramento.

Begin your American River Parkway journey in Discovery Park. Under the shade of an old cottonwood tree near the Jibboom Street Bridge is the Jedediah Smith Bicycle Trail plaque followed by a sign marking the trail as far as Nimbus Dam. You can travel an additional nine miles beyond to Folsom Lake on the California State Park part of the bicycle trail. Equestrian and hiking trails stretch the length of the Parkway and often weave across the bicycle trail.

East of Guy West Bridge sycamore trees have been planted. California sycamores grow to 80 feet high and have fuzzy maple-like leaves. In autumn look for the round dangling seed balls. Nisenan used sycamore logs for half-cylinder foot drums and the leaves to wrap food for baking.

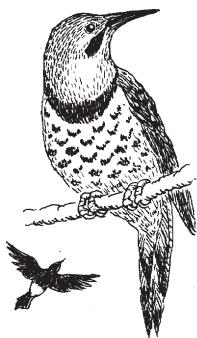


Near **Mile 8**, the concrete upright pipe riverside leads to the pump system, transporting sewage under the river to the regional waste water treatment plant.

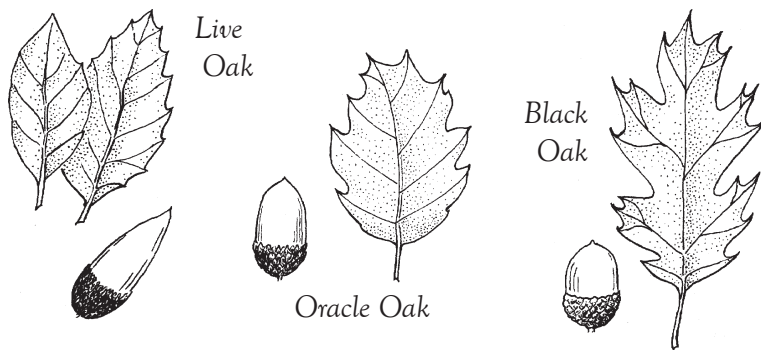
Up the trail a tenth of a mile, look for the U-shaped set of benches overlooking the river. **Coyote brush** grows on either side of the benches. This large shrub is a valuable plant in the Parkway. When other plants have lost their blooms, coyote brushes' small, whitish blossoms provide food for nectar-loving insects, west coast ladies, blues and buckeye butterflies.

In autumn and winter, the seeds are an important staple for birds, including western scrub jays. This common, aggressive blue and gray bird feeds on just about anything—acorns, fruit, nuts, seeds, insects, and even bird's eggs and nestlings. Sometimes the acorn or nuts they thump into the ground for a later meal are forgotten and grow into large trees.

At any time of year the quiet observer can also find **northern flickers** here, one of the more than ninety bird species seen in the Sacramento area year-round. Larger than a robin, this brown, black-bibbed bird flashes a white spot on its rump in flight. Its bright orange-red wing and tail feathers make it easy to identify. Watch for the quick "flicker" of red feathers as it dashes between ground and tree where it uses its long sticky tongue to reach insects deep in their nests. Flicker feathers are so unusual Nisenan used them extensively in their ceremonial clothes.



MILE
8



The oak at **Mile 11.5** is an unusual tree. This rare beauty is an **oracle oak**, one of the 13 oak hybrids found in California. The leaves are a cross between a live oak and a black oak. The live oak parent is probably across the picnic table from this strange offspring. The other parent, the pollen donor, is a black oak tree common to higher elevations.

Before the short rise after the equestrian sign is another small trail leading to a site where beavers have been active. In venturing into these hidden areas, show respect for the animals' homes by being quiet and nondisruptive.

Pause along the rise in the trail near Rio Americano High School. From this vantage point you can see nearby lagoon-like river inlets, good places to view ducks and birds during the winter. For more than 25 years, the American River Natural History Association has conducted a Winter Bird Species Count (now expanded into a Winter Wildlife Count) along the American River Parkway. During this one-day count, up to 112 different bird species have been identified.

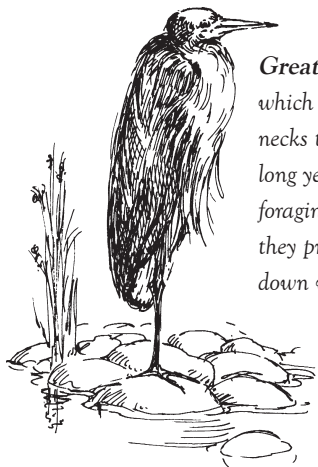
About one-third of all waterfowl traveling the Pacific Flyway spend the winter in the Sacramento Valley. Migration routes and habits vary with each species. Pintails banded in California have been found as far away as Japan, Siberia, and South America. Mallards wintering here nest in the Columbia River Basin, Canada, and Alaska and usually return to the same nesting and wintering grounds each year. Some mallards can also be seen in the Parkway year round. A few waterfowl, like the cinnamon teal duck, actually migrate to the Sacramento area for the hot summers. Migrating birds are dependent on the River for sustenance.

S
**Arden Pond
 and Arden Bar**

Hike on the path which runs toward the river and skirts the main part of **Arden Pond**. Separated from the river by a gravel dike, the pond supports mosquito fish, bluegills and tule perch, and is periodically stocked with trout and catfish. The abundant pondlife here also includes stoneflies, beetles, crayfish, bullfrogs, tadpoles, damsel fly nymphs, dragonflies, beavers, muskrats and even the elusive otter.

Islands provide important nesting sites for ducks and other birds. Black phoebes can often be seen in the spring bringing materials to nearby nests. These black and white flycatchers are common year-round residents near ponds, rivers and streams. Listen for the “phee-bee” call.

In the spring, colorful plants dot the trailside which branches toward the pond. Sit quietly amid blue vervain and rushes on a point at the edge of the pond. Rushes grow up to four feet tall in moist and wet places. You can sometimes hear the impatient rattling call of the kingfisher or see patient fishers such as blue heron and egret.



Great blue herons stand four feet tall and have wings which can span six feet. Watch for their graceful flight, with necks tucked into an S curve and legs trailing behind. Their long yellow bill is a formidable spear. They can also be seen foraging for mice and gophers in drier fields. After feeding, they preen themselves with a soft white powder called powder down which comes from special feathers. You can often spot the dark shadows of great blue heron (and egret) nests in their rookery east of the main pond near the river.

Another type of fisherman, the more playful variety, will go out of its way to bodysurf a good hill. The adult **river otter** has a four foot long, streamlined fur-covered body and tail. Crayfish and fish are their favorite foods. Otter scat is recognizable by broken pieces of crayfish shells on logs or river banks. The otter’s home is a burrow



Near the **Park Road** access up the trail, you will find large stands of sweet fennel and milk thistle intermingled in a live oak and elderberry restoration project.

The bicycle trail curves toward the river at Sunrise Boulevard.



JIM JONES

Jim's Bridge



Near **Mile 19.7** is **Lower Sunrise Park**, a favorite spot for salmon viewing, sunbathing, swimming, and raft launching. At the intersection, the trail branches off to **Jim's Bridge**, a popular pedestrian and bicycle crossing. Jim Jones has been a champion of the river for many years. When the gravel miners left and Lower Sunrise became part of the Parkway, he persuaded the Board of Supervisors to retain this old bridge. The bridge was originally built to handle the trucks of the Lone Star Gravel Company, which mined gravel along the river here until 1975. At times of heavy flooding the bridge is submerged, and the onramps tend to get washed out.