



## Portola and Castle Rock Foundation

*Inspiring the Protection of Castle Rock and Portola Redwoods State Parks Through Quality Educational Experiences and Infrastructure Improvements*

### October 2017 Newsletter

#### Work Starts on the New Castle Rock Entrance

After years of planning and fundraising, work has finally started on the construction of the new Castle Rock entrance and facilities that are slated to open in the summer of 2018.

A short video can be seen at:

<http://www.portolaandcastlerockfound.org/work-starts-new-castle-rock-entrance/>



#### Miles and George the Rattlesnake

Former Castle Rock Ranger and PCRFB Director relates this story from his life in Castle Rock

“In 1980, when I was first assigned to be one of five rangers assigned to Castle Rock State Park, my wife, Carolyn, was pregnant with our second daughter. After living at Portola State Park and commuting to Castle Rock for nine months, we finally were able to move into the only available house at Castle Rock with our infant daughter. The house, located by the Castle Rock Camp, was small (800 square feet), but the important fact to know for this story, was that the house was built on a cement slab that was nearly level with the surrounding ground. The main entrance to the house was a sliding glass

door that faced a dry, brown lawn. What that meant was that almost any animal – large or tiny – could crawl into the house if the door was left open.

Carolyn and I immediately recognized the problem because we would find lizards, snakes, and almost any small animal in the house if we carelessly left the door open. To solve the problem we got a sliding screen door, I civilized the back yard with a lush lawn, I put screening around the bottom of the fencing surrounding the yard, but, as we soon found out, it was still important to keep the doors closed and an eye out because critters were still there.

By the third year our new daughter was a toddler and she had a penchant for wanting to go out and play on the lawn. I had put in a “jungle gym” and swing for my older daughter next to the lawn, so playing outside was attractive. Carolyn kept an eye out for snakes (she had been a biology teacher so critters didn’t bother her) and she would make sure that if she saw a rattlesnake she would call the girls in and call me to remove the snake. I always carried a snake stick (like a “litter stick” but with with a soft mouth) in my truck along with garbage bags to safely remove snakes. In a state park all animals were protected (except, maybe, mosquitos and flies).

One day my wife called me and said she had a large (36”) rattlesnake in the back yard and would I please come and remove it? When I arrived the snake was sleeping quietly on the foundation near the front door and was quite docile. I picked up the snake with the snake stick, put it in a garbage bag, and took it out in the park and released it. The next day my wife called again and said there was a rattlesnake next to the door, and she said it looked very familiar. When I arrived the snake was almost in the same place as the one I had removed on the day before and about the same size. I picked up the snake, but this time I dipped its tail in bright orange florescent paint\* and then released it about 200 yards away from the house. The following day I got a call from Carolyn again saying that ‘George’ was back and would I please



come and get him. When I arrived, sure enough, there was a large rattlesnake with a bright orange tail. I picked up George and took him to the top of our entrance road next to Skyline Blvd – almost exactly one mile away. Three days later Carolyn called again

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and said “he’s baaack”. I came, picked up George again, and this time I took him to Saratoga Gap – several miles away. A week later Carolyn called again, and, yep, George was back. This time I transported him to Waterman Gap – at least 6 miles away. After that, although we did see more rattlesnakes in the back yard, we never saw one with an orange tail. Of course snakes shed their skin, so we never knew for sure.

In 1990, after we moved to another house in the Park – one what was built with a crawlway underneath and far more difficult for snakes to enter – I found out from an article in a journal that rattlesnakes can travel long distances to return to their original den. I also discovered that the cement slab foundation that the campground house had been built on had eroded away on one side and that a rattlesnake den was underneath the slab. As time passed, the Park’s staff shrunk, the vacant house became vandalized, then the campground house was torn down, and the foundation was removed. Today there is little left except natural rock crevices for snakes to use as a den. I stand on where the house used to exist and see little for the snakes to use as a den, but I’m sure they are still there — somewhere – and I often think of George and hope he has fared well.”

Goodbye George and good hunting.

Miles Standish

\*orange in photo was added via Photoshop

## **Portola Ramada Nears Completion**

From 1943 to 2011, Park visitors extensively used a Ramada structure, located adjacent to the Campfire Center and surrounded by second-growth Redwoods. The Ramada has been the site of many family and group events such as weddings and family reunions, and as an inclement weather shelter for multiple generations. The Ramada may be reserved by groups for special events, is available for general picnicking use and also provides a meeting and project area for the Jr. Ranger interpretive program.



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Working with Donor partners Peninsula Open Space Trust and Save The Redwoods League, the Foundation is working to build a replacement structure to maintain the look and feel of the original structure. The old structure was demolished in 2014 and after a lengthy iteration in of the construction package, work started in early April, 2016 and is planned for completion late October, 2017

## Park Activities

### Castle Rock State Park

#### Oct 14, 28 -Guided Hikes

Join Park Naturalist Erik Hylkema on this 3 mile loop!

We'll meet at **the main parking lot at 9am** which is located at **15000 Skyline Blvd. Los Gatos, CA 95030**. You will find it on Highway 35 (Skyline Blvd.), just 2 1/2 miles southeast of the junction with Highway 9. Due to road closures the only direct way to access the park is by taking Highway 9 to Highway 35.

**Parking can be very limited- be sure to arrive early to get a spot.**

Our hike will take us past sweeping views of the Santa Cruz Mountains, as well as some of the iconic rock formations found in the park. The hike will be approximately 3 miles total and will take about 3 hours. We will stop for lunch about halfway through the hike. You will need to bring plenty of water, a lunch, hat, sunscreen, and good hiking shoes. The hike will be moderate in difficulty. Participants will need to be in good physical condition due to two sections in the trail that require us to hike up and over some rocky areas.



## **Oct 20, 27 School Visits to Castle Rock State Park,**

On Oct 20 and 27 Castle Rock Interpreter Eric Hylkema will lead the first of a series of hikes for local school children. He will be assisted by Park Volunteers. This is part of a statewide program to bring title 1 schools (low income) into our local State Parks.

## **Portola Redwoods State Park**

Portola Campground will remain open during October weekends, but will be closed to camping during the week for work on the campground roads.

The campground will close for the winter entirely at the end of October, as in previous years.

## **Membership**

Protect...Restore...Enhance...Your membership of the Portola Castle Rock Foundation will support the beauty of our local state parks. Benefits include hiking and climbing maps for both Parks, a discount at the Visitor Center store, and organized hikes led by experienced docents as well as the annual Appreciation Event, a wonderful opportunity to connect with fellow community members who love our parks. These precious local state parks provide a natural sanctuary of beauty and serenity in our busy, hectic world and deserve your support. You may join for \$35 as an Individual Member or up to \$1,000 as a Patron Member. To learn more and join, visit our website at [www.PortolaAndCastleRockFound.org](http://www.PortolaAndCastleRockFound.org).

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