

# Fort Tejon State Historic Park



## Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation 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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**Discover the many states of California.™**

### **Fort Tejon State Historic Park**

**P. O. Box 895**

**Lebec, CA 93243**

**(661) 248-6692**

*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.*





**A**t 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. Due to the semi-aridity of this region, summer temperatures are often in the high 80s and low 90s, sometimes reaching into the 100s. Winter temperatures can get down 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 Indians 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.



*Volunteers portray Dragoons at Fort Tejon.*

### Founding of a Fort

The gold discovery drew thousands of people to California in the 1850s, bringing about confrontations between the Indians, miners and the land-hungry settlers. The U.S. government tried to mitigate the situation by establishing reservations, including, in 1853, the Sebastian Indian Reservation at the southern end of the San Joaquin Valley.

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, and some of them were brought to Fort Tejon in 1859 where the Army took charge of them. However, 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 Indians living on the Sebastian Indian Reservation, and to deter raids by the Paiutes, Chemehevi, Mojave and other desert Indian groups. The Dragoons' wide-ranging patrols covered most of central and southern California and sometimes extended as far as Utah.

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 Indian Reserva

tion, 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.

### Tejon Ranch

Even prior to the closure of Fort Tejon, Edward F. Beale began purchasing land in the area. In 1866 he acquired the former lands of the Sebastian Indian Reservation and the Castac Rancho land grant upon which the fort sat. The fort's old adobe buildings were then being used as stables, storehouses and residences for ranch workers.

### FORT TEJON TODAY

In 1940, through the persuasive efforts of Kern County citizens, the Tejon Ranch Company deeded five acres—the old 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.



*California poppies are among the many wildflowers to be found in the park.*



*Reconstructed Quatermaster building*

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 to be found 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 park's natural vegetation is dominated by oak woodlands, which provide forage and shelter for a variety of wildlife, including the California condor. Look for scrub jays, as well as red-shafted flickers and other woodpeckers, who feed on the acorns. The presence of a year-round creek in an otherwise arid climate also serves to attract many animals to the park, and 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, which include blacktailed deer, blacktailed hare, Beechey ground squirrels, bob-



*Woodpecker*

cats, 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, they are also fertile hunting grounds for raptors, coyotes, and gray foxes.

The land the park sits on is highly active geologically. This area experienced one of the greatest earthquakes ever recorded in the U.S. 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 over 220 miles long.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

- Various buildings and exhibits, including the visitor center and Officers' Quarters
- Picnic tables, restrooms, and parking near the visitor center/park office
- An interpretive trail around the historic grounds is generally accessible.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- The park is open daily from sunrise to sunset. The visitor center and historic buildings are open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 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 historical 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
  - Path
  - Buildings
  - Sites/Foundations
  - Accessible Feature
  - Gate
  - Group Campground
  - Parking
  - Picnic Area
  - Ranger Station
  - Restrooms



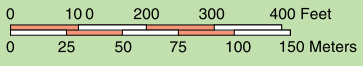
## FORT TEJON STATE HISTORIC PARK

This park is supported in part through the Fort Tejon Historical Association  
 P.O. Box 895  
 Lebec, CA 93243  
[www.forttejon.org](http://www.forttejon.org)

Post Cemetery

- ### NEARBY STATE PARKS
- Hungry Valley SVRA**, in Gorman, 10 miles south of Fort Tejon, (661) 248-7007
  - Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland SP**, 5 miles west of Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve via Lancaster Road, (661) 942-0662
  - Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve**, 15 miles west of Lancaster, (661) 724-1180

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