



Poppies in oak woodland
©DAVID MUECH



High Peaks in autumn
©PAUL G. JOHNSON



Balconies
©LARRY ULRICH



Green grotto
©JOHN DITTEL



California buckwheat set against Machete Ridge in winter
©PAUL G. JOHNSON



Indian warrior and manzanita
©LARRY ULRICH

A Beautiful Place

The difference is immediately apparent. Rock spires, ramparts, and crags that bear no resemblance to the nearby foothills dominate the landscape. Massive monoliths, sheer-walled canyons, and boulder-covered caves define millions of years of erosion, faulting, and tectonic plate movement.

Rising out of the chaparral-covered Gabilan Mountains, east of central California's Salinas Valley, are the spectacular remains of an ancient volcano. Or part of the remains, for the rest of this volcano lies 195 miles to the southeast. Does this seem impossible? It is part of the story of the San Andreas Fault Zone, which runs just east of the park, and of the

geological forces that have shaped this landscape for millions of years. It is the story of heat, frost, water, and wind wearing away rock. Fault action and earthquakes also account for the talus caves, another Pinnacles attraction. Deep, narrow gorges were transformed into caves when boulders toppled from above and wedged among the rock walls. These boulders form ceilings and areas of darkness, enticing visitors and many species of bats. The topography of Pinnacles is not all spires and crags. Elevations range from 824 feet along Chalone Creek to 3,304 feet atop North Chalone Peak, and much of the park consists of rolling hills. To safeguard these rock formations and caves, Pinnacles was proclaimed a

national monument in 1908. Today the park encompasses over 26,000 acres, including some 16,000 acres designated as wilderness. The park protects native plants and animals, historic features, recreational opportunities, and open space in an increasingly urban setting.

Pinnacles is a place for rejuvenation. People come to appreciate the unspoiled wilderness, hike the trails, climb rock walls, explore quiet caves, stargaze in clear night skies, and picnic or camp in the shade of ancient oaks. Please help us continue the work of previous generations and preserve Pinnacles National Monument for future visitors.

Critical Habitat for California Critters

Pinnacles' topography, weather, and 100-year protection as a national monument have preserved habitats for a surprising variety of plant and animal species. Chaparral (plant community characterized by densely-growing evergreen oaks and drought-resistant shrubs) and other vegetation provide shelter and food for insects, mammals, reptiles, and birds. Protected here are 400 species of bees, the largest diversity of bees in one place in North America.

Several species of bats find refuge in Pinnacles' caves, cliffs, and trees. Bear Gulch Cave hosts a maternal colony of Townsend's big-eared bats (above), unusual because they stay year-round, breeding and raising pups in spring and summer and hibernating in winter.

The endangered California red-legged frog (right), largest native frog in the western United States,

is making a comeback. Watch for them around Bear Gulch Reservoir.

Stewardship in Action Pinnacles National Monument is historically a nesting area and one of a few release sites in the United States and Mexico for California condors (above). The condor is on the road to recovery, but it still has many hurdles to clear. Loss of habitat, shootings, and poisoning from lead bullets in gut piles or lodged in animal carcasses that these scavengers feed on led to declining numbers and the condor's designation as an endangered species in 1967. These concerns are still a problem today. An aggressive captive breeding program in the 1980s and '90s gave hope of survival to these magnificent birds. California condors, one of the largest birds in North America, weigh about 20 pounds, have wingspans of 9½ feet, and soar on thermal updrafts, reaching speeds of 55 miles per hour and altitudes of 15,000 feet. Condors can often be spotted flying over the high peaks.

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Faults, Volcanoes, and Erosion

The Earth's crust consists of plates that fit together like pieces of a puzzle. These plates are always moving, some diving under others (subduction); others grinding past each other along fault zones.

Our Pinnacles story began millions of years ago when the central part of the Farallon plate subducted under the southwestern part of the North American plate, creating California's Coast Range and spawning volcanic activity. (Today, the Juan de Fuca plate, an active remnant of the Farallon plate, is diving under the northern part of the North American plate.) After the central Farallon plate's subduction, the Pacific plate collided with and wrenched off a chunk of the North American plate, creating the San Andreas Fault Zone. Molten rock poured through fissures that opened as plates ground against each other.

By 23 million years ago the Pinnacles volcano was born—believed to be 15 miles long and 8,000 feet high. The volcano wasn't where the Pinnacles are now but 195 miles to the southeast (see *Neenach Formation on map below*). How did these fantastic rocks get here? As the Pacific plate crept north, it split the volcano and carried two-thirds of the Pinnacles' volcanic mass with it, leaving behind the Neenach Formation. On the Pinnacles' slow journey, the mass sank beneath the surface. In time, the power of wind, rain, and ice exposed the old volcano, eroded the rubble, and fashioned the spires and caves of today's Pinnacles National Monument.

Edges of Juan de Fuca Plate

Mendocino Fracture Zone

San Francisco

Pinnacles National Monument

PACIFIC PLATE

NORTH AMERICAN PLATE

SAN ANDREAS FAULT

Neenach Formation

Los Angeles

Volcanoes

Fault zones are likely places for volcanoes to occur. Here the Earth's crust is broken, allowing magma to ooze up from below the surface or gases and ash to suddenly erupt as pressure is released. Many land volcanoes are found near plate boundaries. But most volcanism—about three-quarters of all lava eruptions on Earth—takes place beneath the ocean.

Erosion

Erosion from weather, water, and wind is responsible for the spires and towers you see at Pinnacles today. Water—the most powerful force—erodes by seeping into cracks, freezing, expanding, and prying off flakes and chips of the brittle rock.

Where the rock is weak, erosion works more quickly; stronger rock resists these forces. Over millions of years, these changes scoured nearly a mile of rock from the volcano, resulting in the distinctive rocks seen throughout the park.

Crust
Mantle

Grassroots Movement
The People's Park

People have lived nearby for hundreds of years, but more time needs to be spent finding out about them. Chalone and Mutsun Indians were hunter-gatherers who seasonally harvested the area's resources. In the 1700s Spanish missionaries introduced a new religion and lifestyle and, unknowingly, brought diseases that almost decimated the Indians that frequented Pinnacles.

Settlers arrived next. Pinnacles became a popular destination for picnics, festivities, camping,

and exploration. Homesteader Schuyler Hain, who led tours of the caves for years, began a grassroots campaign to preserve these rocks and caves. David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University; Gifford Pinchot, chief of the U.S. Forest Service; and local families joined in. Their efforts paid off in 1908 when President Theodore Roosevelt protected these geological formations, proclaiming them a national monument. In the 1930s the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) built trails, tunnels, and the Bear Gulch dam and day use area. Today's visitors join a long tradition of treasuring and preserving this beautiful park.

Fantastic
Flowers

Pinnacles’ Mediterranean climate—hot, dry summers, cool winters, and moderate rain-fall—influences the vegetation that grows here. Chaparral dominates the landscape with its varieties of dense, woody evergreen shrubs. Woodlands offer blue oak and gray pine. Riparian areas flaunt ferns and mosses. Meadows sprout native (and exotic) grasses. Cliffs support multicolored lichens. But every spring a miracle seems to happen. Wildflowers—over 100 species—burst into bloom, dazzling the eye with color.



Larkspur



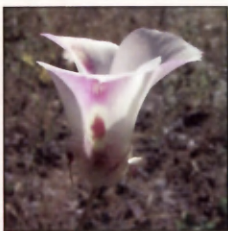
California buckeye



Elegant clarkia



California buckwheat



Mariposa lily



Bush poppy



Gray mule-ears



Sticky monkeyflower

Excellent Exploration

Hiking Pinnacles National Monument has over 30 miles of trails, ranging from easy to strenuous. Many trails intersect, and you can plan a short loop or a longer all-day trip. Trails are self-guiding. Popular destinations are Bear Gulch Reservoir, High Peaks, and the Balconies area (see detail map and trail chart at right).

Exploring the Two Caves Balconies and Bear Gulch caves are talus caves created by huge boulders that formed a roof over a narrow canyon. Some cave areas are narrow and twisting, with low ceilings and uneven footing. Passing through may require scrambling over rocks and wading through water. The caves are dark; use a flashlight. Caves may be closed by flooding, and portions of Bear Gulch Cave are closed seasonally to protect sensitive bat species. Contact the park or check our website for the status of caves.

Rock Climbing The rock at Pinnacles, mostly volcanic breccia and tuff, is weak compared to the granite and basalt of many climbing areas. Technical rock climbing is recommended only for persons well-trained and properly equipped. Bolts, nylon slings, and protection hardware are not maintained by the park. Pinnacles rock can be so unstable that even new bolts may fail. Always test holds and bolts before trusting your life to them. Climbers should be alert for rocks that may become dislodged or equipment that may be dropped onto unwary hikers below.

Before climbing at Pinnacles contact the park or check our website for information. Be familiar with the park’s climbing bulletins before your

climb. For detailed descriptions of routes and difficulty refer to a climber’s guide, available online, at bookstores, and at the visitor center.

When to Visit The park is open year-round, 24 hours a day. The busiest times are mid-February to early June, when the weather is comfortable and the wildflowers glorious. Weekends during those months are especially crowded, and you may need to park in one of the overflow lots.

If you enjoy solitude, exploring peaceful trails, or discovering wildlife, why not try something different? Visit on a weekday or in the off-season. Bring a picnic dinner. Hike along Chalone Creek in the moonlight. Stroll along Old Pinnacles Trail when it is raining. Watch for condors soaring on warm updrafts, woodpeckers burying acorns in the bark of gray pines, or bobcats trotting along the road.

Would you like to learn first-hand about bats? How about seeing the Milky Way in a sky unpolluted by city lights? Ranger-led programs are available seasonally, as staffing allows (reservations may be required). Some activities are available year-round. Read park bulletin boards or contact the park about schedules.

Our Birds and Bats Raptors (birds of prey), cliff-dwelling birds, and bats rear young in many rock formations. Please do not enter or climb in these areas during critical breeding seasons. For restrictions contact the park, ask a ranger, or check our website.

A Wilderness Wonder

Congress has protected over 16,000 acres of Pinnacles National Monument as wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act. Wilderness is meant to protect forever the land’s natural conditions, opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation, and scientific, educational, and historical values. In wilderness, people can sense being a part of the whole community of life on Earth. Preserving wilderness shows restraint and humility and benefits the generations that follow us. Visit www.wilderness.net.

Pinnacles National Monument is one of over 390 parks in the National Park System. Visit www.nps.gov to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America’s communities.

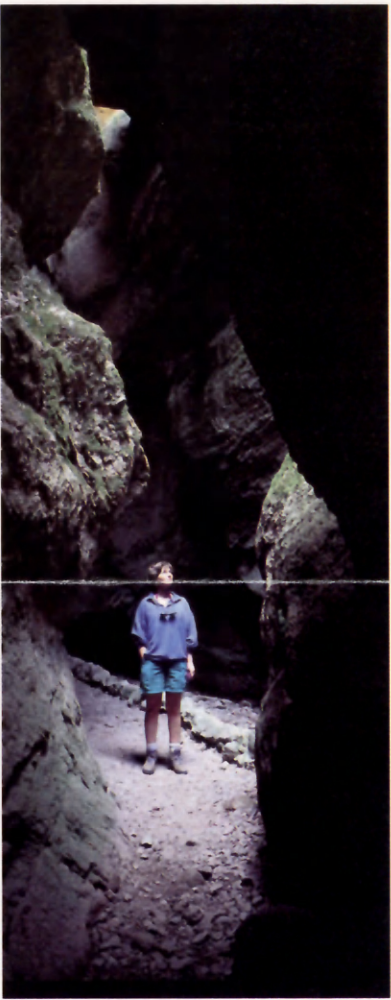


Getting to the park: Pinnacles National Monument is in central California, about 50 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean and 140 miles south of the San Francisco Bay area. **WARNING: CA 146 does NOT go through the park.** To get from one entrance to the other (east or west) you must drive around the park; allow about two hours driving time.

Try Out A Trail

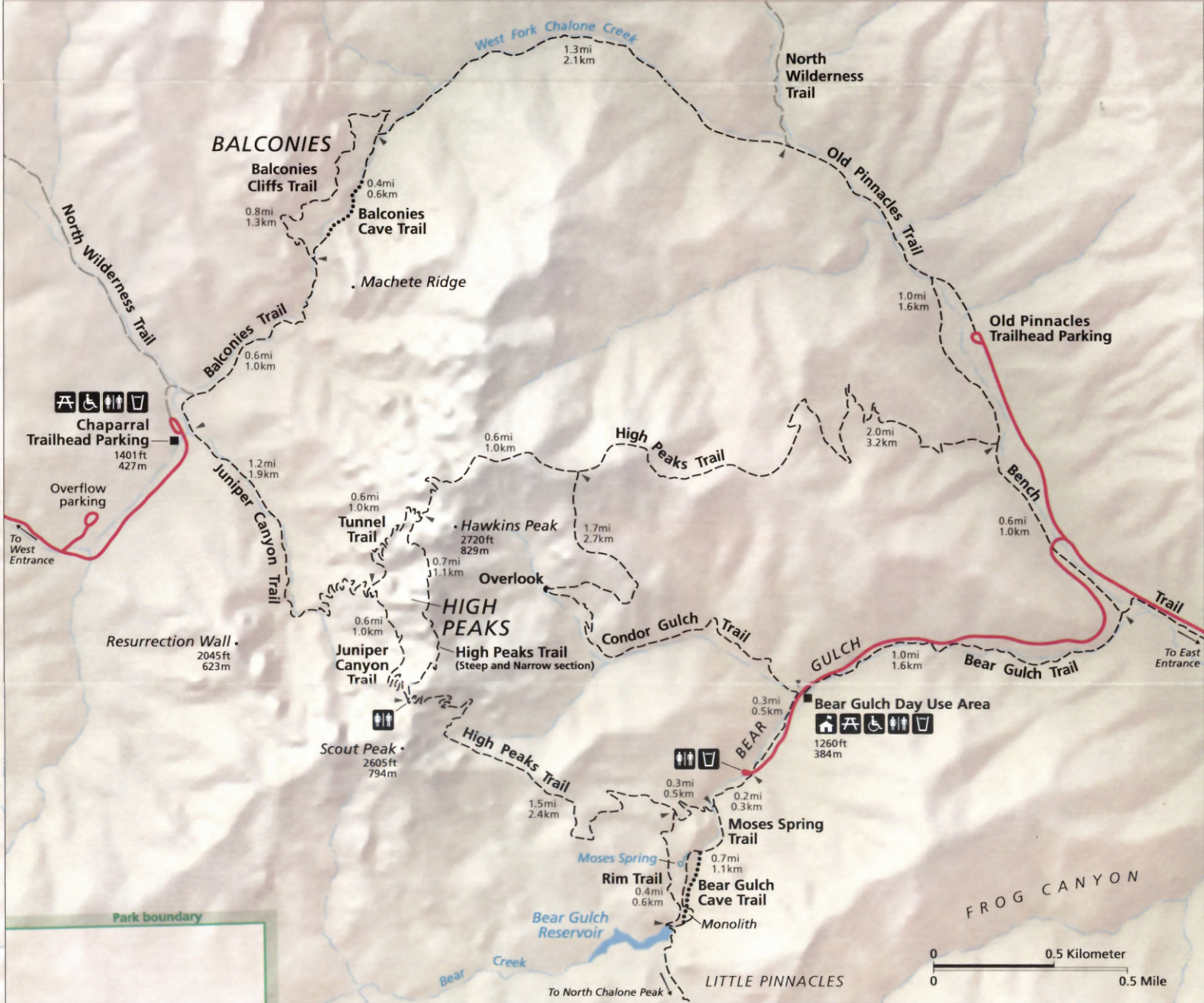
East Side Trails

Pinnacles Visitor Center–Bear Gulch Day Use Area 2.3 miles one way, 1½ hours elevation gain: 300 feet	<i>Moderate</i> Walk along Chalone and Bear creeks from the Pinnacles Visitor Center to the Bear Gulch Day Use Area. Portions of the Bench Trail are accessible to visitors in wheelchairs.
South Wilderness Trail 6.5 miles round trip, 3 to 4 hours no elevation gain	<i>Moderate</i> Follow this unmaintained trail to the park boundary, or simply meander through the magnificent grove of valley oaks. Begin at the campground and follow the Bench Trail to the South Wilderness marker. (See large map at lower left.)
Pinnacles Visitor Center to Balconies Cave 9.4 miles round trip, 3 to 4 hours elevation gain: 300 feet	<i>Moderate</i> Hike along sunny Chalone Creek on the Bench and Old Pinnacles trails to Balconies Cave. On the return trip, cross over the cave via the Balconies Cliffs for views of formations. Flashlight required in cave.
Moses Spring–Rim Trail Loop 2.2-mile loop, 1½ hours elevation gain: 500 feet	<i>Moderate</i> This loop is a good choice for rock formations, talus caves, and the reservoir on a short hike and also a good choice for children. Bear Gulch Cave is open seasonally. Flashlight required in cave.
Condor Gulch–High Peaks Loop 5.3-mile loop, 3 to 5 hours elevation gain: 1,300 feet	<i>Strenuous</i> Walk through the heart of the Pinnacles rock formations, particularly along the Steep and Narrow section of the High Peaks Trail. Add the Rim and Moses Spring trails to extend the loop to 6.1 miles.
High Peaks–Bear Gulch Loop 6.7-mile loop, 4 to 5 hours elevation gain: 1,425 feet	<i>Strenuous</i> Climb into the High Peaks and descend along the ridge through meadows of grasses and, in spring, wildflowers. Return to the Bear Gulch Day Use Area under the shade of sycamores along the Bear Gulch Trail.
Condor Gulch Trail 1.7 miles one way, 1 to 1½ hours elevation gain: 1,100 feet	<i>Moderate to Overlook, strenuous beyond</i> This trail offers spectacular views of the High Peaks, whether you hike just a few minutes or the entire trail. The Overlook is one mile up. Ask about a geology trail guide.
Chalone Peak Trail 9 miles round trip, 3 to 5 hours elevation gain: 2,040 feet	<i>Strenuous</i> Climb to the highest point in the park, North Chalone Peak, and be rewarded with views of the surrounding valleys. Continue on an unmaintained trail to South Chalone Peak for a longer hike. (See large map at lower left.)
Old Pinnacles Trail to Balconies Cave 5.3 miles round trip, 3 to 5 hours no elevation gain	<i>Moderate</i> This sunny hike to Balconies Cave also leads to towering rock formations: Machete Ridge and the Balconies Cliffs. Begin at the Old Pinnacles Trailhead. Flashlight required in cave.
West Side Trails	
Balconies Cliffs–Balconies Cave Loop 2.4-mile loop, 1 to 1½ hours elevation gain: 100 feet	<i>Easy to Moderate</i> This trail through Balconies Cave may require a bit of scrambling through talus passages. Wading may be required in winter. Flashlight required in cave.
Juniper Canyon Loop 4.3-mile loop, 2 to 3 hours elevation gain: 100 feet	<i>Strenuous</i> This steep trail climbs along switchbacks to the heart of the High Peaks. At the top, circle through the rock formations along the Steep and Narrow section of the High Peaks Trail and the Tunnel Trail.
North Wilderness Trail Loop 9.3-mile loop, 5 to 8 hours elevation gain: 1,020 feet	<i>Strenuous</i> This unmaintained trail climbs along ridgetops and then descends into the Chalone Creek bed, where it is marked by rock cairns. Return along the Old Pinnacles and Balconies trails.
High Peaks–Balconies Cave Loop 8.4-mile loop, 4 to 5 hours elevation gain: 1,540 feet	<i>Strenuous</i> Begin by climbing into the High Peaks, and the rest of the loop is downhill or flat. Return along the Old Pinnacles and Balconies trails, going over or through the cave. Flashlight required in cave.



Bear Gulch Cave
© JOHN DITTL

Detail Map



What You Need To Know

To the East Entrance Take CA 25 to CA 146. Turn west on CA 146 into the park.

East Entrance–Pinnacles Visitor Center The visitor center, at the entrance to the campground, has information, a small bookstore, and exhibits. Staff can help you plan your visit. The visitor center is open year-round 9 am to 5 pm. There are picnic tables, restrooms, water, a pay phone, and parking.

Pinnacles Campground The only campground in the park is inside the eastern boundary. NOTE: Camping is prohibited on the west side and outside of this designated campground. The campground offers tent, RV, and group sites; showers; and a store. Please call 831-389-4485 for general campground information. For reservations visit www.recreation.gov or call 877-444-6777.

Bear Gulch Day Use Area Bear Gulch Day Use Area includes picnicking, trailheads, and park headquarters. Bear Gulch Nature Center is open seasonally, as staffing permits. Exhibits there include an earthquake seismograph, a topographic relief map, and natural and cultural history displays.

To the West Entrance Take US 101; at Soledad turn east onto CA 146 and follow signs to the park. **WARNING:** The road from Soledad to west Pinnacles is steep and narrow; RVs, trailers, and large vehicles should avoid this entrance.

West Entrance–Chaparral Trailhead Visitor contact station, restrooms, water, parking at trailhead. No phone.

An automatic gate at the west entrance opens each morning at 7:30 am and closes at night. Visitors can leave the park after the gate is closed, but vehicles cannot enter when the gate is shut. This allows for late hiking and climbing.

Lodging, Food, and Gas These are not available in Pinnacles National Monument, but they can be found in nearby towns. You are welcome to picnic in the park.

Weather, Heat, and Water Daytime temperatures in summer and early autumn can reach above 100°F. Hiking steep trails requires energy and results in greater water loss through sweating. Wear a hat and clothing that provide ventilation and sun protection. Drinking water is available only in developed areas—there is no water along any of the trails. Carry and drink at least one liter of water per person per hour. Heat and dehydration can be fatal.

Pets Pets are not allowed on trails. They must be on a leash in parking lots and picnic areas. Pets should not be left unattended at any time, even in vehicles. Animals left in vehicles during the heat of the day can quickly die from heat exhaustion.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website.

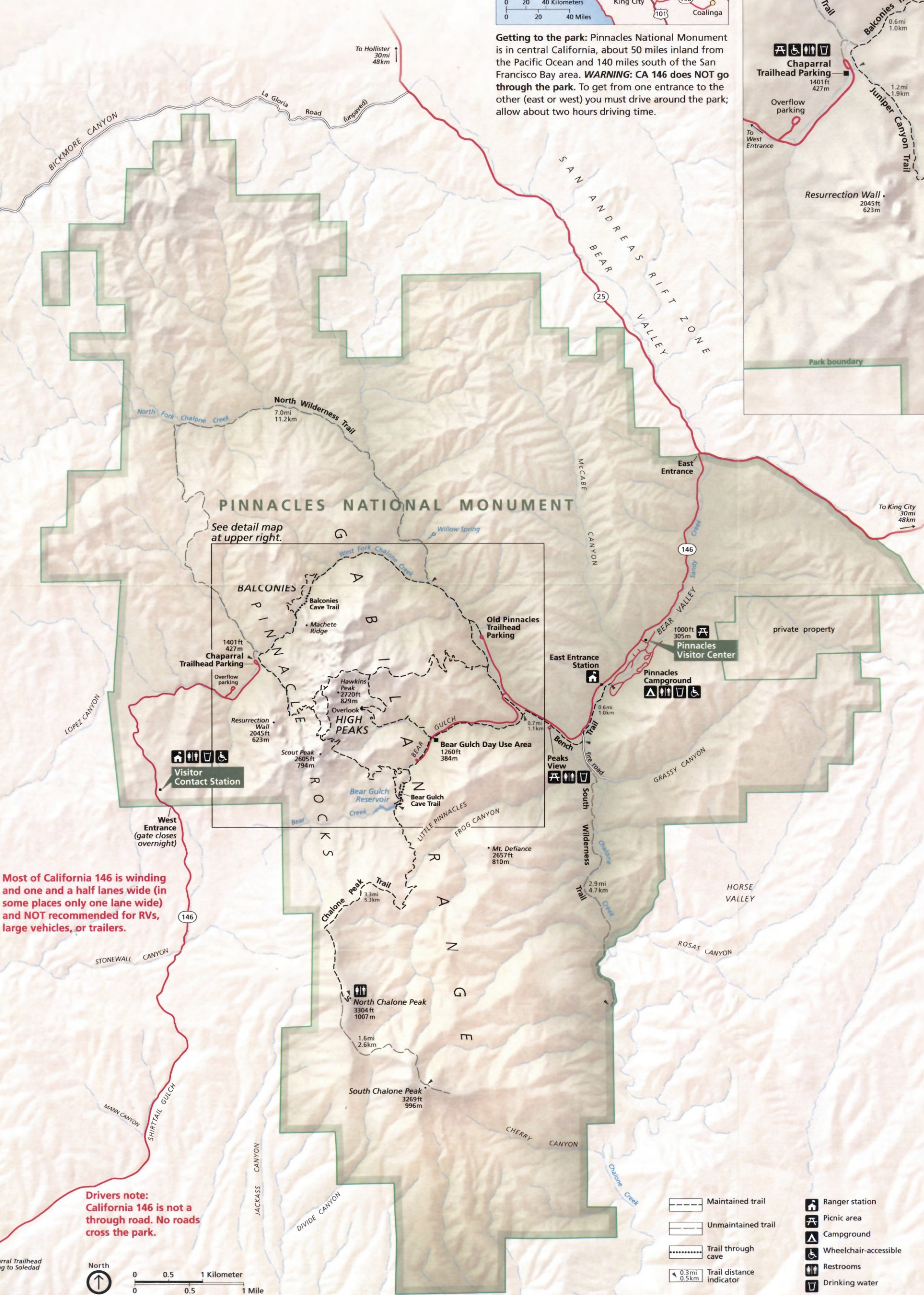
Safety and Regulations Hiking, caving, and climbing can be fun, but remember—if you get injured, you are a long way from medical help. Cell phones may not work in this remote park. Don’t let your guard down when it comes to safety. Be prepared. Please follow these regulations:

Carry and drink plenty of water! • Wear shoes with ankle support and non-slip soles that provide good traction. • Caves have low ceilings and slippery rocks. You must use a proper flashlight. Penlights or small lights will not guide you safely through a dark, rugged cave. • Be alert for poison oak and stinging nettles. • Stay on established trails to help prevent erosion. Green fences indicate restoration work; do not enter these areas. • Bicycles are not permitted on any trails. • Be alert for pedestrians and wildlife on roadways. • Feeding, approaching, or hunting wildlife is prohibited. • Snakes, including rattlesnakes, live in the park. Watch where you step, sit, or place your hands. • Wildflowers, pine cones, rocks, and other natural and cultural features are beautiful, but please do not remove or destroy them. Leave them for the enjoyment of future visitors. All plants, animals, rocks, and structures in the park are protected by federal law. • For firearms regulations, check the park website.

Emergencies: contact a ranger or call 911.

More Information Plan ahead. Contact the park and check our website for ideas about planning your trip, safety tips and regulations, ranger-led activities, and the status of caves.

Pinnacles National Monument
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www.nps.gov/pinn



- Maintained trail
- Unmaintained trail
- Trail through cave
- Trail distance indicator

- Ranger station
- Picnic area
- Campground
- Wheelchair-accessible
- Restrooms
- Drinking water