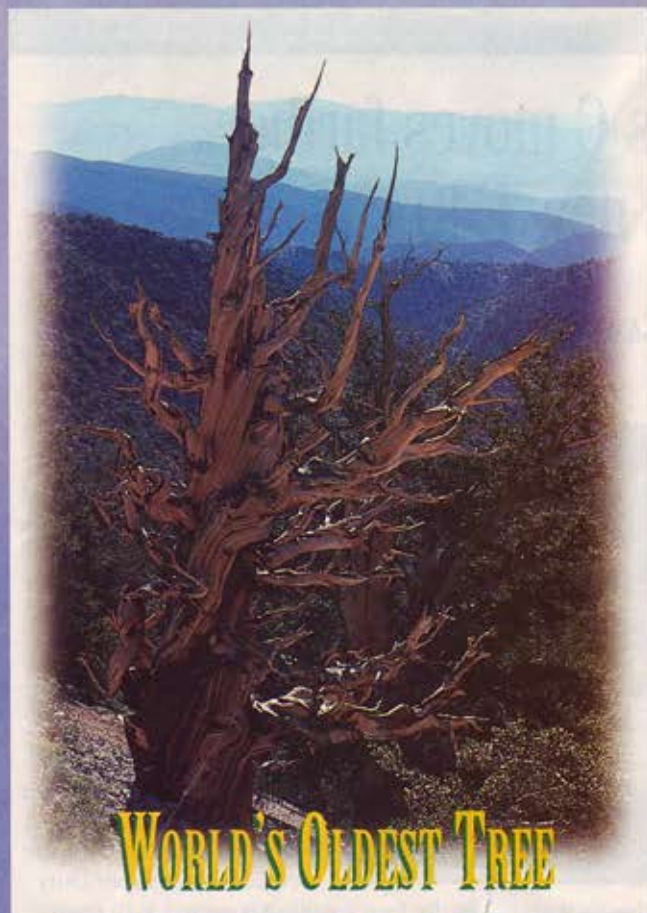


TREES

of the Golden State



WORLD'S OLDEST TREE

The bristlecone pine is a relic that has been on earth more than 40 centuries. Despite its age, however, the bristlecone rarely grows to more than 25 feet high.



WORLD'S TALLEST TREE

The coast redwood (*sequoia sempervirens*), on the other hand, attains an impressive height of nearly 400 feet in its also-impressive life span of 2,000 years.

From the giant sequoia to the bristlecone pine, California's unusual trees are sights worth seeing

RHONDA OSTERTAG

California is home to the world's oldest, tallest, biggest and arguably most unusual trees. They are, respectively, the ancient bristlecone pine, the coast redwood, the giant sequoia and the Joshua tree. Each species weaves a fantastic backdrop for a motorhome vacation and is well worth the hunt.

In pursuit, RV travel-

ers will top 10,000 feet elevation, tour the White Mountains in east-central California and dip to near sea level along the fog-drenched coast. They will journey to the heart of the Sierra Nevada and claim the high-desert realms. Come along and get to know these unique residents of the Golden State.

WORLD'S OLDEST TREE

In a harsh climate high in the White Mountains of

Inyo National Forest exists the world's oldest living tree, the bristlecone pine. These relics exceed 4,500 years in age. While they appear elsewhere in the western United States, it was here that Doctor Edmund Schulman's discovery of their age captured the attention of the scientific world 40 years ago. These trees, which put down roots when the great pyramids were erected in Egypt, cradle in their trunks an unmatched paleoclimatic record. Standing amid them

is humbling. Despite their age, the wind-molded, ice- and sand-polished trees stand less than 25 feet tall. Growth comes slowly, a century's time adding barely an inch in girth. Snags linger a thousand years before erosion claims them.

In the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, comfortable self-guided nature trails at Schulman and Patriarch groves welcome visitors to stroll amid the trees. At Schulman Grove (the more

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WORLD'S BIGGEST TREE

The Agassiz Tree, at 250 feet tall and 25 feet in diameter, is one of the world's 10 largest giant sequoias, which grow only on the western Sierra.



MOST UNUSUAL TREE

The Joshua tree is characterized by its bayonet-leaved branches, which vary in number. A member of the lily family, it blooms at night with fragrant white clusters.

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accessible of the two), the half-mile Discovery Walk strings past Pine Alpha, the first ancient bristlecone dated by Dr. Schulman. The grove's Methuselah Walk (a 4.5-mile loop) visits its 4,700-year-old namesake and at least nine other 40-century-club pines.

Amid the scoured bowl of Patriarch Grove, visitors gaze at the world's largest bristlecone pine, for which the grove is named. The 1,500-year-old Patriarch consists of three mostly dead trunks, with a combined circumference of 37 feet. Needle-clad youngsters dot the Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest—records of the present, witness to the future.

Limber pines intersperse the forest. Few photographers can forgo recording this alpine desert of white gravelly sand, incomparable blue sky and weird living sculptures. Vistas pan the desert ranges of Death Valley and the High Sierra.

A visit requires special attention to your health and your vehicle. Since there's one-third less oxygen at this elevation, anyone with a blood-pressure, heart or lung condition should first consult a physician. To ward off altitude sickness and dehydration, go slow, drink lots of water and heed your body's signals. Vehicles should be tuned, having the carburetor adjusted for high elevations and adequate radiator coolant.

The Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest is located some 40 miles northeast of Big Pine. From U.S. 395, go east on State Highway 168 for 13 miles and turn left on White Mountain Road, which is paved as far as Schulman Grove and continues as a passable dirt road open to passenger vehicles to Patriarch Grove. The route goes past the forest's information centers. Due to its winding ascent, the road is not recommended for large motorhomes or trailers. Motorhome visitors to the area would be wise to take along a dinghy vehicle in which to complete the journey to the bristlecones.

Big Pine is the last place to get gas, drinking water or services. Come prepared for striking drops in temperature, harsh sunlight and strong wind. Primitive camping (maximum length

21 feet) is found at Grandview Campground, part way up White Mountain Road (bring water). Alternative overnight options exist in the Big Pine-Bishop area; consult your *Trailer Life Campground/RV Park & Services Directory*. The peak season is June through October. Before coming, phone Inyo National Forest for road and weather updates, (619) 873-2500.

WORLD'S TALLEST TREE

The coast redwood (*sequoia sempervirens*) occupies a 30-mile-wide, 500-mile-long coastal belt that stretches from 150 miles south of San Francisco to the Oregon border. The rapidly growing coast redwood attains heights in excess of 300 feet and life spans of 2,000 years and boasts the tallest trees measured on earth. Top honor goes to the Howard A. Libby Tree. At 367.8 feet, it reigns over Tall Trees Grove along Redwood Creek in Redwood National Park.

Douglas fir, tan oak and madrone interweave the coast-redwood forest, with Sitka spruce sharing its ranks on the Northern California coast. Fire-hollowed goose-pens and chimney flues, second-generation sprout rings, fern-fuzzy burls and the splendid red trunks entwine. Shadow and light, a veiling fog and sunbursts animate the forest, while redwood sorrel, trillium and sword fern decorate the floor.

More than two dozen state parks, as well as a national park, protect and showcase the coast redwood. It was this tree that prompted the formation of California's first state park, Big Basin Redwoods State Park, in 1902.

At Humboldt Redwoods State Park (south of Eureka), the 32-mile-long Avenue of the Giants and 6-mile-long Mattole Road offer exceptional windshield viewing with opportunities to exit your motorhome and walk the nature trails. Mattole Road tours the celebrated Rockefeller Forest, the world's largest old-growth stand of coast redwoods. Stepping away from the RV at the Big Trees Area, travelers can view the Tall Tree (359 feet tall), the Flatiron Tree (with an unusual

oblong trunk) and the Giant Tree (363 feet tall with a 53-foot circumference).

Farther north near Klamath, 9-mile-long Elk Prairie Parkway (rededicated the Newton B. Drury Scenic Parkway) offers a similar appreciation of Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park. Commonly, at its south end, visitors can view Roosevelt elk grazing in the open meadows.

South of San Francisco, in the Santa Cruz Mountains, nature trails at Big Basin Redwoods State Park (on State Highway 236) and Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park (on State Highway 9) spotlight several esteemed trees. The 0.8-mile all-ability loop at Henry Cowell ranks among the finest, inviting frequent stops and repeat tours. It visits redwoods named for presidents and military leaders. The tallest shoots skyward 285 feet, even after losing its 75-foot crown in a windstorm.

Most redwood state parks extend scenic wooded, riverside or coastal campsites. Along U.S. 101 in Northern California, Redwood National Park offers primitive roadside camping near the beach; miles of motorhomes line this popular strip. Private campgrounds throughout the redwood belt present full-service overnight options. Hiking and horseback riding, pursuing the rhododendron bloom and fishing also engage visitors. Where the redwoods march to the ocean, one finds dark-sand beaches, chiseled cliffs, cobbled coves and a wild surf. The tree's range welcomes year-round appreciation.

WORLD'S BIGGEST TREE

The giant sequoia resides in 75 locations on the western flank of the Sierra Nevada. Its seekers can best point their RVs toward Sequoia National Park (east of Fresno) or Calaveras Big Trees State Park. Each extends record-size sequoias and first-rate recreation.

The giant sequoia first came to the public's attention at Calaveras Big Trees, once thought the sole growing site. Its North Grove is where promoters felled the Discovery Tree in 1853. It took five men 22 days to drill the tree's circumference with auger

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holes and several more for the tree to fall. The 25-foot-diameter stump became a dance floor, the trunk a bowling alley and the stripped-bark shell a traveling display to convince people of the tree's existence. The act so riled John Muir that he penned *The Vandals Then Danced Upon the Stump!*

A milelong self-guided nature trail tours North Grove, visiting the Discovery Tree, the Mother of the Forest (another victim of promoters) and several magnificent, unadulterated examples of giant sequoia, named and unnamed. The park's larger, more remote South Grove offers a 5.25-mile tour, making a loop and a detour to the Agassiz Tree, one of the world's 10 largest sequoias at 250 feet tall and 25 feet in diameter.

Although the brochure identifies several trees, the grove includes many unheralded giants. As with coast redwoods, some show fire-hollowed bases and chimneys. Azalea and dogwood blooms add to the spectacle;

at Calaveras Big Trees, a postcard-notification system alerts visitors to their onset. The park has year-round camping, with all 129 sites open in summer. Winter visitors admire sequoias in snowy display.

At Sequoia National Park, Giant Forest, which is reached via Generals Highway, similarly applauds the big tree. Experts judge this 5-square-mile area to hold the finest collection of giant sequoias anywhere, with four of the five largest in the world. Foremost is the General Sherman Tree, the world's largest living thing (by volume). It stands some 275 feet high and has a base diameter of 36.5 feet, with a 14-foot diameter 180 feet above ground. It exceeds 2,500 years in age.

Some 40 miles of trails probe Giant Forest, allowing for various loops. The most popular remains the 2-mile Congress Trail, knitting together the General Sherman, the President and the Chief Sequoyah trees, the House and Senate groups, and the General Lee and McKinley trees. Short side tours add other named attractions; purchase the park brochure for further information about Giant Forest. Camping is available within national park boundaries. Recreation is year-round; winter guests strap on skis and snowshoes.

MOST UNUSUAL TREE

The Joshua tree, a member of the lily family, completes this lineup of superlatives. Its erratically branched, bayonet-leaved form clinches the honor of "most unusual." This undisciplined tree is a celebrated resident at parks such as Saddleback Butte State Park and newcomer Ripley Desert Woodlands, with Joshua Tree National Park paying it the highest tribute. Its typical setting unites cacti and desert wildflowers, unusual rock formations, arid buttes and peaks, sweeping vistas and a big-screen celestial view. Photographers delight in the bizarre tree.

The Joshua tree reaches a maximum height of 30 feet, and the number of arms varies greatly. On an irregular schedule, this night-bloomer puts forth fragrant white clusters. Unfor-

tunately, early-day motorists torched these trees to light the way for fellow travelers. In June 1930, the world's tallest Joshua fell to this practice. Despite the burning spree, many 700- to 800-year-old Joshuas still exist. Today, the world's largest Joshua tree resides in San Bernardino National Forest, removed from major roads.

In Antelope Valley, Ripley Desert Woodlands, a 500-acre park, showcases a Joshua-juniper complex—once common, now nearly nonexistent. Within this congested woodland, the trees stand barely 10 feet tall. The undeveloped park straddles Lancaster Road, 7 miles west of the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve; look for the park boundary notices. The parking is roadside, and exploration is on your own, with old tire tracks offering tried routes. While touring, beware of the sharp radial leaves of the many low-growing Joshua sprouts.

At Saddleback Butte State Park, east of Lancaster, a fine Joshua tree-studded plateau spreads between Saddleback Butte and the campground and picnic areas. A nature trail near the ranger station introduces the tree and its habitat. A longer trail tops the butte (elevation 3,651 feet) for an overview of the Joshua-tree forest and the high-desert neighborhood.

Throughout the western half of Joshua Tree National Park (near the town of Twentynine Palms), visitors find expansive plains of the picturesque tree; Covington Flats boasts great numbers. The tree is also well-represented in the campgrounds and near the rock jumbles that attract climbers from across the nation. Camping is primitive, but the setting is regal. Nine campgrounds serve park guests. (Be sure to top off both fuel and water tanks before you go.)

Campsites here and at Saddleback Butte fill quickly, when spring blooms bring a blush to the desert face. While Joshuas welcome year-round admiration, summer outings are best confined to morning and evening hours.

The world's oldest, tallest, biggest and most unusual trees await. Discover them for yourself. ■