



Black Mountain Grove

Sequoia National Forest

Giant Sequoia National Monument

Western Divide Ranger District



WHY IS BLACK MOUNTAIN GROVE SIGNIFICANT?

Some of the earliest timber cutting in giant sequoia groves by the Forest Service was done here in approximately 1970. The cutting was designed to improve health and vigor of the grove. It was done on a small scale with little fanfare. In 1985 similar cutting on a larger scale helped create a national controversy on the subject of giant sequoia grove management by the Forest Service.

WHAT WILL YOU SEE?

There are three suggested stopping points on this tour, although the grove itself covers more than 1,000 acres. You are welcome to explore all of it. Stopping points are indicated by a Forest Service informational sign mounted on a 4X4 post.

WHERE IS BLACK MOUNTAIN GROVE?

Black Mountain Grove is located at approximately 6500 feet in elevation on the Western Divide Ranger District. It can be reached by driving east 17 miles from Porterville on State Highway 190 to Springville, then another 16 miles to Camp Nelson. At the Camp Nelson turnoff, bear right and take the Coy Flat road to Coy Flat Campground, one mile. Continue six miles past the campground on a rough dirt road to the cattle guard and fence marking the boundary between the Sequoia National Forest and the Tule River Indian Reservation. Continue another 300 feet to the first stop.

Travel time from Porterville is approximately 1.5 hours. The route is passable for ordinary passenger vehicles, but there will be some dust and roughness of the road surface once you leave Coy Flat Campground.

STOP #1: TIMBER HARVEST AND FOREST REGENERATION

As you park in the wide spot on the right, you will notice a patch of small trees (over 40 feet tall) surrounded by scattered large, old giant sequoias and larger trees of other species. These smaller trees were planted in 1971 after timber harvesting removed slow-growing and possibly diseased white fir, incense-cedar, and pine. At that time, this portion of the Black Mountain Grove was administered by the Forest Service.

In 1980 a transfer was made to the Tule Indian Reservation. Notice the young giant sequoia, white fir and incense-cedar that are present in addition to the planted Jeffrey pine on the 3-acre "patch". All but the Jeffrey pine have become established from seed after a seed bed was prepared by removing logging debris and making bare soil available for the seed to land on.

The forest has been renewed (regenerated) on this site, and there are young giant sequoia trees present to take the place of the large, old ones when they finally die.

STOP #2: FIRE AND THE RENEWAL OF GIANT SEQUOIA

From Stop #1 go back approximately 500 feet to the road junction. Turn left and drive three miles to Stop #2. Travel time from Stop #1 is approximately ten minutes.

Uphill on the left is a large open area where you can readily see numerous large, old giant sequoia. This area was subject to a timber harvest in 1986. This is something like what the three acre patch at Stop #1 looked like in 1971 except this area is 25 acres in size rather than only three.

The cutting was done here to help promote the establishment of young giant sequoia seedlings, to reduce the chances for devastating wildfire, and to contribute to the supply of wood products needed by the nation.

Notice the small giant sequoia and other species now beginning to appear. Some were planted by the Forest Service in 1991, and some have become established from natural seed. Most are 5 to 12 feet high. Can you imagine what this site will look like in another 20 years?

Look downhill into the uncut stand below. Notice the dense growth of trees underneath the large giant sequoias. Had the Forest Service not been successful in suppressing wildfires, some of this dense growth probably would have been burned in this century, leaving a more open appearance. The large, old giant sequoia trees can usually tolerate frequent but light fire.



Their bark is thick, and their crowns are high enough to prevent them from being scorched. In fact, giant sequoia seeds need the bare soil and sunny environment created by fire to germinate and become established. However, when undergrowth is allowed to accumulate as you see below, numerous "fuel ladders" are created so that fire can reach into the crowns of the tall tree. The large trees could now be killed in an intense fire. The cutting on the uphill side of the road was done in part to simulate the beneficial effects that fire has on giant sequoia groves, without the harmful effects of intense wildfire. The logging done on this site used tractors to pull the fir, pine and incense-cedar logs down to the road. Because tractors are maneuverable, damage to some of the regenerated forest was avoided. As you will see on the next stop, steep slopes limit the flexibility we have in saving this "advanced" regeneration.

STOP #3: A NATIONAL CONTROVERSY

From Stop #2 continue two miles. At this point, you will reach a small turnout in the road. Stop #3 is approximately 100 feet back and upslope from the road. You are at the bottom portion of the site. To reach the top portion of the site at Stop #3, continue on what appears to be the main road and bear left at all intersections. This is a rough road and is not recommended for most automobiles. Travel time from Stop #2 is approximately 15 minutes.

Since 1987 the management of giant sequoia groves by the Forest Service has been subject to a tremendous amount of media exposure, both locally and nationally. Photographs of the site before you have been published in numerous articles on the subject, including one in the National Geographic Magazine.

How did this site become the symbol of controversy, even though in 1986 the Forest Supervisor halted such logging activity, and the management goals were identical to those at Stop #2?

For one thing, the scale appears to be very large, even though this site is only 13 acres as compared to 25 acres at Stop #2. The reason for the larger appearance is the fact that the ground is steep, and the entire site can be seen from one vantage point. Another impression that most people had was the "starkness" of this site. This is because when other species were removed, only the few large giant sequoia you see remained. Also on this steep slope tractors were not appropriate to use for removing logging debris and naturally occurring fuels, so the Forest Service burned under prescribed conditions to do that job. Because of the logistics in "broadcast burning" such as this, the advanced regeneration could not be saved as it was at Stop #2. However, notice the vigorous growth on planted giant sequoias and ponderosa pine, now approaching 15 to 20 feet in height after only ten growing seasons.

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Forest management strategy that resulted in the cutting at this site was formulated more than 20 years ago in a time when people viewed National Forests, and the values expected from them, in a different way. Increasing population, increasing public awareness, and changing social values shifted more rapidly than the Forest Service recognized, creating the controversy that erupted in the mid-1980's.

In 1990 the Sequoia National Forest entered an agreement with a wide range of interested citizens and user groups, including the Sierra Club and Save-the-Redwoods League. This agreement is referred to as the "Mediated Settlement", and it modifies the policies under which the forest is managed. It specifies that the goal of giant sequoia grove administration shall be "To protect, preserve, and restore the Groves for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations."

As a result, all National Forest giant sequoia groves have been removed from the land base considered suitable for the sustained production of timber and other commodities. The Forest Service has begun intensive mapping of the groves and is currently inventorying the groves. These tasks are needed to carry out the agreed upon goals.

Practice a Leave No Trace! Ethic.

**When you leave your campsite,
Take all garbage, large and small.**

PACK IT IN!

PACK IT OUT!

**Thank you for your help in making forest visits
enjoyable and safe! Plan ahead by obtaining a
National Forest map at one of the following offices:**

Western Divide Ranger District

**32588 Hwy 190
Springville, CA 93265
[559-539-2607](tel:559-539-2607)**

Forest Supervisor's Office

**1839 S. Newcomb Street
Porterville, CA 93257
[559-784-1500](tel:559-784-1500)**

