



United States Department of Agriculture  
Forest Service

**PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGION**

*Restoring, Enhancing and Sustaining Forests in California, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands*

**Sierra National Forest**

# Nelder Grove of Giant Sequoias Bass Lake Ranger Districts

**WELCOME**

The Nelder Grove of Giant Sequoias is a 1540 acre tract in the Sierra National Forest containing 106 mature giant sequoias intermingled in a forest of second growth pine, fir and incense cedar. Located in the center of the sequoia range, south of Yosemite National Park, the grove has been managed as an historical site, preserving the uniqueness and historical significance of the giant sequoias and what has occurred beneath their branches.

Nelder Grove contrasts sharply with sequoia groves in the nearby National parks. There are no paved roads and no crowds blocking the view of the big trees. The forest is much more dense, and as a result, the giant trees seem to appear suddenly as visitors walk through the grove.

Near Nelder Grove Campground is an interpretive area containing several historical replicas and displays. Two restored cabins form the center of the site with life-size replicas of cross-log and two-pole logging chutes along the original paths loggers used 100 years ago. Also mixed in among the area are several giant sequoia tree stumps left by the loggers. Within a nice, short walk of the large cabin is the "Big Ed" giant sequoia.

The "Bull Buck Tree" was once considered a contender for the title of the "world's largest tree." Precise measurements are impressive with a height of 246 feet and a ground level circumference of 99 feet.

There is a one mile long, self-guiding interpretive walk along The Shadow of the Giants National Recreation Trail, located in the southwest corner of the grove. Signs along the path tell the story of the giant sequoias and its forest neighbors as the trail meanders along the banks of Nelder Creek. Toilets are located at the beginning of the trail. The trail was originally constructed in 1965 and was established as a National Recreation Trail in 1978.

The Graveyard of the Giants, a small grove of large sequoias killed by a wildfire can be seen after a three mile hike along a trail from the campground. This death by fire is unusual as the thick sequoia bark usually protects them from fire. On a nearby ridge is a group of sequoias known as "Granddad and the Kids." Beneath an isolated, mature sequoia with one huge branch outstretched like a protective arm, stands several young sequoias.

Management objectives for Nelder Grove are to protect the larger trees and the historical remnants of Native American Indians and logging in the grove, while fostering the establishment of new seedlings and the growth of these younger trees. Your cooperation in leaving things as you find them will help us to achieve these objectives.

**HISTORY OF THE GROVE**

Historically this area did not see a heavy influx of Europeans until the California Gold Rush, which explains why there is not written mention of it before the 1850s. The grove's history goes back much farther. Archaeological studies found the Southern Sierra Miwok were well aware of the grove and had been for several thousand years, camping while gathering acorns and hunting.



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The area's first Euro American historical reference appears in the 1851 diary of a soldier in the Mariposa Battalion. Galen Clark of Yosemite called it Fresno Grove as it was then a part of Fresno County. The grove is named for John Nelder, who in 1849 left New Orleans, heading for California to quench his gold fever. By 1875, he had grown weary of prospecting and built a log cabin in the shadows of the towering trees, on homesteaded land. That same year, John Muir was exploring the giant sequoia groves south of Yosemite to establish the boundaries of Fresno Grove.

The famed naturalist came upon John Nelder sitting outside his new log cabin. Muir describes Nelder as "a fine, kind man, who in going into the woods has at last gone home; for he loves nature truly and realizes that these last shadowy days with scarce a glint of gold in them are the best of all." Nelder lived another fourteen years and died in 1889 when his cabin burned.

From 1878 until operations were shut down in the mid-1890s, Madera Flume and Trading Company logged extensively in and around the grove. Although their primary targets were sugar pine, ponderosa pine, white fir and cedar, they also brought down some of the sequoias, especially those less than eight feet in diameter. Evidence of those activities is still visible, including the cross-log and two-pole chutes used to transport logs to the mill.

From 1888 to 1892, California Mill #4 was located within the grove itself with a small-gauge rail tramway on which cars loaded with lumber rolled three quarters of a mile to the flume. After the mill had closed in 1892, most of the larger sequoias that were cut were felled to make posts, grape stakes and building shakes.

After Nelder's death the land was sold to a lumber company and was acquired by the Forest Service in 1928. The grove has since received custodial care and large number of "young" sequoias have become established. We hope your stay in Nelder Grove is a pleasant one.

Please view these historical sites without disturbing them. Sequoia wood is protected. No fuelwood cutting in the grove. It's a violation of Federal law to remove artifacts from archaeological sites.

For additional information please contact:

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