

The ancient giants of Yosemite, under a billion stars

June 30 2018, by David Mcnew

The Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias, at the heart of California's Yosemite National Park, is home to 500 of the towering trees—many at least 2,000 years old, having sprouted around the time of Jesus Christ.

One of the world's 65 remaining natural [sequoia](#) groves, and the largest in Yosemite, Mariposa Grove reopened in June, three years after the start of a \$40 million restoration project to protect the ancient giants for future generations.

The oldest sequoias can live for more than 3,000 years, their bark resisting insect attacks and helping them survive countless wildfires over the millennia.

Gone are the gift shop, suffocating fumes from a chugging diesel tram and 115 spaces of parking lot asphalt that once cluttered the site, a major tourist destination four hours' drive from San Francisco.

Only a small parking lot remains alongside new restrooms.

The removal of asphalt helps protect the trees' shallow root system from compaction, allows water to flow naturally again, and reduces damaging air pollution from excess vehicles.

Four miles (6.5 kilometers) of new trails and bridges have been constructed. A new boardwalk through part of the grove is elevated over sensitive areas and facilitates handicapped access to view the trees.

During most of the day, free shuttle buses ferry tourists to the heart of the grove from a new visitor center two miles away.

People stand in line to photograph one another at the California Tunnel Tree, a surviving sequoia through which a wagon-sized hole was long ago bored.

But like the rest of the forest, Mariposa Grove never closes, so after the last shuttle bus returns and the road gate is reopened, more adventurous visitors can drive to the tiny parking lot and hike through the night in the ancient woods.

And as day becomes night, billions of stars shine down on the 300-foot (90-meter) tall [trees](#), the 1,800-year-old Grizzly Giant and its age-old fellows towering over the silent scene.

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