



PATRICK'S POINT STATE PARK

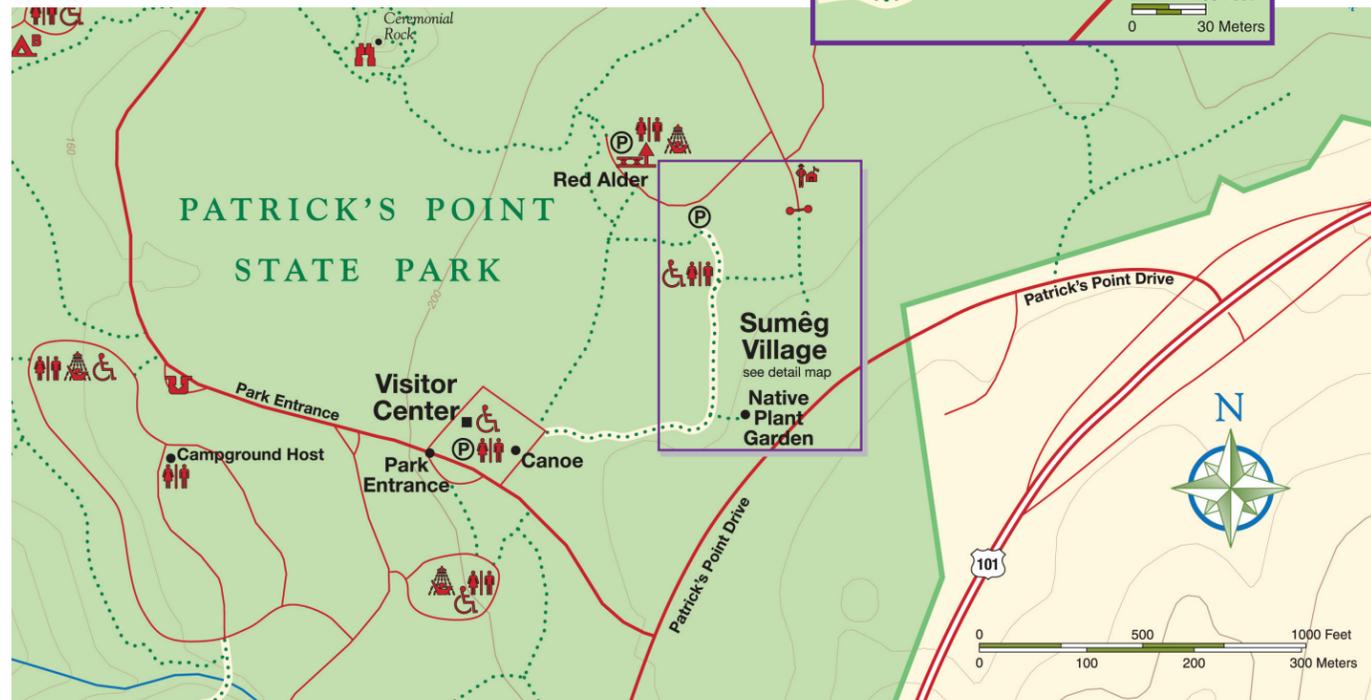
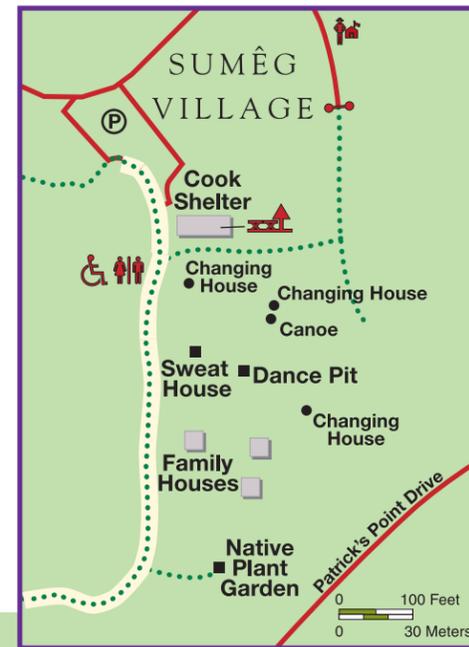
SUMÊG VILLAGE

Native American Cultural Setting

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization.

For more information contact:

North Coast Redwood Interpretive Assn.
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Legend

	Freeway		Locked Gate
	Major road		Park Building
	Paved road		Parking
	Trail		Ranger Station
	Accessible Trail		Restrooms
	Accessible Feature		RV Sanitation Station
	Campground		Showers
	Group Picnic Area		Viewpoint

Patrick's Point State Park
4150 Patrick's Point Drive
Trinidad, CA 95570
707/677-1945

For more information:
www.parks.ca.gov

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Yurok Culture

The Yurok were a "water" people whose lives and villages were centered around rivers and the sea. Even the name Yurok indicated a people who live "down river." The local climate was damp but mild, and the Yurok rarely had need for cold-weather clothing.

Each village functioned independently. The Yurok had no central government—no chief, no army, no courts and no police. They had no laws to secure the public interest; all laws governed interactions between private parties. The Yurok settled violations by transfer of wealth, which consisted of dentillium (tusk-shaped sea shells), obsidian knife blades, white deerskins, red-headed woodpecker scalps, houses and canoes. Virtue and wealth were naturally associated because a person could not break the law and remain wealthy. The head man of each village was usually the wealthiest—and most virtuous—person.

Men married later in life because wives were expensive; Yurok men tried to marry women whose skillful hands could work hard and bring wealth to the family. Yurok women were excellent at making baskets, used for cradling babies and gathering, storing and cooking food.

The Yurok diet was varied and food was generally plentiful. They hunted deer and elk, took seals and fish from the sea, and gathered berries and acorns. A favorite meal, acorn soup, was prepared by placing fire-heated rocks in waterproofed cooking baskets filled with acorn meal and water.

Sumêg Village

In the 1800s, the Yurok world extended from the mouth of the Klamath River north to Wilson Creek, near Crescent City, and south to Little River, near McKinleyville. The Yurok people had fifty-six villages, from the north at Big Lagoon to the south at Trinidad. Village sizes varied from two to as many as 24 houses.

Though our replica of a small Yurok village is not an actual village site (no original structures remain from this era), the setting is close to traditional Yurok summer food-gathering locations.

In 1990 an all-Yurok crew constructed this village. It was officially named Sumêg—a name that means forever—in the hope that the village would endure for generations to come. Today the village is used as a site for cultural and educational activities that preserve the heritage of several neighboring tribes—Yurok, Kúruk and Hoopa.



Family house

Family House

Family houses were built of redwood planks split from fallen logs using elk antler and wooden wedge tools. Curved planks were placed on the roof to draw off the rain. A covered skylight opening in the roof let the light in and the smoke out. The entire plank structure was lashed together using hazel saplings the builders had made pliable by rapidly heating them in a fire. Internal steam created by intense heat burst the saplings into fibers that were soaked and twisted into rope.

The houses were built on two levels. The lower level, a square pit, had a fire burning continuously; during very foul weather, the women and children slept below. When the weather was good, everyone slept outside. The upper level had a broad ledge around the top of the pit for storing baskets and wooden chests that held the family's food and wealth.

Family houses were also used for protection. Small round doors kept out intruders and bears. The sizes and shapes of the doors allowed women to easily defend the houses with burning sticks from the fire.



Ongoing repair to village structures is a never-ending job and requires the time and effort of many volunteers.



Dance pit

Dance Pit

When a child became spiritually ill, the family would take their house apart to create a pit for a brush dance—a healing spiritual and social event that lasted several days and nights. People gathered together to visit with friends and family, eat good food and participate in the ceremony.

To prepare for the healing dance, the local medicine woman would gather herbs, fast for ten days and ritually purify herself in the sweat house. The medicine woman then sat in the pit and made steaming, curative mixtures of herbs to help the child. Mother and child sat across the fire from the medicine woman, who faced east, while men and unmarried women in ceremonial clothes danced around them. Much of their traditional regalia was very elaborate. The women's shell-bedecked dresses “sang like rushing streams and wind in the trees” when they moved.

Changing House

These shelters are used as changing rooms for today's brush dancers. Each tribe—Kúruk, Yurok and Hoopa—has its own changing house.



Changing house

Redwood Canoe

Yurok canoes were made from naturally fallen redwood trees. A typical canoe took about five years to make because all construction had to be done after the ordinary work of daily survival. These vessels were very seaworthy. An average canoe weighed about 1,000 pounds and seagoing hunting canoes were 40-50 feet long.

Yuroks believed their canoes had spirits. To keep from transferring any bad spirits to his canoe, the builder never worked on it when he was angry or spiritually troubled. Since a canoe represented a living being, it was created with a nose in the bow, lungs and a heart in the middle, and kidneys at the end in the stern.

With bone tools and fire, a canoe builder would cut a log of usable length. The log was then moved to a nearby stream and floated to a spot where construction took place. First the log was split in half lengthwise using wedges of oak and elk antler. Then it was rolled flat-side down so the heartwood, the strongest and heaviest part of the log, formed the canoe bottom. The seat was at the stern.

The process of shaping and hollowing the canoe involved a series of chiseling, burning and scraping operations using shell adzes with rock handles. As each canoe was completed, it was filled with shavings that were fired to purify the canoe, burn away any splinters and harden it with a fire polish.

Yurok canoes were kept in water to prevent cracking and would float even when full of water. Hunters used this fact to advantage. To bring a dead seal into the canoe, they would float it beside the canoe, tip the canoe to let water in over the side, float the seal in and then right the canoe.



Redwood ceremonial canoe

Sweat Houses

Sweat houses were important to Yurok culture. When weather was foul, the men and boys sheltered in the sweat house and slept there. The house was a low structure, mostly underground, having a separate entrance and exit. It was used for bathing and ritual purification by men and occasionally by the local medicine women.

Men would bring armfuls of sticks into the structure and light a fire. Frequently the smoke pouring from cracks in the house made it appear to be on fire. Men and boys would enter to



Sweat house

participate in the sweat after the smoke stopped coming through the cracks and the fire had become coals.

When individuals felt their purification was complete, they would leave the sweat house by the exit door,

facing a source of water. The final stage of the sweat involved going into the water to wash. Sometimes the people were so weak when they exited the house that they lay on the ground for a while before entering the water.

The Native Herb Garden

In 1973 the Patrick's Point Garden Club created a garden in the park that consisted of plants and herbs native to this foggy coastal environment. In 1997 the garden was reestablished as a Native American plant garden. Adjacent to Sumêg Village, it contains examples of plants that have been used for thousands of years by the Yurok people—some for food, and others for ceremonial purposes, medicine and basket making.

Accessible Features

In Sumêg Village, an accessible trail allows viewing of the reconstructed Yurok structures and the Native Plant Garden. Call the park for specific accessibility information.