

Museum to feature state parks artifacts

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Most Californians know their state parks as a place to camp, walk on the beach or stare with jaws gaping into a canopy of giant redwoods. Fewer know the state parks system also guards one of the largest troves of historical artifacts in the nation.

Soon, Californians will be able to walk through that remarkable assembly of artifacts for the first time. They can survey one of the largest collections anywhere of American Indian basketry, behold racks of ornate furniture once owned by big names straight from the history books, and eye curiosities – such as Kit Carson’s name carved into a tree stump.

All these and a lot more are held by the California Department of Parks and Recreation at its Museum Collections Center, a vast storage and research facility unveiled Wednesday after more than four years of preparation.

The center is housed at a cavernous concrete warehouse at Sacramento’s McClellan Park, a former U.S. Air Force installation. The state parks system spent four years and \$15 million refurbishing the building. In total, more than a million artifacts are stored here – and millions more documents and photographs – most of which have never been displayed in a state park or museum. Parks officials said they have as much responsibility to protect these remnants of California’s past as they do the parks themselves.

Starting Jan. 7, the Museum Collections Center will be open to the public.

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