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California

by John Escott

(Adapted book. Elementary book)

Chapter 1. The Golden State

Americans call California ‘The Golden State’. And it’s true that people once came to look for gold and silver in the mountains. Now they come to see the great cities, the big parks, the beautiful desert, the wonderful coast of Big Sur, or to enjoy Disneyland.

More than thirty million people live here, and millions more visit the state every year. Of the fifty states of America, only Texas and Alaska are bigger than California.

It is the home of Hollywood and the American film business of computers and of California wines. Its long dry summers and wet winters make it a wonderful place for growing most things.

But 150 years ago it was just a land of deserts and mountains...

Chapter 2. The Gold Rush

America made California an American state in 1850, two years after winning it from Mexico in the Mexican-American War.

During those two years, something important happened in California. Something which sent men hurrying across wild and dangerous country, or on long journeys by sea, to get there.

On January 24, 1848, nine days before the end of the war, thirty-six-year-old James Wilson Marshall was working on the

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land, eighty kilometres east of Sutter's Fort, which was later to become the city of Sacramento. Suddenly he saw something bright and yellow in a river. Looking more carefully he discovered small pieces of gold, washed down in the river from the Sierra Nevada mountains.



Prospecting for gold

On March 15, a San Francisco newspaper, The Californian, told the story of Marshall's discovery. The news travelled across the world, and soon men from

Australia, France, Britain, Germany, China, Mexico, Peru and Hawaii, as well as the rest of America, started the long journey to California. They all wanted to find gold, and to become rich. They were often called 'Forty-niners', because most of them arrived in 1849. This was the start of the Gold Rush.

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A Karok Indian in 1890

By 1852, there were more than 100,000 prospectors in California. Gold mining villages grew on the lower western sides of the Sierra Nevada mountains - the 'Gold Country'. San Francisco was soon a large, busy city, selling everything the prospectors and miners needed. Sailing ships arrived and their sailors ran off to the Gold Country to look for gold in the rivers, or to work in the mines. Ships often sailed away from San Francisco with half their sailors missing!

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Gold mining

California was soon a dangerous place to live. There were more than a thousand killings in San Francisco during the early 1850s. And many of the Forty-niners were wild men who took things from, and killed, the Indians - the first Americans.

By the middle of the 1850s, it was getting more and more difficult to find gold by prospecting in rivers. Most of the gold was under the ground, so mining businesses started to use machines to get at the gold.

Then, in the 1860s, people discovered something new in the ground. They called it black gold, because it soon made them rich. Its real name? Oil.

In 1869, workers finished building the first railway between the east and the west coasts of America, through the Rocky Mountains and the Sierra Nevada mountains. Most of the workers were Chinese. They worked hard, at difficult and

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dangerous jobs, for very little money. After they finished the railway, journeys from other parts of America were easier.

Chapter 3. San Francisco

At 5.13 a.m. on April 18, 1906, there was a terrible earthquake in San Francisco. The earthquake destroyed about 5,000 buildings immediately. Most of the other buildings in the city burned down in the great fire that followed it. 3,000 people died and 300,000 people lost their homes in the fire and the earthquake.



After the earthquake

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Today, the buildings in San Francisco are much stronger.

They are specially built so that they usually stand up well in earthquakes. In 1989, when there was another earthquake in the city, only eleven people died and 1,800 lost their homes.

San Francisco sits on a hill between San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. One of the best places to see nearly all of the city is from the top of Twin Peaks, its second and third highest hills.

Coming into San Francisco by sea, you enter through the Golden Gate - the name Captain John Fremont gave to the way in to the city's harbour in 1846.

The famous Golden Gate Bridge opened to traffic in May, 1937. It joins San Francisco to Marin County. The bridge was the work of an engineer, Joseph Strauss, and he and his men built it in four years (today workers need four years to paint it!). At 1280 metres it is one of the longest bridges in the world. 100,000 cars travel across it every day.

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Golden Gate Bridge

Golden Gate Park, between Fulton Street and Lincoln Way, has beautiful trees and flowers, and small lakes. There are three museums to visit, and a Japanese Tea Garden. Or you can ride on a horse, go fishing, watch baseball, or play tennis or golf.

Fisherman's Wharf, on Jefferson Street, is now a tourist area, with little shops and seafood restaurants. But fishermen still go out early every morning and come back in the afternoon with fish for the restaurants.

The boat for tourists going to Alcatraz, the prison island, leaves from Pier 41. Alcatraz was a prison between 1934 and 1963, but now you can tour the cell rows. Prisoners once named these cell rows after famous American streets (New York's Park Avenue, Los Angeles' Sunset Boulevard, etc.).

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Alcatraz

One prisoner was Robert Stroud. He was called the 'Birdman of Alcatraz' because he was famous for keeping birds in his cell.

San Francisco is a city of hills - Nob Hill, Telegraph Hill, and the often-photographed Lombard Street which is on Russian Hill.

On August 1, 1873, the first San Francisco cable car climbed up Nob Hill. Andrew Hallidie, an engineer from Scotland who built it, was driving it. Soon there were 600 cable cars in the city, but today there are only thirty-seven. They travel between Downtown and Fisherman's Wharf, and Nob Hill and the Financial District. There is an interesting Cable Car Museum at 1201 Mason Street.

Union Square, in the middle of Downtown, is where you find the biggest shops - like Macy's and Saks Fifth Avenue - and the hotels.

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City Hall, in Van Ness Avenue, is one of the city's most beautiful buildings. It was built in 1915.

By 1850 there were about 4.000 Chinese people living in San Francisco. Many more came to work in the gold mines, and to build the railway. Today, people come from Japan, Korea and Vietnam, as well as China. And tourists go to the part of the city called Chinatown to see the beautiful buildings, and to visit the little shops and food stalls.

The interesting gateway to Chinatown, with its dragons across the top, is at Grant and Bush Streets.

San Francisco is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. 800.000 people live here, but every year another 2.5 million visitors come to enjoy it.



Chinatown

Chapter 4. Parks

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California is the home of some of the oldest and biggest trees in the world.

The famous giant redwood trees can be seen in a number of state parks. These begin about 300 kilometres north of San Francisco, and US Highway 101 takes you through them.

Humboldt Redwoods State Park is a twenty million year-old forest. Visitors drive through its fifty-two kilometre Avenue of the Giants to see some of the world's tallest redwood trees.

East of San Francisco are three of America's wonderful National Parks.

Yosemite National Park covers more than 1,600 square kilometres of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Three million tourists visit the park every year. Most of them come to see the beautiful waterfalls and rocky cliffs of the eleven kilometre Yosemite Valley at its centre. You can take a tour bus or drive into the valley.

Yosemite is also a favourite place for climbing, walking, bicycling and camping. And in winter, cross-country skiers ski along the valley floor.

South of Yosemite are the Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. They are next to each other and they are usually visited together.

The sequoia tree is another kind of redwood, not quite as tall as those in the redwoods parks, but very much fatter.

The General Sherman Tree in Sequoia Park's Giant Forest is 31 metres round and 84 metres tall.

On the eastern side of Sequoia Park is Mount Whitney, 4,418 metres high, and the highest place in California. The General Highway joins Sequoia and Kings Canyon.

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North of Yosemite is Lake Tahoe. Most of the land around the lake is private, but there are public parks where visitors can enjoy California's most beautiful lake.

Lake Tahoe is 35 kilometres long and 19 kilometres across, and it is a favourite place for water sports, horse-riding and walking - and in the winter for skiing. The prettiest part of the lake is the south-western corner where Emerald Bay State Park meets Emerald Bay. There are places to camp, and it is a good place for swimming and boating.

Chapter 5. Highway 1

Highway 1 is the 643 kilometre coast road from San Francisco to Los Angeles, running along beside rocky cliffs and white beaches.

The first stop for most tourists driving south is Monterey. It is the old Mexican town of what was once called Alta (Upper) California.

Once famous for fishing, Monterey Bay sardines were an important business for the town at the beginning of the twentieth century. The fish were 'canned' in Cannery Row, later made famous by writer, John Steinbeck, in his book. Cannery Row.

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Monterey Bay

Another famous writer lived in Monterey for a short time. Robert Louis Stevenson, who wrote *Treasure Island*, stayed in a house at 530, Houston Street for four months after arriving in California in 1879. Monterey's Old Fisherman's Wharf is full of small shops, and has restaurants where you can sit and look out into the harbour.

The beautiful '17-Mile Drive' starts in Pacific Grove, a few kilometres outside Monterey, and goes between cypress trees and along beside the Pacific Ocean. Here you can watch otters and sea-lions, and hundreds of sea birds, before arriving at Carmel Bay.

Carmel-by-the-Sea is a little seaside town of narrow streets full of restaurants and (sometimes expensive) shops.

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Carmel beach has fine white sand, and pine and cypress trees to sit under.

The film star, Clint Eastwood, was Carmel's Mayor in the late 1980s.

The ninety miles of coast from Carmel to San Simeon is called Big Sur. Here the Santa Lucia mountains meet the rocky coast of the Pacific Ocean. San Simeon is where William Randolph Hearst built his castle, high on a hill above the sea. In the 1930s, a number of newspaper businesses, radio stations and two film studios belonged to Hearst. Among his weekend visitors were some of the most famous film stars of the 1930s and 1940s. Now, thousands of people come every year to see this strange but wonderful building.

Chapter 6. Los Angeles

Lying between the San Gabriel mountains and the Pacific Ocean, Los Angeles is one of the world's largest cities. There are nearly nine million people living in the city, and it is more than 10,000 square kilometres in size. The only way to move around easily is by car. You can stay a month and still not have time to see and do everything.

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A visit to El Pueblo de Los Angeles State Historic Park in Downtown Los Angeles is a good place to begin. Here you can see some of the Mexican village where Los Angeles began in 1781.

Olvera Street is a busy Mexican marketplace with colourful stalls and old buildings, like Avila Adobe, Los Angeles' oldest building, and the Old Plaza Church.

Just north of here is Chinatown where there are exciting and colourful parades during the Chinese New Year.

Not far away is Little Tokyo, the centre of the Japanese-American area, with more than eighty restaurants and lots of interesting shops.

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American film-makers first came to Los Angeles because the weather was good all through the year, and because Californian workers were cheap.

Today, some of the film studios - Paramount at 5555 Melrose Avenue, and Universal at 100 Universal City Plaza, Universal City - give tours.

Hollywood Boulevard has the names of more than 2,500 film stars on stars in the sidewalk on its five-and-a-half kilometre Walk of Fame.

And on the sidewalk outside Mann's Chinese Theater, also on Hollywood Boulevard, you can see the hand and footprints of many film stars.

The famous Hollywood sign up in the hills above Beachwood Canyon was put up in 1923. It first said 'Hollywoodland'.

In 1920, film stars Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks built their Victorian home in Beverly Hills. Other stars soon followed them, and Beverly Hills is still the place to see some of the city's most beautiful houses and gardens. Near to Beverly Hills, Bel Air is also a place where famous people make their homes, and above Beverly Hills is Rodeo Drive, famous for its expensive shops.

A short drive away is Griffith Park, the USA's biggest city park.

Here you will find the Los Angeles Zoo, with more than 2,000 animals. For those who like sport, there is lots to see and do in Los Angeles.

Visit Dodger Stadium and watch the Los Angeles Dodgers play baseball.

At different times of the year, you can also see American football, ice hockey, horse racing and basketball.

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There are more than one hundred places to play golf, and there are lots of bicycle paths.

Around Los Angeles

The sixty-four kilometres of coast, including Malibu, Santa Monica and Venice Reach is what Los Angeles people call 'the beach'. Surfers from all over the world come to Malibu's Surfrider Beach.

It is often said that Santa Monica is the place where LA's people and visitors go 'to play'. It has a busy nightlife, and some of Los Angeles' finest restaurants. It also has one of the best piers in California, and on it is a carousel which is almost a hundred years old.

At Long Beach, you can visit the famous British ship, the Queen Mary.

Anaheim is forty-three kilometres south-east of Downtown Los Angeles on the Santa Ana Freeway, and is the home of Disneyland - Walt Disney's famous 'Magic Kingdom'. Since it opened in 1955, millions of people from all over the world have come to enjoy its rides and parades, and to visit 'Tomorrowland', 'Fantasyland', 'Adventureland', and all the other 'lands' of excitement.

Chapter 7. The Desert

East of Los Angeles is the Mojave Desert. It begins in Antelope Valley where, between March and May, you can see hundreds of California poppies. The best time to visit is between October and early May when it is not so hot.

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Two of the most interesting parts of the desert are the Joshua Tree Monument, and Death Valley.



Poppies in Antelope Valley

The Joshua Tree Monument is sixty-four kilometres from Palm Springs. Its name comes from the strange-looking Joshua trees which can grow up to eighteen metres high. The best place to see the trees are from Key's View.



Death Valley

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Death Valley National Park got its name when some of the families travelling to the gold fields in 1849 died here. It is one of the hottest and driest places in the world and covers 8,399 square-kilometres.

Get a bird's-eye view from Dantes View, which is 1,750 metres high. On a fine day, you can see Mount Whitney which is 137 kilometres away. Down in front of you is Bad water, the lowest place in the western half of the earth.

At its lowest, it is nearly nine metres below the level of the sea.

There are places to camp at Furnace Creek, also shops and restaurants, and a Visitor's Centre where you can get information about the desert.

Palm Springs, east of Los Angeles, was once a quiet little town. Then the film people of Hollywood discovered it in the 1930s, and film stars started coming here for the winter.

Palm Canyon Drive is the place for the best shops and restaurants.

Go to Moorten's Botanical Garden, where you can see more than 3,000 cactus and other desert flowers. Or visit Palm Springs Desert Museum.

When you get too hot, have a ride on the Aerial Tramway to the top of Mount San Jacinto.

The Anza-Borrego desert, northeast of San Diego, is America's largest state park. There are more than 950 kilometres of roads, and as many walking paths. The park's Visitor's Centre is at Palm Canyon.

Chapter 8. San Diego

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215 kilometres south of Los Angeles is San Diego, California's oldest, and second largest, city. It is home to a US naval base, and to many of the world's biggest fighting ships.



San Diego

More than a million people live in San Diego, and its sunny weather and 112 kilometres of beautiful sandy beaches make it a favourite place for holidays.

The oldest part of the city - Old Town - is about 5 kilometres north of the city centre. There are many old buildings, museums and art galleries.

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Gas Lamp Quarter was San Diego's main street area in the 1800s.

Seaport Village, with its art galleries and small shops, is on the side of the harbour. It is meant to show how the harbour-side looked a hundred years ago.

The wonderful Balboa Park is in the centre of the city. Here, as well as many delightful walks and bicycle paths, are several museums and the San Diego Zoo. You can take a five kilometre bus tour which covers most of the zoo, or enjoy a bird's-eye view from the Skyfari Aerial Tramway which crosses the zoo fifty-two metres above the ground.

Chapter 9. California

From the redwood forests in the north down to the deserts of the south; from the lakes and mountains in the east to the beaches in the west; there is something for everyone in California - America's Golden State! Come and see for yourself!

- THE END -

Hope you have enjoyed the reading!

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