

Do You Remember?



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California Insignia (Continued)

The California Legislature chose the phrase "The Golden State" as the state's official nickname in 1968.

The state reptile has been the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) since its selection in 1972. It is listed as a threatened species. A vegetarian, it is native to the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts. It averages 9 to 15 inches on its upper carapace.

The California dog-face butterfly (*Zerene eurydice*) is our state insect. Found only in California, the male has the silhouette of a dog's face colored an iridescent bluish-black on its upper wings. Its lower wings are a bright yellow. The female on its upper wings is yellow except for the black dot of the dog's eyes; the lower wings are completely yellow. They feed on the nectar of thistles. This colorful butterfly became the official state insect in 1972.

The state marine animal is the California gray whale (*Eschrichtius robustus*), selected in 1975. It spends summers in the icy waters of the Bering and Chukchi Seas near Alaska. As the ice pack advances in the fall, the whale embarks on one of the longest known migrations of any mammal. Staying close to the western North American coastline, it swims more than 5,600 miles to Baja California. Protected since 1946, it has made an astonishing comeback; in 1994, it was removed from the endangered species list. Baleen hangs from its upper jaw, allowing it to filter the seawater and feed on tiny plankton and krill. The gray whale's length averages 35 to 50 feet, and its weight from 20 to 40 tons.

California has two state ghost towns—Bodie, the gold rush ghost town



Gray whale

and Calico, the silver rush ghost town. Bodie is preserved in a state of "arrested decay," that is, the state does not attempt to restore the buildings but keeps them standing. The town had a population of 10,000 by 1880 at the height of the gold rush. It is estimated that \$18 million of gold was mined here. About 170 of 2,000 buildings remain; at its peak there were 65 saloons on Main Street. Now, it is the site of a State Historic Park and named as a state insignia in 2002. It is near the CA/NV state border, about 75 miles south of Lake Tahoe at an elevation of 8,379 feet. The old Miners' Union Hall serves as a museum. Calico, near Barstow, was named as the state silver rush ghost town in 2005. The town is near the site of a major silver strike in 1881; there were 15 mines in the area. By the early 1900s it had become a ghost town. The mines produced nearly \$20 million of silver. Walter

Knott purchased the town site in 1950 and restored the buildings to the 1880 era. Calico is now a San Bernardino County Regional Park.

The state marine fish, the garibaldi (*Hypsopope rubicundus*), is a brilliant golden orange color. It grows to about 14 inches long and is commonly found in shallow waters and reefs off the Southern California coast, from Magdalena Bay in Baja to Monterey Bay. It was chosen as a state insignia in 1995.

The state quarter was designed and issued in 2005. It has John Muir standing on the left looking toward Half Dome and the Yosemite Valley. Muir was a naturalist and conservationist who was instrumental in establishing the area as a national park in 1890. He also helped to organize the Sierra Club to preserve it. Between Muir and Half Dome is a representation of the California condor is on the quarter. Its inclusion

was to celebrate the bird's remarkable return from near extinction.

Purple needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*) is the state grass. A native perennial grass, much of its habitat has been overgrown by non-native annual escapees from farmers' fields, for example, wild oats. The Contra Costa Water District is trying to preserve the needlegrass. In early spring the land around Los Vaqueros Reservoir is used as a short-term pasture for sheep, which prefer the wild oats and leave the native grasses when herded quickly over the hills. The seeds of the native grasses were an important food source for Native Californians. They were harvested by the women with baskets and seed-beaters when the seeds were ripe. Then they used rock mortars to process the seeds, somewhat like a vertical metate. Once the seeds were ground into meal, the women made various edibles, for example, seed cakes or a warm cereal called pinole, somewhat like oatmeal. These native grasses are bunch grasses, tolerant of summer drought. They are

widespread from Oregon to Baja.

Purple needlegrass was chosen as a state insignia in 2004. Selected in 1991 by the legislature, my favorite insignia is the state prehistoric artifact, a chipped stone bear, created in the same manner Native Americans made arrowheads or spear points. It is small, only 2½ by 1½ inches, fashioned from black meta-volcanic rock about 8,000 years ago. Discovered at an archeological dig in San Diego County in 1985, it resembles a walking bear and was perhaps used for religious purposes by Native Americans. This artifact is one of the earliest forms of representational art found in the Western United States. The Archeology, History and Museums Division of the California State Parks is the custodian of the artifact.

You can find more California State Insignia, such as the state tartan, the state tall ship, the state military museum, and the state fife and drum band on the computer.

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