

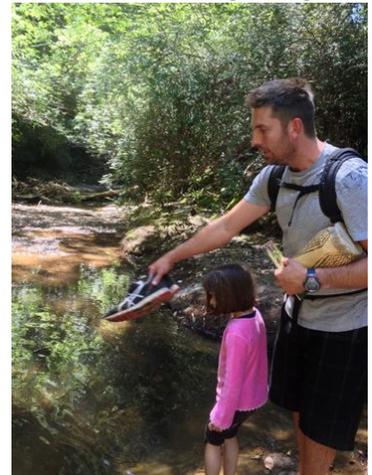
Our Trip to Big Basin State Park with Nate

Big Basin is California's oldest State Park, which we entered via a beautiful canopied road that left us 2000 feet above sea level! We got to meet face to face the Sequoia family members that are among the oldest and tallest trees on the earth.



We had a wonderful time getting to know our new friends and families. We ate lunch inside an ancient redwood, which could have been 2000 years old! This was the first time, at least for me! How impressive is what is also gone: there is only five percent of the ancient Redwood forest left after being overharvested during the gold rush. Not until 1902 did the preservation formally take hold and behold, our cherished parks.

Nate told the children about the amazing survival mechanisms of the trees that had been hollowed out by fire and still continue to grow. We visited a fairy circle of trees in a small grove and the children loved playing amidst these giants, taking their own pieces of nature and commanding me with their sticks and asserting their power. I believe being around trees can inspire one to feel both humble and powerful.



We went on a nice walk to a creek, which we used our ears to spot since we couldn't see it right away and the map, which we tried to read with Jasper's expert help, was a little tricky. We discovered some slender salamanders and centipedes on the way. We learned that yellow jackets collect mud from the stream for their nests and drink from it as well. We had fun spotting brown trout and talking about camouflage.



We saw wonderful grinding rock holes that the Ohlone used to grind their acorns in to make acorn flour for their bread. I explained that they took baskets, lined them with redwood sprigs, sifted the flour over and over again in the streams to get the tannins out and then used the tannin-free flour for their sweet bread. Since there was still some sand left over from the grinding stones, their teeth weren't in as good shape as ours but they ate well! We also saw, hanging above, a fern called a five-finger fern. You can see why!



We saw yerba buena, the herb, that San Francisco was named after. It was growing on the side of the path and got to rub it between our fingers to smell its delicious scent. We got to taste the new redwood growth that actually is good for you, full of vitamin C! We also saw



butterflies on the way back, spotted by Devin! She also had a glorious time in the water and hopefully it was worth the wait to get into dry clothes again.

We took our time reflecting on the quiet of the woods, the beauty of the wild irises and the meadow that we passed by which reminded me of Peter and the Wolf. We made a drum circle at the end, back in the redwood fairy circle of trees, and got to hear what everyone enjoyed from the visit. Clearly everyone got something different and meaningful out of the experience, from knowing it was ok to have a meltdown once in a while, to discovering how much fun it is to explore nature with peers and how old and sacred the plants and trees are that surround us every day.



I enjoyed sharing our musical games with the visitors to the park who came from other parts of the country and hearing total silence after I put the frozen yoghurt down in front of each child.

I was touched how the children managed to kindle and rekindle a friendship with a new child after they could find a connection with something they both liked either in the park or in their own lives. Children are so resilient! We don't give them enough credit.



The children must have used up their energy because most fell asleep on the ride back! This is after Nate and I tried to push them a little farther than their comfort level and stretch them physically just enough so that they build new skills. For example, we let them climb and navigate the stones and branches along the path and in the creek. We ask them to walk just a little further than they are maybe used to and then they can be proud that they really grew both physically and socio-emotionally. I



stand behind my commitment to have these kids, both typical and atypical, learn from each other and see the value in the experience. I certainly did on this trip!



I hope you will join us on our next adventure to Live Earth Farm in Watsonville. It is an educational outreach farm, with wonderful experiences available to us because of the commitment the owners have to the communities around them. They have welcomed us for four years and we have a great relationship with them that we cherish!

That will be June 9th from 10:30 to 5:30. Hope you and your children will join us.

Sincerely,
Chaia