

FORTRESS ROSS  
(Fort Ross)  
Fort Ross State Historic Park  
19005 Coast Highway One  
Jenner  
Sonoma County  
California

HALS CA-33  
CA-33

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

## HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

### FORTRESS ROSS FORT ROSS FORT ROSS STATE HISTORIC PARK

HALS NO. CA-33

Location: 19005 Coast Highway One, Jenner, Sonoma County, CA  
Lat: 38.51958 Long: -123.24696

Significance: Fort Ross was designated as one of five historical monuments in 1928 and became a state park and National Historic Landmark in 1962. It was settled by the Russian-American Company in 1812 as part of Russian efforts to expand their trade and territory and has remained much the same since that time.

History: Fort Ross is a 3386-acre park that preserves North America's southernmost Russian settlement originally founded in 1812 by the Russian-American Company. Today the site includes the restored Rotchev House and 5 other reconstructed buildings including the Northwest and Southeast Blockhouses, the Kuskov House, a chapel and Officers Quarters. The original fort is enclosed by a stockade built of Redwood with wood spikes on top.

The park property includes the Call Ranch House, remnants of a Russian Orchard and cemetery, a visitor center with interpretive displays, picnic and parking facilities for visitors. Archaeological excavations have been undertaken to insure that the placement, orientation and size of features is historically accurate. The fort is set on a point of land between For Ross Cove and Sandy Cove with a broad view of the Pacific Ocean and of forested hills to the northeast. Because the Call family valued the site the property today is almost the same as it had been when the Russians left it in 1841.

Prior to the Russian settlement Native Americans used this site known as Metini for centuries. The Kashaya Pomo people seasonally moved their village from the ridges where they lived in winter, to their summer home along the seashore where they hunted, gathered food and harvested seafood.

Russians began exploring in North America as early as 1742. In 1784 they built the first permanent Russian settlement on Kodiak Island, Alaska. This organization became the Russian-American Company in 1799. In 1809 the Russian-American Company sent Ivan Kuskov to locate a California site to serve as a trading base. Kuskov chose Metini which had plentiful water, good soil, forage and pasture and a supply of redwoods. The site was relatively inaccessible which gave the settlers a defensive advantage. The settlement was never threatened by outside attack. Kuskov returned in 1812 to build houses and a stockade. The colony was dedicated on August 13, 1812 as "Fortress Ross" to

**FORTRESS ROSS  
FORT ROSS  
FORT ROSS STATE HISTORIC PARK  
HALS NO. CA-33  
PAGE 2**

honor its connection with Imperial Russia – or “Rossiia”. Kuskov was an avid gardener, growing cabbage and beets for pickling. He produced enough to ship the excess to Sitka, Alaska. At its peak the Fort Ross settlement included 300 men, women and children and thousands of livestock.

Outside the stockade a village grew to the southwest that had 50 buildings, Native Americans continued to live nearby and worked at the fort. Ross was a successfully functioning multicultural settlement for at least 30 years; residents included Russians, Native Alaskans, Californians and Creoles. Activities included agriculture, ranching, hunting sea mammals, blacksmithing, tanning, brick making, logging and shipbuilding. The decline of the marine mammal population contributed to the departure of the Russians.

One of the first horticultural efforts was the Russian experiments with fruit trees. Peach trees were brought from San Francisco and planted in 1814. Grapes from Peru were planted in 1817. A Russian orchard located on the hillside included apples, peaches, grapes, quince, cherries and several types of pear. An 1841 inventory listed 216 fruit trees. This orchard is still maintained. Agriculture at the site peaked in the 1830s but was never very successful do to the severe climate and gophers.

In 1841 the property was sold to John Sutter who was based in the Sacramento Valley. Sutter had Otto Benitz manage the Ross property (1841-67). Benitz sold to James Dixon and Lord Fairfax who ran a lumber company 1867- 1873 when Fort Ross was sold to George W. Call (1873 – 1979). (See separate HALS inventory form for the Call Ranch).

In 1903 the California Historical Landmarks Committee acquired the Fort Ross property within the stockade from the Call family. The state acquired the property in 1906 and has implemented the restoration and reconstruction work.

The Rotchev House is a designated National Historic Landmark  
The Chapel has been recorded by HABS  
The entire property is State Historic Landmark No. 5

Sources: Fort Ross State Historic Park brochure, California State Parks, [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

"Fort Ross" published by Fort Ross Interpretive Associates, General Editors: Lyn Kalani, Lynn Rudy and John Sperry. E-mail: [fria@mcn.org](mailto:fria@mcn.org), 1998

Historic Spots in California, by Mildred Brooke Hoover, Hero Eugene Rensch and Ethel Grace Rensch, third edition revised by William N. Abeloe, 1966.

Site visit and review of interpretive material in Visitors Center, May 22, 2009 by  
Chris Pattillo.

Historian: Chris Pattillo, Landscape Architect, June 14, 2009  
PGAdesign  
444 17th Street  
Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 550-8855  
pattillo@PGAdesign.com



View from inside the stockade looking north with the Kuskov House on the left, the Chapel on the right, cannons in the foreground, and forested hills beyond the stockade (Chris Pattillo, May 22, 2009).



View from inside the stockade looking southwest toward the front of the Officials' Quarters, the north end of the Rotchev House, and the Pacific Ocean beyond the stockade. Note the flagpole in the middle of the photo and the very large eucalyptus outside the enclosure (Chris Pattillo, May 22, 2009).



View from outside the stockade looking north with the large eucalyptus tree on the left (Chris Pattillo, May 22, 2009).