

Highway 99/70 Loop - Sacramento to Red Bluff

Route Description:

The highway 99/70 route parallels Interstate 5 in California's Central Valley. This alternate route to busy Interstate-5 will add about an hour to your travels north or south, but for the leisure traveler, the delay is worth it. Highways 99 and 70 are a mixture of two-lane country roads and divided freeways. This route takes you through farming communities, orchards, rice fields and some of the finest marshes, valley oak forests and foothill grasslands remaining in the Central Valley.

Starting from Sacramento, Highway 99/70 split from Interstate-5 five miles north of the city and travel through miles of rice fields. In the fall after the rice harvest, these fields attract millions of waterfowl that feed on the waste grain as they migrate along the Pacific Flyway. Watch for large flocks of white snow geese or tundra swans in the fields from fall through spring. Do not stop on the highway, this is a very narrow roadway and winter fog can reduce visibility; pull off on a side road if you want to view wildlife. As the highway leaves the flat rice fields and moves into fruit and nut orchards, highways 99 and 70 split.

Take highway 99 along the Feather River and through Yuba City. Here the Sutter Buttes rise from the valley floor. These ancient volcanic peaks support a great variety of wildlife. If time allows, follow the Sutter Buttes Scenic Loop signs which will take you through the buttes, however there is no public access for hiking or walking so stop on the side of the road and enjoy the diversity of birds, especially birds of prey that live in these hills. Continue north on Highway 99 through miles of orchards as you parallel the Sacramento River until you reconnect with Interstate 5 at Red Bluff. Make sure to leave time to explore valley towns such as Live Oak, Gridley and Chico, and stop at roadside fruit stands for your picnic supplies.

All wildlife viewing locations are within 10 miles of the highway unless otherwise noted. The best viewing generally occurs in the fall and winter when waterfowl and other marsh and shore birds over-winter in the Central Valley. During the hot summer, resident wildlife are most active at dawn and dusk, so plan visits at these times of day.



Gray Lodge Wildlife Area



Location: On highway 99 at Live Oak turn west on Pennington (North Butte) Road. Turn right on Almond Orchard Avenue and continue to entrance. Distance from Live Oak about eight miles.

Best Season: Fall through winter when over a million ducks and geese overwinter here. Wildlife viewing is good year-round but animals are not concentrated as in winter.

What to see: Over 6,600 acres of wetlands support 230 species of birds as well as river otters, muskrats, and black-tailed deer. Gray Lodge has an international reputation for its remarkable concentrations of waterfowl in the winter, but shorebirds, songbirds and birds of prey are also commonly seen.

Visiting Tips: In the winter, plan to arrive about an hour before dusk to experience the sight and sound of thousands of waterfowl flying from the ponds to feed in surrounding fields at night. Drive the visitors loop if you only have an hour to spend.

Contact: (530) 846-5176 or (530) 358-2877

http://www.dfg.ca.gov/lands/newsites/wa/region2/graylodge/glwa_index.htm

Local Accommodations and Travel Information: Yuba City Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.yubacity.net/>

Oroville Wildlife Area



Location: From highway 99 approximately 10 miles north of Gridley, go east on Oro Dam Boulevard to entrance.

Best Season: Fall through Spring

What to See: This preserve bordered by 12 miles of river channels and Thermolito Afterbay protects a large block of riparian forest. In winter and spring look in the treetops for nesting egrets and herons at a rookery upstream from the Thermolito outfall. Riparian forests support many species of songbirds as well as beaver, river otter, raccoons and muskrats.

Visiting Tips: Elevated levees offer easy car viewing. Take a quick drive along the levees or stop and hike through the area.

Contact: (530) 538-2236

http://www.dfg.ca.gov/lands/species_lists/r2wa/oroville/oroville_list.htm

Local Accommodations and Travel Information: Oroville Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.orovillechamber.net/>

Feather River Hatchery



Location: In Oroville, from Highway 70 take the Montgomery Street exit. Turn left on Washington. After crossing green bridge, turn right and continue to parking area.

Best Season: Mid-September to February when salmon and steelhead are spawning. February to August to see millions of young fish.

What to see: Located on a scenic stretch of the Feather River just below Oroville Dam, this hatchery offers stunning scenery, an underwater window view of fish using the fish ladder, and huge salmon and steelhead spawning in natural gravel beds below the hatchery and within the hatchery. Good birdwatching along adjacent river.

Visiting Tips: A good side trip for an hour or two, especially during spawning season.

Contact: (530) 538-2222

Local Accommodations and Travel Information: Oroville Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.orovillechamber.net/>

Bidwell Park



Location: In Chico, from highway 99 take highway 32 east. Turn left on Bruce Road (which becomes Manzanita). Drive 1.7 miles to Wildwood Road and turn right. Continue 1.5 miles to Upper Park gate. Dirt road first 1.5 miles good; very rough beyond.

Best Season to View: Year-round.

What to See: Third largest city park in the United States with a near wilderness "upper park" -- oak forests and grassy meadows support mule deer, coyotes, foxes, wild turkey, pygmy owls, acorn woodpeckers and many other wildlife species.

Visiting Tips: Stop by the Chico Creek Nature Center (1968 E. 8th Street) for trail information, natural history exhibits and a universally accessible trail. Bring a picnic lunch and plan at least two hours to hike and view.

Contact: (530) 895-4972

http://209.232.194.157/parks/Bidwell_Park.asp

Local Accommodations and Travel Information: Chico Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.chicochamber.com/>

Chico Genetic Resource Center



Location: In Chico, from highway 99 take Skyway exit east. Drive .25 miles and turn right on Dominic Drive. Go one block; turn left on Morrow Lane. Drive 50 yards; turn right on Cramer.

Best Season to View: Year-round.

What to See: This is a birding hot spot! This U.S. Forest Service arboretum offers outstanding wildlife viewing as well as a unique collection of trees and plants from around the world. Over 200 species of birds can be found here.

Visiting Tips: A great place for a quick stop or spend a few hours. On weekends and after hours, park at the gate and walk through the wheelchair accessible gate.

Contact: (530) 895-1176

Local Accommodations and Travel Information: Chico Chamber of Commerce

<http://www.chicochamber.com/>

Lake Red Bluff Salmon Viewing Plaza



Location: 128 miles north of Sacramento; 31 miles south of Redding. At Red Bluff, turn east on highway 36. Turn right on Sale Lane and travel 2.4 miles to plaza.

Best Seasons: Peak fish migrations occur from August through October. Bird watching year round.

What to See: The Sacramento River is backed behind the Red Bluff Diversion Dam where two fish ladders allow salmon and steelhead to migrate above the dam. The lake and surrounding riparian forests attract song birds and osprey in the spring and summer; waterfowl and bald eagles in the fall and winter; and wading birds year-round.

Amount of Time for Visit: Restrooms, picnic area and trails make this a good lunch or rest stop

Contact: (530) 934-3316

Local Accommodations and Travel Information: Shasta Cascade Wonderland Association

<http://www.shastacascade.org>

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