Jack London
State Historic Park

Our Mission

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Discover the many states of California.™

Jack London State Historic Park
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(707) 938-5216

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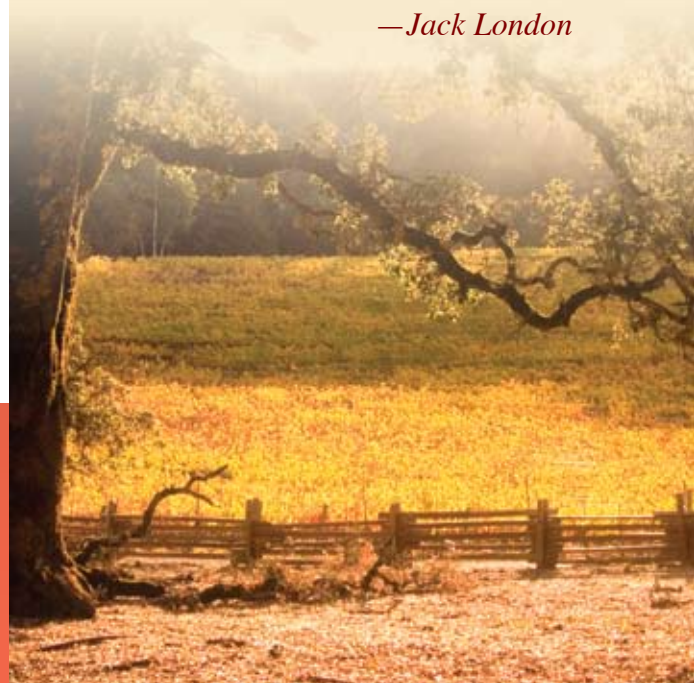
The grapes on a score of rolling hills are red with autumn flame. Across Sonoma Mountain wisps of sea fog are stealing . . . I have everything to make me glad I am alive. (I am filled with dreams and mysteries. I am all sun and air and sparkle. I am vitalized, organic.)"

—Jack London



Jack London was first attracted to the Sonoma Valley by its magnificent natural landscape. He had fought his way up out of the factories and waterfront dives of West Oakland to become one of the highest paid, most popular and prolific writers of his day. Although he had sailed the world over, this gentle landscape made him feel at home and anchored in the land.

Jack London at work

THE FIRST INHABITANTS

For thousands of years, these high hills, deep canyons, fields and streams were home to the Coast Miwok people. They lived in small autonomous villages, with leadership from heads of the largest and most influential families. Their lives began to change drastically around the early- to mid-1800s, when the arrival of Europeans and other settlers introduced serious diseases that killed many natives. The remaining Miwok were forced into servitude.

Today Coast Miwok descendants still live in the area. The Coast Miwok and some of the Southern Pomo have joined together as the Federally-recognized tribe known as the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

JACK LONDON

The author was born on January 12, 1876. By age 30, London was internationally famous for *Call of the Wild* (1903), *The Sea Wolf* (1904) and other literary and journalistic accomplishments. Though he wrote passionately about the great questions of life and death and the struggle to survive with dignity and integrity, he also sought peace and quiet inspiration. His stories of high adventure were based on his own experiences at sea, in Alaska, or in the fields and factories of California. His writings appealed to millions worldwide.

Jack London was also widely known for his personal exploits. He was a colorful, controversial personality, often in the news. Generally fun loving, he was quick to side with the underdog against injustice of any kind. An eloquent public speaker, he was much sought after as a lecturer on socialism and other economic and political topics. Most people considered London a living symbol of rugged individualism, a man whose fabulous success was not due to special favor of any kind, but to a combination of immense mental ability and vitality.

Strikingly handsome, full of laughter, restless and courageous, always eager for adventure, Jack London was one of the most romantic figures of his time.

He ascribed his worldwide literary success largely to hard work—to "dig," as he put it. Between 1900 and 1916, he completed more than 50 fiction and nonfiction books, hundreds of short stories and numerous articles. Several of the books and many of the short stories are classics and still popular; some have been translated into as many as 70 languages.

In addition to his many commitments, London carried on voluminous correspondence (he received some 10,000 letters per year), read proofs of his work as it went to press, and negotiated with his agents and publishers. He spent time overseeing construction of his custom-built sailing ship, the *Snark* (1906-1907); the construction of his dream house, Wolf House (1910-1913); and the operation of his farm, Beauty Ranch, after 1911.

The natural beauty of Sonoma Valley was not lost on Jack London. The magnificent vistas and rolling hills of Glen Ellen were an ideal place for Jack and Charmian London to relax and enjoy the natural life. "When I first came here, tired of cities and people, I settled down on a little farm . . . 130 acres of the most beautiful, primitive land to be found in California." Though the farm was badly run down, he reveled in its natural beauty.

"All I wanted," he said later, "was a quiet place in the country to write and loaf in and get out of Nature that something which we all need, only the most of us don't know it." Soon, however, he was busy buying farm equipment and livestock for his "mountain ranch." He began work on a new barn and started planning a fine new house. "This is to be no summer-residence proposition," he wrote to his publisher in June 1905, "but a home all the year round.

I am anchoring good and solid, and anchoring for keeps."

Living and owning land near Glen Ellen was a way of escaping from Oakland—from the city way of life he called "the man-trap." But, restless and eager for foreign travel and adventure, he decided to build a ship, the *Snark*, and go sailing around the world—exploring, writing, adventuring—enjoying the "big moments of living" that he craved and that would give him still more material to write about.

Jack and Charmian London aboard the Snark

The voyage, which was to last seven years and take Jack and Charmian around the world, lasted just 27 months and took them only as far as the South Pacific and Australia. Discouraged by health problems and heartbroken about having to abandon the trip and sell the *Snark*, London returned to the ranch in Glen Ellen.

Between 1909 and 1911 he bought more land, and in 1911 he moved from Glen Ellen to a small ranch house in the middle of his holdings. On horseback he explored every canyon, glen and hilltop. He threw himself into a farming style of the period, termed scientific agriculture, as one of the few justifiable, basic and idealistic ways of making a living. A significant portion of his later writing—*Burning Daylight* (1910), *Valley of the Moon* (1913) and *Little Lady of the Big House* (1916)—was about the simple pleasures of country life, the satisfaction of making a living from the land and remaining close to nature.

Jack and Charmian London's dream house began to take shape early in 1911 when a well-known San Francisco architect, Albert Farr, created the drawings and sketches for Wolf House. Farr then supervised the early stages of construction of a grand house that was to remain standing for a thousand years. By August 1913, London had spent about $80,000, and the project was nearly complete. On August 22, final cleanup got underway, and plans were laid for moving the Londons' specially designed, custom-built furniture and other personal belongings into the mansion. That night at 2:00 a.m., word came that the house was burning. By the time the Londons arrived on the scene, the house was ablaze, the roof had collapsed, and even a stack of lumber some distance away was burning. Nothing could be done.

London looked at the fire philosophically, but the loss was a crushing financial blow and the end of a long-cherished dream. Rumors abounded about the cause of the fire. In 1995 a group of forensic fire experts visited the site, concluding that the fire had resulted from spontaneous combustion in a pile of linseed oil-soaked rags left by workers. London planned to rebuild Wolf House, but at the time of his death in 1916 the house remained as it stands today, the stark but eloquent vestige of a shattered dream.

Jack London's office

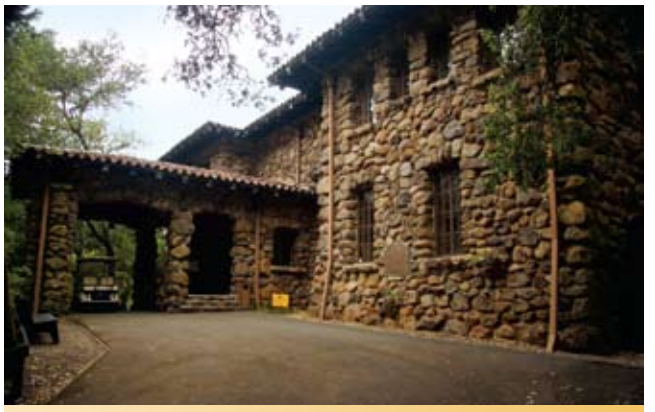
The loss of Wolf House left London depressed, but he forced himself to go back to work. He added a new writer's study to the ranch house he had occupied since 1911.

Occasionally London went to New York, San Francisco or Los Angeles on business. He spent time living and working aboard his 30-foot yawl, the *Roamer*, which he sailed around San Francisco Bay and the nearby Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. In 1914 he was a war correspondent in Mexico, covering the role of U.S. troops and Navy ships in the Villa-Carranza revolt.

In 1915 and again in 1916, Charmian persuaded him to spend time in Hawaii, where London seemed better able to relax and more willing to take care of himself. But his greatest satisfaction came from his ranch activities. His ambitious plans to expand the ranch and increase its productivity kept him in debt and under pressure to write as fast as he could, even though it might mean sacrificing quality in

favor of quantity.

When his doctors urged him to change his work habits and his diet, stop all use of alcohol and get more exercise, he refused. If anything, the pressure of his financial commitments to helping friends and relatives and his increasingly severe health problems only made him dream larger dreams and work harder and faster.



The House of Happy Walls

On November 22, 1916, 40-year-old Jack London died of gastrointestinal uremic poisoning. He had been suffering from a variety of ailments, including a kidney condition, but up to the last day of his life, he was full of bold plans and boundless enthusiasm for the future. Words of grief poured into the telegraph office in Glen Ellen from all over the world.

"No writer, unless it were Mark Twain, ever had a more romantic life than Jack London. The untimely death of this most popular of American fictionists has profoundly shocked a world that expected him to live and work for many years longer." (Ernest J. Hopkins in the *San Francisco Bulletin,* December 2, 1916)

THE HOUSE OF HAPPY WALLS

Built by Charmian London between 1919 and 1926, this house is somewhat similar to Wolf House—the Spanish-style roof tiles and walls of fieldstone, for example—but is smaller and more formal. Charmian lived here when she was not traveling abroad or staying with relatives. After her death in 1955 at the age of 84, her will directed that the house be used as a memorial to Jack London and as a museum housing their collection of photographs and exhibits about London's life and adventures.

Much of the house's furnishings were designed by the Londons and custom built for Wolf House. The library contains equipment from London's study. The rolltop desk, the Dictaphone and some other items appear in old photographs showing London at work.

WOLF HOUSE

The trail to Wolf House is a little more than a half-mile long and slopes gently downhill. The one-mile roundtrip takes an hour or more. The trail wanders through a beautiful mixed forest. Ferns, manzanita and a wide range of other shrubs and small flowering plants thrive here, along with many kinds of birds and other forms of wildlife. The remains of Wolf House still remind visitors of Jack and Charmian's original dream. Stone walls, complete with window openings, fireplaces and other details, appear little changed by the passage of time. It is easy to see how grand the house was intended to be.

Wolf House ruins

Native materials were chosen and carefully matched to one another—boulders of maroon lava, unpeeled redwood logs outside and redwood paneling inside. The Spanish-style roof was dark red and matched the stone walls. The outdoor pool was to be stocked with mountain bass. Inside, there was a library and a large, isolated workroom for Jack. A fireproof vault in the basement was to house his collection of manuscripts and other valuables. The two-story living room had a massive fireplace and an alcove for Charmian's grand piano. The dining room would have seated 50 people, and there were numerous guest rooms.

The house stood on an extra-thick concrete slab intended to be earthquake proof. Double-thick concrete walls were intended to be fireproof. Modern utility systems were installed, and every detail was of the highest quality, for money was no object. The house would have been magnificent.

THE GRAVE SITE

Jack London's ashes were placed on the little hill close beside the plain wooden headboards marking the graves of

Jack London's grave

two pioneer children. The final ceremony was simple, attended only by a few members of London's immediate family, his old friend George Sterling and workmen from the ranch. A small copper urn bearing his ashes was sealed within a specially made receptacle, and in Sterling's own words:

"Amid the profound silence of the on-lookers, a huge boulder—a great block of red lava long-pitted by time and enriched by the moss of uncounted years—was urged by roller and crowbar above the sepulcher.

"Then the party dispersed as quietly as it had gathered, the stillness making it a funeral impressive beyond all memory of those in attendance. No word, aside from a brief whisper, had been said. The thirteen strong men of the ranch faced the bearers of the remains in silence, and as silently departed."

PARK FEATURES

Eucalyptus Trees

Some of the 81,000 eucalyptus trees near Beauty Ranch are visible from the picnic area.

Sherry Barn

Constructed by Chinese laborers in 1884 for the Kohler and Frohling winery, the Sherry Barn became a stable for London's highly-prized purebred shire horses.

Stallion Barn

This barn housed six of London's shire horses.

Manure Pit

In 1914 Jack London hired Italian stonemasons to build this pit to store fertilizer for later distribution in the fields. He also built an elaborate system to gather and store liquid fertilizer from his cow barn. Note the contrast in construction techniques between the protruding stones of the Italian-built structures and the flush stones of the Chinese-built winery buildings.

Cottage

Jack London purchased this wood-framed cottage and the old Kohler & Frohling winery buildings in 1911. The cottage was later enlarged to include about 3,000 square feet of living space. Jack's study on the west side was added in 1914. Here he wrote many of his later stories and novels. The stone-walled east wing, originally part of the old winery, was used as a dining room. The glassed porch to the right of the front door is where Jack died on November 22, 1916.

The cottage where London wrote

Winery Ruins

The Kohler & Frohling Winery, heavily damaged by the 1906 earthquake, was used as a carriage house, living quarters for ranch hands and rooms for guests. A fire destroyed the wooden upper stories in 1965.

Terraced Hillside View

London's steeper fields were graded into terraces to retain moisture and prevent erosion. Some of those original terraces are still being used today.

Distillery

This building was used by the ranch hands to store and repair farm equipment. The ruins of a blacksmith shop are on the west side.

Pig Palace
This unique piggery was designed by London and built in 1915. Laid out in a circle, its central feedhouse is circled by 17 pens. Each family of pigs had a courtyard with feed and water troughs, a roofed sleeping area and a fenced outdoor run.

The Pig Palace

Silos
These cement-block silos stand over 40 feet high. They once held fodder made from cut-up forage plants.

London Lake
About three-quarters of a mile up the trail beyond the silos, London built a curving stone dam with a shallow, five-acre lake. Featuring a redwood bathhouse, the lake was often enjoyed by the Londons and their guests.

London lake

Beyond the lake, the trail passes through madrone, manzanita, redwood, Douglas fir, grassy meadows and oak woodland. The Valley of the Moon vista is visible just below the 2,463-foot summit of Sonoma Mountain. The strenuous 6.6-mile round trip takes about three hours. Please bring your own drinking water.

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Restroom: A portable restroom in the upper picnic area is generally accessible. A portable restroom on the Wolf House service road is the only wheelchair-accessible restroom available to the public.

Parking: The lower parking area has three spaces designated accessible. Assistance may be required with slopes. The paved 400-foot route from the lot to the Museum may be accessible for assisted wheelchair users or strong riders.

Accessibility is continually improving. For current accessibility details, call the park at (707) 938-5216 or visit **http://access.parks.ca.gov.**

PLEASE REMEMBER

- Picnic tables and barbecue pits are available; ground fires and portable stoves are prohibited.
- The museum in the House of Happy Walls is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Days.
- Be alert for rattlesnakes and poison oak.
- Dogs must be kept on a leash; they are not allowed in the museum or on hiking trails.
- Don't trespass on private property surrounding the park; help us be good neighbors.

Jack London
State Historic Park

JACK LONDON STATE HISTORIC PARK

Pine Tree Meadows

Woodcutter's Meadow

Deer Camp

Historic Orchard

Camp Via (SDC)

Park Entrance

Upper Lot

Lower Lot

Smoke House

Bat Box

Silos

Pig Palace

Sherry Barn

Distillery

Winery Ruins

Manure Pit

Stallion Barn

Londons' Cottage

House of Happy Walls Museum

Grave Site

Wolf House

Bath House

London Lake

May's Clearing

Ancient Redwood

Fern Lake

Park Summit 2370ft 722m

to Sonoma Mountain 2463ft 750m

to Glen Ellen

to Sonoma Developmental Center (SDC)

London Ranch Road

Wolf House Service Rd

Orchard Road

Graham Creek

Middle Graham Creek

South Graham Creek

Asbury Creek

Mill Creek

Seasonal Closure - Bikes and Equestrians

N

0 0.05 0.1 0.15 0.2 0.25 Miles

0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 0.5 Kilometers

Legend

- Paved Road
- Unpaved Road
- Trail: Hiking
- Trail: Multi-Use
- 0.5 mi Trail Distance (in miles)
- Park
- Orchard
- Parking Area
- Accessible Feature
- Bicycle Trail
- Dogs Allowed on Leash
- Drinking Water
- Emergency Access
- Equestrian Staging
- Group Picnic Area
- Hiking
- Horse Trail
- Information
- Locked Gate
- No Dogs Allowed
- No Horses Allowed
- Park Building
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Restrooms
- Utility Line
- Viewpoint

NOTE: Forest roads (unpaved, red-dashed roads) are difficult to bike. Please ride with caution.

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact Valley of the Moon Natural History Association, 2400 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen, CA 95442 **www.jacklondonpark.com**

Sugarloaf Ridge SP
Annadel SP
Santa Rosa
Glen Ellen
Yountville
Rohnert Park
Jack London SHP
Cotati
Sonoma
Sonoma SHP
Petaluma Adobe SHP
NAPA
Petaluma
Olompali SHP
Novato
San Pablo Bay
Vallejo
Benicia SRA

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