Sequoia Encyclopedia Article

Sequoia

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Sequoia

Sequoia is a genus of conifer containing one species, *Sequoia sempervirens,* the coast redwood. It is named for a Georgian Indian chieftain who invented the Cherokee alphabet. Traditionally included in the Taxodiaceae, current workers combine this family with the cypress family, Cupressaceae. One of the world's tallest tree species, sequoias can exceed 115 meters (360 feet) in height. The trunk, covered in red, shredding bark, is about 3 to 5 meters (10 to 16 feet) in diameter, but may reach 10 meters (33 feet). The branches bear both triangular and needlelike leaves. Male (pollen-producing) and female (seed-bearing) cones are borne on the same tree, but on different branches. *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, the giant redwood, formerly included in *Sequoia*, was placed in its own genus in 1939.

Coast redwoods form coniferous forests in western North America, from coastal central California to southernmost Oregon. Here they receive fog that provides moisture and cool conditions during the dry summer months. Coast redwoods are relics, plants that had wider distribution in the milder, moister climate of the past. Adult trees can live 2,200 years, and their thick bark resists most fires, which clear the undergrowth and create the open conditions needed for seedling establishment.

Redwood lumber is greatly desired, as it is rot resistant and straight grained. Therefore, redwood trees have been logged heavily during the last 150 years. Trees readily resprout from roots and stumps, so forests grow back quickly. Nevertheless, concern for the disappearance of virgin groves prompted the creation of Muir Woods National Monument in 1908. Less than five percent of the ancient redwood forests are intact, and most of those survive only through the protection of parks and National Forests.

A man stands besides a fallen redwood tree in California's Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park.

See Also

Coniferous Forests; Conifers; Gymnosperms; Record-Holding Plants; Trees.

Bibliography

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