

# Columbia welcomes the season's best

Columbia State Historic Park was a primary field trip destination during my youth. I remember children climbing on the large rocks there. It was there that I learned to pan for gold. There, I rode a small horse. I represented one of my "pageant titles" as I went for a carriage ride with my mother. I visited the park with my classes in elementary school and I watched from behind the scenes as my mother performed in a show at the Fallon House Theatre.

Since I moved to Twain Harte with my parents two years ago, I have been able to enjoy the laughter, relaxation and beauty of Columbia more often. I'm happy to share that joy with you as the new "Tuolumne Talk" columnist for Sierra Lodestar, replacing Kim Mathie, whom I had the pleasure of interning with at Sierra Repertory Theatre two summers ago.

One of the many treasures Tuolumne County offers, Columbia State Park lights up with special holiday treasures this weekend. In addition to the ongoing



The baby Jesus might find a manger Sunday at the Las Posadas Nativity Procession in Columbia State Historic Park.

Courtesy photo

ing candy cane making at Nelson's Candy Kitchen (every Saturday and Sunday through Dec. 18), the park hosts several Christmas events for families and individuals of all ages this weekend.

On Friday, visitors can step away from the hassle of busy Christmas

shopping for an old-fashioned Christmas, complete with story times and Christmas carols performed by area children. Carriage rides are free during the event, which goes from 5 to 8 p.m.

On Saturday and Sunday (and Dec. 18 and 19), A Miner's Christmas fea-

tures costumed characters recreating the mining camp of the 1850s. Guests will enjoy fresh roasted chestnuts and hot cider, as well as live music. These events run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

This weekend, Sunday's entertainment includes an all-equestrian Christmas parade at 11 a.m. The parade has been a tradition in Columbia since the 1990s. Horses and their owners will strut down Main Street, and Santa and Mrs. Claus will pay a visit. The parade will also include an unwrapped toy drive to benefit area families in need.

Also on Sunday, the Las Posadas Nativity Procession – a Spanish tradition that Columbia has adopted annually since 1983 – recreates the biblical account of Mary, Joseph and the Christmas birth of the baby Jesus. The cast of characters includes Mary riding on a donkey led by Joseph, angels, the three wise men, a tax collector, gold miners as shepherds, townspeople in 1850s costume and, at

## Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler

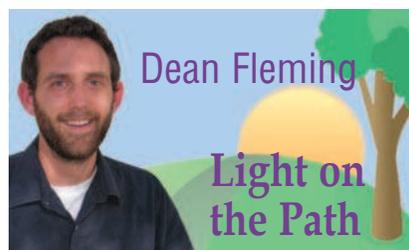


the finale, the baby Jesus. The Mirth & Glee Carolers will lead the community in carols this year. The procession begins at 5 p.m.

Why not go on a field trip of your own to Columbia State Historic Park? Decked out in wreaths, lights and various Christmas decorations through the end of December, the park promises a wonderful holiday experience.

Contact park officials at 588-9128 or call 536-1672 for more information; to reach the Columbia Chamber of Commerce, call 536-1672 or visit [columbiacalifornia.com](http://columbiacalifornia.com).

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at [hwheeler@sierralodestar.com](mailto:hwheeler@sierralodestar.com) and [mtaylor@sierralodestar.com](mailto:mtaylor@sierralodestar.com).



## Rangers make New Melones easy to hike

New Melones Reservoir is without a doubt one of the best low-elevation recreation destinations in the Mother Lode. Perhaps most commonly referenced for its great fishing and boating, Melones also offers a fantastic selection of well-organized campgrounds, excellent mountain biking terrain and fantastic hiking trails.

Although a few scattered trails around the Melones area are maintained by the Melones branch of the Bureau of Reclamation, there are two main recreation areas

along the lake's shoreline that offer a multitude of hiking options. The Glory Hole Recreation Area (on the north side of the Stevenot Bridge on Highway 49) hosts six scenic trails within a short distance of the boat launch. Five of the trails at Glory Hole are moderate, but one – known as Tower Climb – is just as steep as it sounds. This exciting bicycle ride or challenging hike is a relatively short 1.3-mile trek, but

it packs an aerobic punch followed by a rewarding view. On the southern side of New Melones is the well-known Tuttle town Recreation Area. During summer months this area is one of the most popular boating and camping destinations in the foothills. During fall and winter, the boating dies down; however, day users remain entertained with seven moderate hiking trails and user-friendly campgrounds.

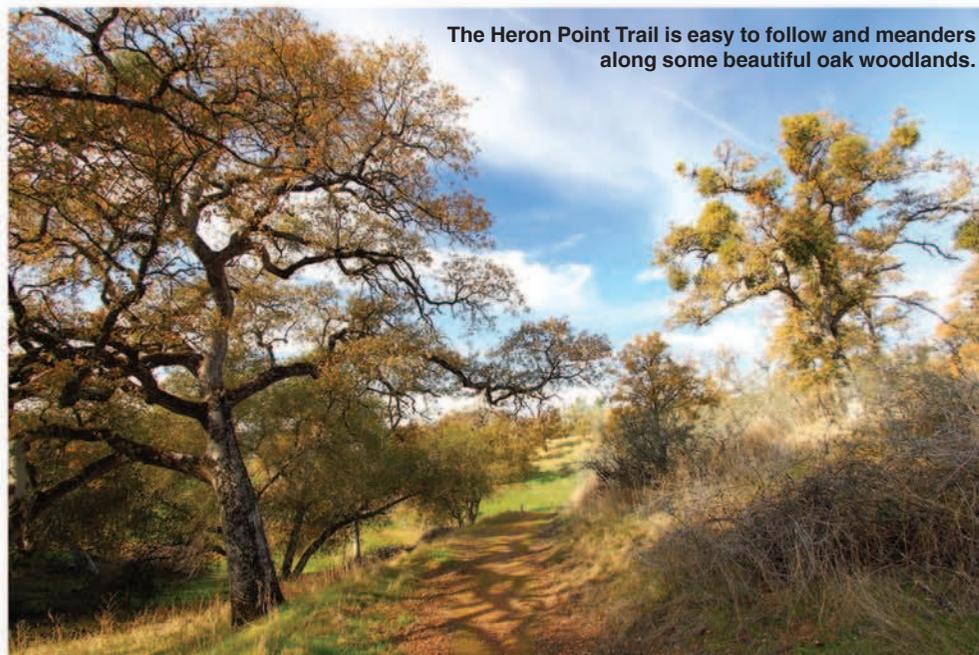
One Sunday brought more gorgeous fall temperatures and changing colors to the foothills. Accordingly, I decided to head over to Tuttle town and check out one of Melones' more popular hikes. The Heron Point Trail is a relatively easy 1.7-mile walk through level fields and golden oak trees. The bulk of the trail wanders through scattered oak woodland until it nears Heron Point and opens up to spectacular views of New Melones Reservoir.

This trail can be traveled three different ways. A short distance beyond Heron Point is a well-marked offshoot trail to the hiker's right that takes you on a short loop back to the parking area. Because of

*Continued on next page*



Photos by Dean Fleming



The Heron Point Trail is easy to follow and meanders along some beautiful oak woodlands.

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