

# “Big Tree”

## Ponderosa Pine

### La Pine

If you visit this tree in La Pine State Park, you’ll see how it got its name. “Big Pine” is the biggest ponderosa pine tree ever measured. After the wind blew its top out a few years ago, however, it was no longer considered the overall largest tree of its species. It still has the largest trunk of any ponderosa pine in the world, though, and it measures over 28 feet in circumference!

The “Big Pine” began as a seedling around the time that Christopher Columbus visited North America. It grew up tall in its home near the Deschutes River in Central Oregon and by the time the Oregon Trail pioneers crossed the state, the “Big Pine” was already a giant.

Ponderosa pines are adapted to grow in the drier sites of central and eastern Oregon. Their bark grows thick with age and this helps them survive the forest fires that naturally occur in these forests from time to time. The “Big Pine” has likely survived quite a few wildfires during its long lifetime. Older ponderosa pines have yellowish to reddish bark and for this reason the “Big Pine” has also been nicknamed “Big Red”. Native Americans sometimes stripped off the moist inner bark of ponderosa pines for food.

It takes two seasons for ponderosa pinecones to grow and produce seeds, which are eaten by a variety of birds, chipmunks and squirrels. You have to think that the Big Pine has fed a lot of wildlife and produced a whole forest of new pine trees during its five hundred years of life.

Photographs by Greg Giesy

