

State provides disabled access to Vikingsholm



Vikingsholm is now accessible to people with disabilities. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

EMERALD BAY STATE PARK – While Lora Knight’s guests were always allowed to drive to her estate, that has not always been the case for California State Parks visitors.

This is the second year people with disabilities are allowed to drive to Vikingsholm at Emerald Bay State Park. Otherwise it’s a one-mile trek down that feels much longer going up.

Volunteers escort people to a parking area not far from the castle. Two guest cars are allowed per day. Everyone is in their own vehicle to avoid insurance issues.

The normal \$10 parking fee is charged. The stay is for about two hours, which is long enough to tour the historic house.

Helen Smith, who summered at the estate when she was a child,

is still involved with Vikingsholm. A section of the museum, which is separate from the house, is dedicated to her. Smith used to be a regular docent. Last week she was there for a fundraiser.



The main room as it was when Mrs. Knight owned the estate.

Fundraising is an ongoing endeavor for the nonprofit associated with Vikingsholm because the state does not provide enough money for all the repairs. Smith formed the Vikingsholm Project in 1999 to raise money for the estate where she spent 14 years as a child in the summer. This year the circular stone driveway was replaced. Next year planting wildflowers in the sod roof is the main project.

The state acquired the land – which now totals 282 acres – in 1953. It included the castle-like building and Fannette Island, where Mrs. Knight's tea house sits in ruins.

In 1928, Mrs. Knight bought 250 acres at Emerald Bay for \$250,000. That fall the foundation was laid for Vikingsholm, while it was finished in less than six months the following year. It was designed after Scandinavian castles.

Most of the materials came from the greater Lake Tahoe area. One condition of Mrs. Knight's was that the trees at the bay not be harvested. The only things imported were the lead windows from Sweden.

Many of the furnishings in the home are original to Mrs. Knight. What she could not buy outright from Europe she had re-created by laborers in the States.



The kitchen at Vikingsholm.

And while it only cost \$125,000 to build the structure, the furnishings amounted to much more. The cashmere rug was \$40,000. The Steinway piano is from 1929. The unusual thing about it is that it has six legs.

Fifteen servants were employed to cater to the summer guests. The top floor is where people stayed, while the bottom floor was for entertaining, including eating.

Today, visitors are able to see most of the rooms on the two main floors, but are not allowed to the third level where Mrs. Knight would sleep. All she had to do was turn her head to see Emerald Bay.

Notes:

- Reservations for the ADA escort must be made 24 hours in advance by calling 530.525.9529.
- A disability placard is required.
- Dates are limited for when the service is provided. It is offered seasonally when the castle is open.
- Parking is \$10; the tour is an additional \$10 per adult.