

Kern County, California

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Kern County is a [county](#) located in the southern [Central Valley](#) of the [U.S. state](#) of [California](#). Established in 1866, it extends east beyond the southern slope of the Eastern [Sierra Nevada range](#) into the [Mojave Desert](#), and includes parts of the Indian Wells Valley, and the [Antelope Valley](#), and has an area larger than the state of [Connecticut](#). From the Sierras the county extends across the floor of the San Joaquin Valley to the eastern edge of the Temblor Range, part of the Coastal Ranges. To the south the county extends over the ridge of the [Tehachapi Mountains](#). As of the [2000 census](#), its population is 661,645, but recent California Department of Finance estimates place the county population at 779,869. The [county seat](#) is [Bakersfield](#) (since 1874) with the original county seat being the former mining town of [Havilah](#) in the mountains between Bakersfield and Tehachapi.

The county has a large agricultural base and is a significant producer of oil, natural gas, hydro-electric power, wind-turbine power, and geothermal power. [As of 2004](#), Kern remains California's top oil-producing county, with over 85% of the state's 43,000 [oil wells](#). The county accounts for one-tenth of overall U.S. oil production, and three of the five largest U.S. oil fields are in Kern County. Kern is also noted for its [mineral](#) wealth, including [gold](#), [borite](#), and [kernite](#).

[Edwards Air Force Base](#), [China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station](#), and [Mojave Spaceport](#) are located in Kern County (the latter owned and operated by the county government)

Kern County is home to California's largest open pit mine at Boron, which mines [borax](#).^[1]

The [American Lung Association](#) ranked Kern County as the most ozone-polluted county in the nation in 2006.^[2]

History

The Kern County area was first claimed by the Spanish in 1769. In 1772, Commander [Don Pedro Fages](#) became the first European to enter the area. The expedition entered via the [Grapevine Canyon](#) (later the site of the [Ridge Route](#) along [U.S. 99](#) and now [Interstate 5](#)). [Walker Pass](#) was discovered in 1834 and is an important pass across the [Sierra Nevada](#) as it is one of the few not closed by winter

snows. It is now a [National Historic Landmark](#). In 1848, the Kern area was ceded to the [United States](#) as part of the transfer of [California](#), [Nevada](#), and [Utah](#) and other lands under the [Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo](#).

Kern County was created in 1866 with the county seat located in the now abandoned mining town of [Havilah](#). In its beginning, Kern County was dominated by mining in the mountains and desert. The area of the San Joaquin Valley was considered inhospitable and impassable at the time due to swamps, lakes, tule reeds, and diseases such as malaria. This changed when settlers started draining lands for farming and constructing canals, most dug by hand by hired Chinese laborers, to irrigate and drain these lands. Within 10 years the area of the San Joaquin Valley surpassed the mining areas as the economic influence of the county, and the county seat was moved from Havilah to Bakersfield in 1874.

Tensions between Native Americans (mostly Mohave and Paiutes) following attacks on miners and encroaching settlers in the mountains turned deadly on several occasions. Most notably the [ghost town](#) of [Keyesville](#) is the location where 5 Indians were killed in 1856, and another 35 in were killed by soldiers in the 1863 *Keyesville Massacre*. Relations with other tribes were more cordial. The Haidu lived on the Tejon Ranch under General Edward Beale's protection on Ranchos, and relations between Beale and the Chiefs were cordial. The Yokut Indians of the San Joaquin Valley were peaceful and friendly. Spanish explorer Father Francisco Garces befriended the Yokuts at villages at the present day Garces Circle. They lived in Hogans along the branches of the Kern River Delta and hunted antelope, tule elk, deer, grizzly bear, fish, and game birds. The Yokuts for the most part died from diseases, with a few assimilating into the white man's culture. The Haidu assimilated into the local population with most intermarrying with Spanish/Mexican Californios. Many of the Paiute still live in the mountain areas of eastern Kern County, with no reservations in Kern County as in other counties.

Kern County was formed in 1866 from parts of [Los Angeles](#) and [Tulare](#) Counties. The county derives its name from the [Kern River](#) which was named for [Edward Kern](#), [cartographer](#) for General [John C. Fremont](#)'s 1845 expedition, which crossed Walker Pass. The Kern River was originally named Rio Bravo de San Felipe by Father Francisco Garces when he explored the area in 1776. Kern County was nearly named Buena Vista County for the large, and now drained, Buena Vista Lake between Bakersfield and Taft.

Kern County was the site of the Battle of San Emigdio. It was between Indians of the Santa Barbara Mission who rebelled against the Mexican government's taking over mission property and ejecting the Indians. This battle between Mexican forces from Monterrey occurred at the canyon where San Emigdio Creek flows down [San Emigdio Mountain](#) and the Blue Ridge south of Bakersfield near Highway 166.

Former U.S. Ambassador and U.S. Army General Edward Beale established and owned the large Tejon Ranch in the mountains south of Bakersfield. It was the consolidation of four separate Mexican Ranchos he purchased in 1846 after his part in winning California independence in the Bear Flag Revolt against corrupt and inept Mexican government officials. Today, the Tejon Ranch is the largest tract of privately owned land in California. The Beale Memorial Library, Beale Avenue, General Beale Road, The Beale Memorial Clock Tower, Beale Park, and Truxtun Avenue are named after the influential Beale family, both for Edward and his wife, and their son Truxtun.

In 1854 the First Regiment, U.S. [Dragoons](#) established [Fort Tejon](#) near the head of the Grapevine Canyon. The post's mission was protecting peaceful Indians living on the nearby Tejon Indian Rancherias, as well as safeguarding miners from raids by hostile Mohave and Paiute Indians. The Indians of the Tejon Ranch, most of whom were Haidu, assimilated into the local population and the Rancherias no longer exist. Located next to the Ridge Route (now Interstate 5) just north of the town of Lebec, the fort is a California State Historical Park featuring living history programs and Civil War re-enactments (although no Civil War battles were fought there).

Elk Hills, one of the largest oil fields in Kern County, was involved in the [Teapot Dome Scandal](#), an infamous example of corruption of President [Warren G. Harding's](#) administration. In 1923 it was revealed that Harding's [Secretary of the Interior, Albert Fall](#), transferred portions of the naval petroleum reserves into private hands without competitive bidding, and in the case of Elk Hills, in exchange for personal 'loans.' The illicit deals involved the reserves at Elk Hills and at Teapot Dome in Wyoming.

On [July 21, 1952](#), an [earthquake](#) with [epicenter](#) in Kern County measuring 7.3 on the [Richter scale](#) killed 12 people. The [Kern County earthquake](#) was the largest earthquake to strike [Southern California](#) since the [Fort Tejon earthquake](#) of [1857](#) and the [Lone Pine earthquake](#) of [1872](#), causing immense and widespread damage. In addition to 12 fatalities, it was responsible for at least 18 injuries and over \$50 million in property damage. It was followed by several [aftershocks](#), at least 20 of

which were magnitude 5.0 or greater. The quake occurred on the White Wolf Fault and was the second strongest quake in California history, second only to the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

As home to [Edwards Air Force Base](#) the Air Force's main flight test facility, Kern County has been the site of many milestones, including the first [supersonic flight](#) and the first landing of the [Space Shuttle](#). Kern County is also the home of the first inland spaceport in the [United States](#), the [Mojave Spaceport](#). Kern County is also home to the [China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station](#) at Ridgecrest where many naval weapons were (and continue to be) developed and tested.

Between 1983 and 1986, several ritual sex ring [child abuse cases allegedly occurred in Kern County](#). These resulted in numerous long prison sentences, all of which were overturned, some only decades later. The Kern County cases marked the beginning of a series of similar cases all over North America and beyond.

Currently, Kern County is represented by 5 District Supervisors. John McQuiston representing the 1st District, Don Maben representing the 2nd District, Mike Maggard representing the 3rd District, Ray Watson representing the 4th District, and Michael J. Rubio representing the 5th District.

Geography

According to the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the county has a total area of 21,138 km² (8,161 sq mi). 21,085 km² (8,141 sq mi) of it is land and 53 km² (20 sq mi) of it (0.25%) is water.

Demographics

As of the [census](#)² of 2000, there were 661,645 people, 208,652 households, and 156,489 families residing in the county. The [population density](#) was 31/km² (81/sq mi). There were 231,564 housing units at an average density of 11/km² (28/sq mi). The racial makeup of the county was 61.60% [White](#), 6.02% [Black](#) or [African American](#), 3.37% [Asian](#), 1.51% [Native American](#), 0.15% [Pacific Islander](#), 23.22% from [other races](#), and 4.14% from two or more races. 38.39% of the population were [Hispanic](#) or [Latino](#) of any race. 66.8% spoke [English](#), 29.1% [Spanish](#) and 1.0% [Tagalog](#) as their first language.

There were 208,652 households out of which 42.2% had children under the age of 18 living with them, 54.6% were [married couples](#) living together, 14.5% had a female

householder with no husband present, and 25.0% were non-families. 20.3% of all households were made up of individuals and 7.8% had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 3.03 and the average family size was 3.50.

In the county the population was spread out with 31.9% under the age of 18, 10.2% from 18 to 24, 29.80% from 25 to 44, 18.7% from 45 to 64, and 9.4% who were 65 years of age or older. The median age was 31 years. For every 100 females there were 105.3 males. For every 100 females age 18 and over, there were 105.3 males.

The median income for a household in the county was \$35,446, and the median income for a family was \$39,403. Males had a median income of \$38,097 versus \$25,876 for females. The [per capita income](#) for the county was \$15,760. About 16.8% of families and 20.8% of the population were below the [poverty line](#), including 27.8% of those under age 18 and 10.5% of those age 65 or over.

The [center of population](#) of California is located in Kern County, in the town of [Buttonwillow](#) [2].

Politics

Kern is a strongly [Republican](#) county in [Presidential](#) and [congressional](#) elections. The last Democrat to win a majority in the county was [Lyndon Johnson](#) in 1964.

Kern is part of California's [20th](#) and [22nd](#) congressional districts, which are held by Democrat [Jim Costa](#) and Republican [Kevin McCarthy](#), respectively. In the [State Assembly](#), Kern is part of the 30th, 32nd, 34th and 37th districts. The 30th district is held by Democrat [Nicole Parra](#) while the 32nd, 34th, and 37th districts are held by Republicans [Jean Fuller](#), [Bill Maze](#), and [Audra Strickland](#), respectively. In the [State Senate](#), Kern is part of the 16th and 18th districts, which are held by Democrat [Dean Florez](#) and Republican [Roy Ashburn](#), respectively.

Presidential election results			
Year	GOP	DEM	Others
2004	66.5% 140,417	32.5% 68,603	1.0% 2,154
2000	60.7% 110,663	36.2% 66,003	3.1% 5,642
1996	53.7% 92,151	36.6% 62,658	9.7% 16,582
1992	45.1% 80,762	33.8% 60,510	21.2% 37,991
1988	61.5% 90,550	37.4% 55,083	1.1% 1,660
1984	65.0% 94,776	34.0% 49,567	1.0% 1,401
1980	59.6% 72,842	33.7% 41,097	6.7% 8,182
1976	52.3% 58,023	45.6% 50,567	2.1% 2,371
1972	60.1% 71,686	35.2% 41,937	4.7% 5,570
1968	46.6% 53,990	42.6% 49,284	10.8% 12,558
1964	41.2% 45,014	58.7% 64,174	0.1% 120
1960	50.4% 52,800	49.1% 51,440	0.4% 465

Recreation

Kern County's geography offers a wide variety of outdoor geography. Among the outdoor recreational activities are: Horseback riding, water skiing (Lake Buena Vista, Lake Ming, and private ski ranches), offroad biking and dune buggys (Jawbone Canyon, California City, and Randsburg), auto racing (Willow Springs, Buttonwillow, Bakersfield Speedway, Famoso, & and an unnamed half-mile speedway under construction), hunting, paint ball courses, white water rafting, Olympic quality kayaking, snow skiing (Shirley Meadows), shooting ranges (5 Dogs Creek Range), hiking, biking (trails, paths, and roads), camping, fishing, and other activities.

Cities over 300,000 population

[Bakersfield \(County Seat\)](#) (Airport: [Meadows Field IATA: BFL](#))

Cities over 50,000 population

[Delano](#)

Cities over 10,000 population

[Ridgecrest](#)

[Wasco](#)

[Arvin](#)

[Shafter](#)

[Tehachapi](#)

[McFarland](#)

Cities under 10,000 population

[California City](#)

[Taft](#)

[Maricopa](#)

Towns and CDPs

The following are towns or [census-designated places](#) within Kern County:

Towns over 10,000 population

[Oildale](#)

[Rosamond](#)

Lamont

Towns over 1,000 population

Rosedale

Golden Hills

Bear Valley Springs

Mojave (Airport: Mojave Airport IATA: MHV)

Ford City

Lake Isabella

Weedpatch

Weldon

Frazier Park

Wofford Heights

Boron

Lost Hills

South Taft

Taft Heights

Bodfish

China Lake Acres

Kernville

Pine Mountain Club

Stallion Springs

Lebec

Buttonwillow

North Edwards

Caliente

Towns Under 1,000 population

Inyokern (Airport: Inyokern Airport IATA: IYK)

Lake of the Woods

Mountain Mesa

Dustin Acres

Valley Acres

Squirrel Mountain Valley

Onyx
Derby Acres
Keene
Tupman
Johannesburg
McKittrick
Mettler
Fellows
Randsburg
Pumpkin Center
Old River

Adjacent Counties

Los Angeles County, California - south
Ventura County, California - south
Santa Barbara County, California - southwest
San Luis Obispo County, California - west
Kings County, California - northwest
Tulare County, California - north
Inyo County, California - northeast
San Bernardino County, California - east

Transportation Infrastructure

Major Highways

 Interstate 5

 U.S. Route 395

 State Route 14

 State Route 33

 State Route 43

 State Route 46

 State Route 58

 State Route 65

 State Route 99

 State Route 119

 State Route 155

 State Route 166

 State Route 178

 State Route 184

 State Route 204

 State Route 223

Public transportation

[Golden Empire Transit](#) is the local bus operator in and near Bakersfield.

[Kern Regional Transit](#) provides countywide intercity bus service.

Kern County is also served by [Greyhound](#) and [Orange Belt Stages](#) buses and [Amtrak](#) trains.

Airports

[Meadows Field](#) in Bakersfield is a commercial and general aviation airport.

[Mojave Spaceport](#) in Mojave.

Media

Newspapers

Bakersfield Californian [\[3\]](#), Bakersfield, north/west Kern

The Mountain Enterprise, southwest Kern mountains area

Mojave Desert News [\[4\]](#), east Kern desert area

The Daily Independent [\[5\]](#), Ridgecrest, China Lake, and The Indian Wells Valley

The Kern Valley Sun, Kern Valley area