

# Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park



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## Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park

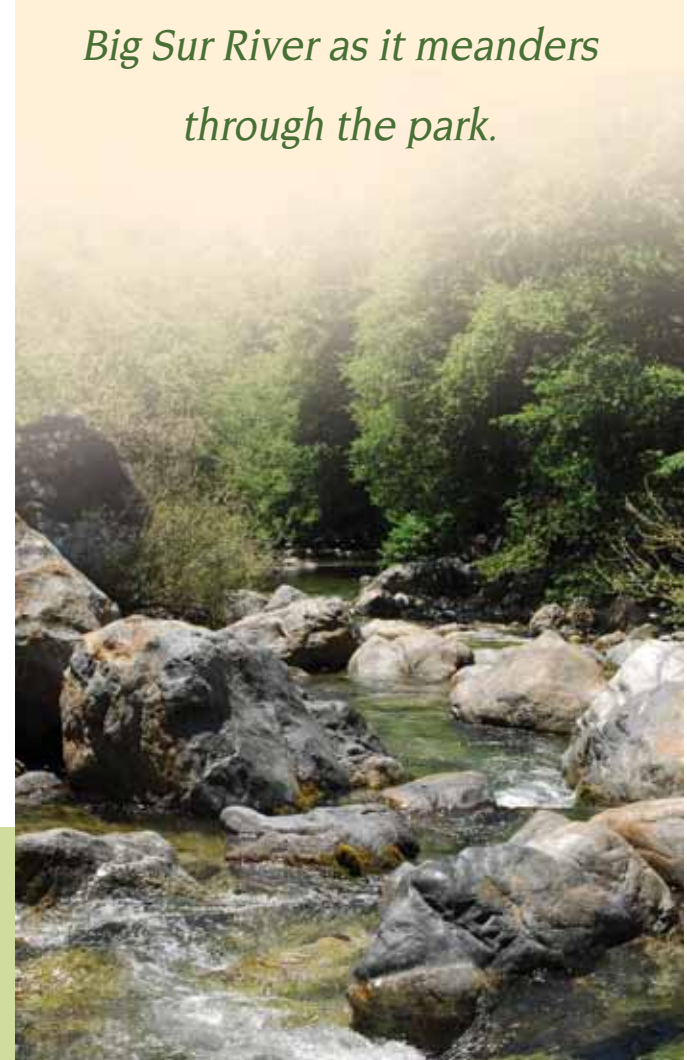
47225 Highway 1

Big Sur, CA 93920

(831) 649-2836

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*Pfeiffer Big Sur  
State Park is loved  
for the serenity of its  
forests and the pristine,  
fragile beauty of the  
Big Sur River as it meanders  
through the park.*



## **O**n the western slope of the Santa

**Lucia Mountains**, the peaks of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park tower high above the Big Sur River Gorge. This is a place where the land, the sea, and forests of giant redwoods adjoin in a rugged landscape jigsaw puzzle.

In winter, temperatures range from the 20s to the 50s. Summer mornings bring fog, which usually burns off by midday.

### **PARK HISTORY**

#### **The Esselen and Rumsien People**

Early archaeological evidence of the Esselen and Rumsien (also known as Costanoan) presence on the Central Coast dates back about 8,000 years. Though physical remnants of these prehistoric Native Americans have not been well documented, a few items discovered in the area—projectile points, bedrock mortars and various shells—have been attributed to them.

Esselen and Rumsien people still live in the Big Sur area, where they honor and practice the traditions of their ancestors.

#### **Big Sur Settlers**

In 1834, Governor José Figueroa granted acreage to Juan Bautista Alvarado. Alvarado's El Sur Rancho stretched from the River Chiquito del Sur (in today's Carmel Valley) to below the Big Sur River.

Mexico ceded California to the U.S. in 1848, at the end of the Mexican-American War. Beginning around 1862, the area was settled by people whose names—Pfeiffer, Partington, Post, Gamboa—are still found on local street signs and businesses.

The park's Manuel Peak was named for a member of the Chumash tribe, Immanuel Innocente, head cattle wrangler at El Sur Rancho. In 1868, Innocente moved his family north from San Buenaventura to the Big Sur area. That year they bought property along the river in what is now the park.

Michael and Barbara Pfeiffer arrived here in 1869, settling at the mouth of Sycamore Canyon to ranch, farm and keep bees. Their son, John, lived along the Big Sur River, near the site of the Homestead cabin.

In the early 20th century, a developer offered to buy some of John Pfeiffer's land, planning to build a subdivision. Pfeiffer refused. Instead, he sold 680 acres—which became the nucleus of today's park—to the State of California in 1933.

#### **The Civilian Conservation Corps**

The Great Depression was in full force in the early 1930s. One of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first official acts was to create the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The CCC employed young men to develop recreational areas and conserve natural resources. From 1933 to 1942, nearly 2.5 million CCC corpsmen built roads, trails and structures in more than 800 state and federal parks and planted nearly three billion trees.

The men here at CCC Camp S.P. 12 built campgrounds, buildings, fences, a footbridge and trails in this park. Their wood and stone “park rustic” style used redwood lumber and river rocks as building materials. Between construction jobs, they tackled fires and problematic poison oak.

**Before and after Highway One:** In 1937, the new highway was completed, forever changing the serene ranch lands. Following World War II, the state highway brought travelers enthralled by the beauty of the area to the park. These photos from 1954 show remote Big Sur's increasing popularity.



*Interpretive hike*



*Big Sur Lodge*



*Swimming hole at Big Sur River*





*Basin Complex fire, 2008*

### NATURAL HISTORY

**Wildlife**—Cooper’s hawks, spotted owls and purple martins perform sky acrobatics. Endangered or threatened animals include California condors and steelhead. On the ground and in the air, ringtails, bobcats, Steller’s jays, gray foxes, and belted kingfishers go about their business.

**Plants**—Coast redwoods, near the southern end of their natural range, flourish in creek drainages and along the Big Sur River. At their feet are ferns, redwood sorrel and other shade-tolerant plants. Big-leaf maples, sycamores, alders, cottonwoods and willows grow along the river and the creeks. On hillsides,



*Belted kingfisher*

manzanita, buckeye and coast live oak have spread. Today, scientists are concerned that increased temperatures and decreased fog due to climate change threaten the survival of the coast redwoods forest.

### The Basin Complex Fire

On June 21, 2008, lightning strikes caused a wildfire that burned more than 160,000 acres along the Big Sur coast. Still-recovering parts of the park may not yet be available for use.

### RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Big Sur Station**—A visitor center for the area parks is south at 47555 Highway 1.

**Big Sur Lodge**—The lodge concession has 61 rooms, cottages, a conference center, a cafe, a gift shop and a grocery store. Visit [www.bigsurlodge.com](http://www.bigsurlodge.com) for details.

**Day Use**—Valley View trail’s east fork leads to a 60-foot waterfall. The many miles of park trails adjoin 200 miles of trails in the nearby Ventana Wilderness of Los Padres National Forest. Visitors may play softball on the field near Big Sur River.

**Camping**—More than 150 recreational vehicle and tent sites sit along the Big Sur River. Two group tent sites and a hike/bike site are available to campers, but no RVs are allowed in these sites. The campfire center has evening programs. Reserve group or family sites up to seven months ahead at [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) or call (800) 444-7275.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Several campsites, the picnic areas and the restrooms are accessible. For accessibility updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- All park features are protected by law and may not be disturbed. Stay on trails to avoid poison oak throughout the park.
- Protect fish nests in the river; do not move rocks, branches or other materials.
- Please do not feed wildlife.
- Except for service animals, pets may not use trails, the river or other natural areas. All animals must be on a six-foot leash.

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park  
11 miles south of Big Sur on Highway 1  
Big Sur 93920 (831) 667-2315
- Andrew Molera State Park  
4 miles to the north on Highway 1  
Big Sur 93920 (831) 667-2315

This park receives support in part from a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact Big Sur Natural History Association P.O. Box 274, Big Sur, CA 93920

