

# Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the Big Sur Station at (831) 649-2836. This publication is available in alternate formats by contacting:

**CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS**

**P.O. Box 942896**

**Sacramento, CA 94296-0001**

For information call: (800) 777-0369.

(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

**[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)**

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**[SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp](http://SaveTheRedwoods.org/csp)**

**Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park**  
**11 miles south of Big Sur on Highway 1**  
**Big Sur, CA 93920 (831) 649-2836**  
**[www.parks.ca.gov/jpb](http://www.parks.ca.gov/jpb)**

*Julia Pfeiffer Burns photo courtesy of Big Sur Historical Society*

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*Visitors from around the world revere the natural beauty of the park's rugged coastline, panoramic views, crashing surf and sparkling waters.*



**Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park offers a dramatic meeting of land and sea**—attracting visitors, writers, artists and photographers from around the world. The same geologic, climate and marine processes that shape the character of this beautiful park keep it undeveloped, susceptible to natural forces. Wildfires and landslides are common.

The steep slopes of the Santa Lucia Range and the rugged coast embody the essence of the frontier spirit and individualism of its early settlers. Visitors may hike, scuba dive, fish and explore the coastal overlook. Park temperatures range from the mid-80s at higher elevations inland to the mid-40s, with heavy winter rains and frequent coastal fog.

### **PARK HISTORY**

#### **Native People**

Evidence suggests that the Big Sur coast was inhabited until the early 1800s by native California Indians who spoke the Esselen language. They used the forested terrain as well as the coast for hunting and harvesting what they needed for sustenance, utility and ornament. Surviving Esselen descendants in Monterey County continue to honor and practice many of their ancestral traditions.

#### **Early Pioneers**

The area of today's park was homesteaded by a number of pioneers in the 1870s,



*Julia Pfeiffer Burns*

including the McWay and Partington families. Homesteaders were largely self-sufficient—making a living as loggers, tanoak harvesters or ranchers by using only the resources available on the Big Sur coast.

Michael Pfeiffer moved to Sycamore Canyon in 1869 when his daughter Julia was an infant. She spent her life in Big Sur, inspired by its terrain, the sea and the wildlife.

Former U. S. congressman Lathrop Brown and his wife, Helen Hooper Brown, purchased property at Saddle Rock as a vacation retreat. Julia Pfeiffer and her husband John Burns leased pasture land from the Browns at Saddle Rock, near McWay Falls. The Burnses lived south of the park at Slate's Hot Springs (now the Esalen Institute), providing tourists with hot meals and a bed.

The Browns enjoyed Julia's plain-spoken manner and big heart, and they donated Saddle Rock Ranch as a state park dedicated to Julia Pfeiffer Burns in 1962. The splendor and seclusion of the Big Sur coast continues to draw vacationers to this park.

### **NATURAL HISTORY**

This four-square-mile park is situated on the central coast. Steep canyons filled with ancient redwood trees and sheer cliffs

dropping nearly vertically to shore provide habitat for many sensitive aquatic and terrestrial species.

Three perennial creeks flow through the park; Anderson, Partington and McWay Creeks begin nearly three thousand feet up in the Santa Lucia Mountains. McWay Creek ends in spectacular McWay Falls at its cove.

Old- and second-growth coast redwoods grow within 100 yards of shore, near the southernmost point in California that supports this species.

### **Wildlife and Plants**

Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park links with the Ventana Wilderness and the Los Padres National Forest to form a wildlife corridor preserving 173,000 acres of contiguous open space for species needing wide-ranging habitats.

Native vegetation types in the park include coastal scrub, chaparral, coastal prairie grasslands, mixed evergreen forest, riparian redwood forest and arroyo-willow riparian forest. Non-native



*California condor*



Image courtesy of Michael L. Baird

*Endangered resident of the California Sea Otter State Game Refuge*

species include blue gum eucalyptus, acacia, mock orange and jubata grass. These species originate elsewhere, but they have taken over parts of the park. Work to control non-native species is ongoing.

Four active seabird colonies make up some of the largest of those found along the Big Sur coast. The central coast's only known colony of double-crested cormorants lives just offshore. Partington and McWay canyons shelter sensitive butterfly populations, including one of only eighteen surviving Smith's blue butterfly colonies on Earth.

Many species in the park are listed as either threatened or endangered, including peregrine falcons, bald eagles, California brown pelicans, California condors and southern sea otters.

### Marine Life

The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary helps preserve California's rich marine life in both rocky intertidal and coastal strand zones. The California Sea Otter State Game Refuge, with its extensive kelp forest, reaches from the Carmel River in the north to Cambria in

the south. In the underwater portion of the park, divers will be amazed by the underwater pinnacles and cliffs along the coastline. Kelp greenling, cabezon and other colorful fish make their homes among the kelp.

### Camping and Trails

Two tent-only, walk-in environmental campsites are available by reservation. For details, call (800) 444-7275 or visit [www.parks.ca.gov/jpb](http://www.parks.ca.gov/jpb). Some park trails are undergoing rehabilitation due to natural events. Observe all posted trail signs.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

An accessible trail for visitors leads from the parking lots to the scenic waterfall overlook. Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, call (916) 445-8949 or visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park  
12 miles to the north on Highway 1  
Big Sur 93920 (831) 649-2836
- Andrew Molera State Park  
16 miles to the north on Highway 1  
Big Sur 93920 (831) 649-2836

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- McWay Falls and the beach at McWay Cove are off-limits to visitors.
- Tidal conditions can change quickly, and cliff overlooks are dangerous. Stay away from cliff edges to avoid being swept out to sea by sleeper waves any time of year.
- Dive permits and surf conditions are available at Big Sur Station on Highway 1.
- Except for service animals, pets are not permitted in campsites or on trails. All pets in the parking area must be attended on a six-foot-maximum leash.
- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.

This park receives support in part through the nonprofit Big Sur Natural History Association  
P. O. Box 274  
Big Sur, CA 93920

**Legend**

-  Paved Roads
-  Unpaved Road
-  Trail
-  Accessible Trail
-  Intermittent Stream
-  Park Boundary
-  Accessible Feature
-  Diving
-  Environmental Camp
-  Locked Gate
-  No Public Access
-  Parking
-  Picnic Area
-  Restrooms
-  Viewpoint
-  Waterfall

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