

# First Come First Served Camping At Andrew Molera SP

We receive a lot of questions about how to book a first come first served camping site—often the Big Sur Sector Office receives 40 phone calls on Thursdays and Fridays asking about it. As you can imagine, this makes getting any kind of other work difficult for those of us answering the phone!

So here are the most frequently asked questions:

## **Can I reserve a site over the phone?**

Unfortunately the answer to this question is no. You must be physically present to get a site. When trying to get first come first served camping always have a back-up plan for what you are going to do if there is not a site available.

## **Can you tell me whether the sites are full (or how many sites are left)?**

Because campers may stay seven days once they have booked their site (and they may renew the site any time before 12 noon) we are unable to predict availability of sites over the phone. First, communication with the kiosk at Andrew Molera is difficult, as phone lines in Big Sur are temperamental and Andrew Molera's phone service is especially unreliable. Second, there could be, for instance, 6 sites available when you ask, and by the time you drive from Los Angeles or San Francisco, an impromptu group of 24 friends take all the remaining campsites.

## **How do I know if the campground is full?**

You will see a sign at the park entrance that says "Campground full." Since our job as your state park is to get as many people camping as possible, we are very good about taking the sign down when we have availability.

## **How early or how late can I arrive to get a site?**

Quiet time in the campgrounds of all State Parks is between 7 am and 10 pm. Please don't tromp through trail camp before or after those hours looking for a site as you disturb others who are camping and usually sleeping. The park kiosk opens at 9 am. Often, there are people waiting in line when the kiosk opens at 9 am. But if the campground is full the night before, we won't know until checkout time (12 noon) if there are any sites available, since once you are in a site you have the option to keep it for seven days. Until the camp check is complete, park employees will not know availability of sites if the campground is full when you arrive. Camp check in, even if you have been promised a site can't happen until the other folks are out – often around 2 pm.

## **When is the best time to get a site?**

Generally speaking, during the busy summer months and holiday weekends, Trail Camp is often full by Thursday night or Friday morning. On busy holiday weekends (and yes this includes Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Year) people often arrive on the Wednesday or Thursday before the holiday or weekend to assure that they get a site. The week before July 4<sup>th</sup> this year, the trail camp was full on Tuesday. The slowest times for camping are Wednesdays and Tuesdays and during rainy weather, so you have a better chance of obtaining a site at those times.

*A good rule of thumb to use:* If you look on Reserve America, and Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park is totally booked, it is going to be difficult to get a site at Andrew Molera because more people will be looking for sites.

### **Can I self- register for a site if the kiosk is closed?**

Yes, the park is open from sunrise to sunset. If you arrive during sunlight hours and the kiosk is closed, you may pay for day use, put your receipt in your car and hike out to trail camp to see if a site is available. Then come back and self-register for the site using an Iron Ranger envelope (deducting the \$10.00 day use fee you have already paid from your camping fee and leaving a note on your envelope that you did this). You do not have the right to occupy a site until you have paid for it. We do ask, however, that you do not go out into the campground before 7 am or after 10 pm looking for a site.

### **If I get there very late and there are no campsites left, can I sleep in the parking lot?**

Camping in the parking lot in Andrew Molera State Park is prohibited and illegal campers will be cited by the resident ranger. This is one of the most expensive camping experiences in Big Sur!

### **What are my options if Molera is full?**

Other campgrounds with first come first served camping in the area include:

Botcher's Gap, USFS Los Padres National Forest

Nacimiento, USFS Los Padres National Forest

Ponderosa, USFS Los Padres National Forest

Backpacking into a trail camp in the Los Padres National Forest

You might also want to find lodging in the more available and cheaper towns to the north—namely, Monterey, Seaside, or Marina – or to the south in Cambria or San Simeon.

### **Should I have “Plan B” if I cannot find camping at Andrew Molera?**

You should definitely have a “Plan B” if you cannot find a first come first served campsite. Despite what you may read on social media and free campsite websites, it is illegal to camp along Monterey County roads, Highway 1, or dispersed along USFS roads. All dispersed camping

in the National Forests must be done at least 4 miles into the wilderness (away from a road). There is currently a concerted effort by the Monterey County Sheriff's Department, the California Highway Patrol, the United States Forest Service, and California State Parks to cite illegal campers, who are causing both public health dangers (by irresponsibly disposing of human waste and littering), public safety dangers (by starting illegal campfires in a high fire danger forest), and generally mistreating the public lands in the Big Sur Area.