Dense redwood groves tend to create their own micro-climate, maintaining those conditions of temperature, moisture, and shelter that have enabled them to exist for some 100 million years. These sentinels of the past are survivors of long bygone eras. Paleobotanists have found fossilized remnants of redwood trees in rock that is more than 100 million years old. This tells us that redwoods co-existed with other long extinct species including the great dinosaurs of the Mesozoic Era.

Today, coast redwoods are restricted to a narrow coastal strip some 500 miles long and up to 30 miles wide. Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park lies near the southern limit of the current range, which stretches north to the southwestern corner of Oregon.

The coast redwood is the world's tallest living organism. The tallest individual specimen is located in Redwood National Park (320 miles north of San Francisco) and measures 367.8 feet in height. Exceptional individuals sometimes reach 15 to 20 feet in diameter and 2,000 years of age.

The largest tree in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park is the "Colonial Tree," located near the group picnic area. It has a circumference of 27 feet. The oldest grove in the park is the "Proboscis Grove" which can be found near the Ranger Station. Studies indicate that these trees are 800 to 1,200 years old.

Coast redwoods produce millions of seeds each year (up to 120,000 per pound). However, few seeds survive and fewer still actually germinate into seedlings, because the thick duff on the forest floor keeps the seeds from nutrient-rich soil. Sprouting is the major form of reproduction. Buds on the roots or burls form vigorous, fast-growing sprouts. Look for these in redwood areas throughout the park.

Although the thick, soft, reddish-brown bark is relatively fire and insect resistant, naturally occurring wildfires long ago damaged some of the older trees within the park. Large fire scars or "goosepens" can be found at the base of these trees.

In the canyons and on the flats beside the river, the redwoods live side by side with sycamores, black cottonwoods, big-leaf maples, alders and willows. Carpeting the forest floor are ferns, clover-like redwood sorrel and various flowering plants that bloom in the spring and summer.

Contrasting with this is the chaparral plant community that thrives on hot, dry, south-facing slopes. It is made up of shrubs such as chamise, ceanothus, buckeye, toyon, coffee berry, cascara, manzanita and yucca. Coast live oaks, tanoaks, and California laurels fill the cooler, moister slopes and ravines.

Poison Oak

Redwood logging operators were active in this area during the early part of the century, but the main forest industry involved the harvesting of tanbark. The bark of the tanoak is rich in tannin, the main ingredient used by the tanneries of Santa Cruz and elsewhere for tanning leather.

Poison oak is found throughout the park. It has an oily substance on its leaves, stems and roots that is highly irritating to the skin. Note carefully the shape of the leaves, which turn from a shiny green in the spring to orange and even bright red in the fall.

WILDLIFE

The various plant communities of Big Sur support a diverse animal population. As you walk the trails in the park you will encounter a variety of different animals each in their own habitat.

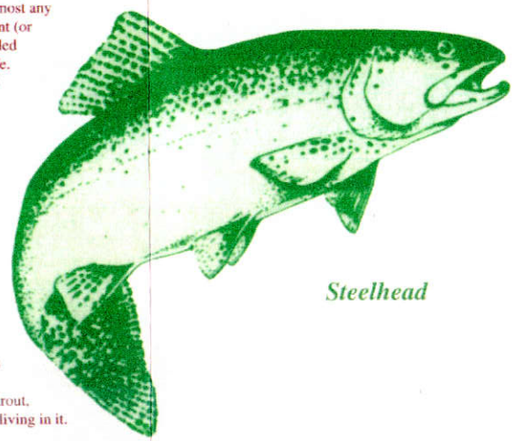
In the chaparral, the vegetation is so thick that it is difficult to see the many animals that live there. Deer, bobcats and other animals may remain unseen even when they are close by and can be heard moving through the brush. The chaparral is also a good place to see and hear birds, especially in the early morning and evening hours. A bird list is available at the park entrance station. Reptiles such as gopher snakes, alligator lizards and even mountain king snakes are found in the chaparral.

Animals are easier to see in the less dense vegetation of the oak woodland. Gray squirrels and ground squirrels are visible at almost any time of the day, while the more patient (or luckier) person is apt to see black-tailed deer, quail and other forms of wildlife. If you listen closely you may be able to hear the call of a hawk, the scurrying of a mouse or the hammering of a woodpecker.

Many Big Sur animals are nocturnal. You may spot a gray fox or a raccoon, for example, in your headlights or flashlight beam at night. The river is a good place to look for evidence of these animals. The footprints of raccoon, deer, fox and ringtail cats can often be found in the mud and sand along the river banks. Kingfishers, dippers, crows and many other kinds of birds can be observed along the river, which has steelhead, rainbow trout, sculpin, stickle-backs and crawdads living in it.

The river is open to fishing at certain times of the year. California Department of Fish and Game regulations are in effect. For further information please feel free to contact the park staff.

Many of the animals at Pfeiffer Big Sur Park are used to human beings. Stellar's jays and ground squirrels are almost fearless. Please remember, however, that they are still wild and unpredictable animals. When humans feed them we upset the natural balance of the area. Quail or deer (which are less bold) will suffer as more aggressive animals such as raccoons or Stellar's jays increase in number. By not feeding the animals at all, we not only help retain natural conditions, but also increase our chances of viewing wild animals in their natural state.



Steelhead

PLEASE HELP

Big Sur is a special place to many people. Help keep it that way and ensure your own safety and enjoyment by observing some simple rules and basic safety tips:

* **FIREWOOD GATHERING** is not allowed. To reduce human impact on the environment, dead and down twigs, branches and logs are protected. As this wood decays it restores nutrients to the soil, helping other plants to survive. Firewood can be purchased at the lodge and camp store. Fires are permitted only in fireplaces and barbeques.

* **MOTOR VEHICLES** must observe posted speed limits. Parking is permitted only in designated areas. The weight of vehicles causes soil compaction that can be harmful to tree roots.

* **STAY ON THE TRAILS** and watch for loose rocks, hidden roots and poison oak. Hiking in the river gorge is especially hazardous. Check for ticks.

* **DOGS** are permitted only in the campground and picnic areas. They are not allowed on trails. Do not leave your dog unattended at any time. They must be kept on leash at all times (6 foot maximum length), and in an enclosed vehicle or tent at night.

* **CAMPING** is allowed in designated areas only. For the comfort and convenience of all, quiet must be maintained between the hours of 10 p.m. and 8 a.m. (Generators may be operated only between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m.)

* **DIVING**, head- or feet-first, is not permitted in any portion of the Big Sur River or its tributaries within the state park.

* **BICYCLES** are allowed on paved roads **only** in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. They are **not** allowed on trails. Due to the windy, scenic nature of the park roadways, bicyclists are reminded to maintain road courtesy and safety practices.

*Please keep valuables with you or locked up, out of sight.

Pfeiffer BIG SUR

State Park

The Esselen Indians were the first human inhabitants of the Big Sur country. They occupied the coastal plains and woodlands from Lopez Point to Point Sur and made their living as hunters and gatherers, using the plants and animals of both land and sea. Starting in the late 1700's, however, Spanish soldiers and missionaries caused the Esselens to leave their villages and move into the missions. Within a few years they were so thoroughly mixed in with other mission Indians and so decimated by smallpox, cholera and other European diseases that they no longer existed as a separate people. Today very little is known of their way of life.

Except for a handful of mission escapees, the rugged Santa Lucia mountain range remained uninhabited until the mid-1800s. The Spaniards called the area "El Pais Grande del Sur," or "the big country of the south," and eventually just "Big Sur."

One of the first American pioneers in Big Sur was George Davis. He grew fruit and raised bees for about eight years before selling his land to Manuel Innocenti.

Manual Innocenti and his wife Francesca were Chumash Indians from Santa Barbara. Francesca raised six children while Manuel worked as a vaquero on Juan Cooper's Rancho el Sur, part of which now lies within Andrew Molera State Park. Their children all died young, but Francesca lived a full 100 years. Today, she and her children are buried near the Homestead Cabin in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. A mountain peak about one mile northeast of the park commemorates Manuel Innocenti.

The Pfeiffers were the first European immigrants to settle permanently in Big Sur. Michael Pfeiffer and his wife Barbara built a house near the mouth of Sycamore Canyon in 1869 and, like most other settlers in the area, supported themselves by a combination of subsistence farming, beekeeping, ranching and logging. Their son, John, homesteaded a 160 acre parcel on the north bank of the Big Sur River and in 1884 moved to the site of the Homestead Cabin. When Big Sur became more popular and the need for accommodations became apparent, John and his wife, Florence, opened Pfeiffer's Ranch Resort on the site of today's Big Sur Lodge.

Homesteaders, Manuel and Francesca Innocenti, lived with their six children in this tiny cabin, on an oak-studded knowl above the valley.

In 1933 the State of California purchased 680 acres of land from John Pfeiffer and named the new park in his honor. Many of the fine, old, rustic-style buildings in today's 810 acre park were constructed during the Great Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

One of the greatest hardships for early settlers was the lack of a good road between Big Sur and the rest of Central California. Until the late 1800s and early 1900s the best overland route was little more than a rough trail along the coast that was often lost as a result of landslides. The trail was eventually widened into a rough road that cut travel time between Big Sur and Monterey from three or four days to just eleven hours. The route, however, was still very circuitous. Deep valleys such as the one at Bixby Creek forced the road inland making the journey long and hard. Finally, after 15 years, and $9 million in construction costs, Highway 1 was completed in 1937.

THE SANTA LUCIAS AND THE BIG SUR RIVER

"Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into the trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves."

These words from John Muir encourage thousands of people to explore California's scenic mountain ranges including the Santa Lucia Mountains which are popular with hikers and backpackers. The range extends a full hundred miles to the south of Monterey and offers some of the most scenic and rugged terrain in all of California. The western slope of the range plunges into the Pacific Ocean south of Monterey to create one of the most famous and dramatic coastlines in the world. At 5,682 feet of elevation, Junipero Serra Peak is the highest point in the range. The Big Sur River, one of fifty separate streams that flow down the mountains into the sea, has carved out a gentle, flatbottomed valley that is now the heart of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park.

The river plays a very important role in this landscape, especially during and just after periods of heavy rainfall, when the river rises dramatically and carries a tremendous volume of soil, downed trees, branches, and other debris. Relatively gentle terrain like that within the park causes the river to slow down and deposit some of its load of sediment and debris.

Over hundreds of thousands of years this process has created a gentle, relatively flat valley floor in the bottom of the canyon. These river flats are made up of rich alluvial soil that is ideal for California's coast redwoods.

During the summer the river attracts many visitors. Water temperatures are in the low 60s, large boulders in and alongside the river invite sunbathing, and the surrounding meadows and tall trees make a magnificent natural setting.

CLIMATE & VEGETATION

Weather along the central California coast remains cool and moist all year. Temperatures fluctuate little from season to season, and fog from the ocean provides moisture for the dense redwood forest throughout the summer. This "natural air conditioning," occurs as cool, moist air is drawn inland by the heat of the valleys that lie on the inland or eastern side of the Santa Lucia Range.

Almost all of this area's 30 to 50 inches of annual rainfall occurs between October and April. Fog banks are likely to move inland between May and October, especially along the coastal strip and in the Big Sur River Valley. The fog usually comes in off the ocean during the evening and lasts until mid-morning.

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BSNHA

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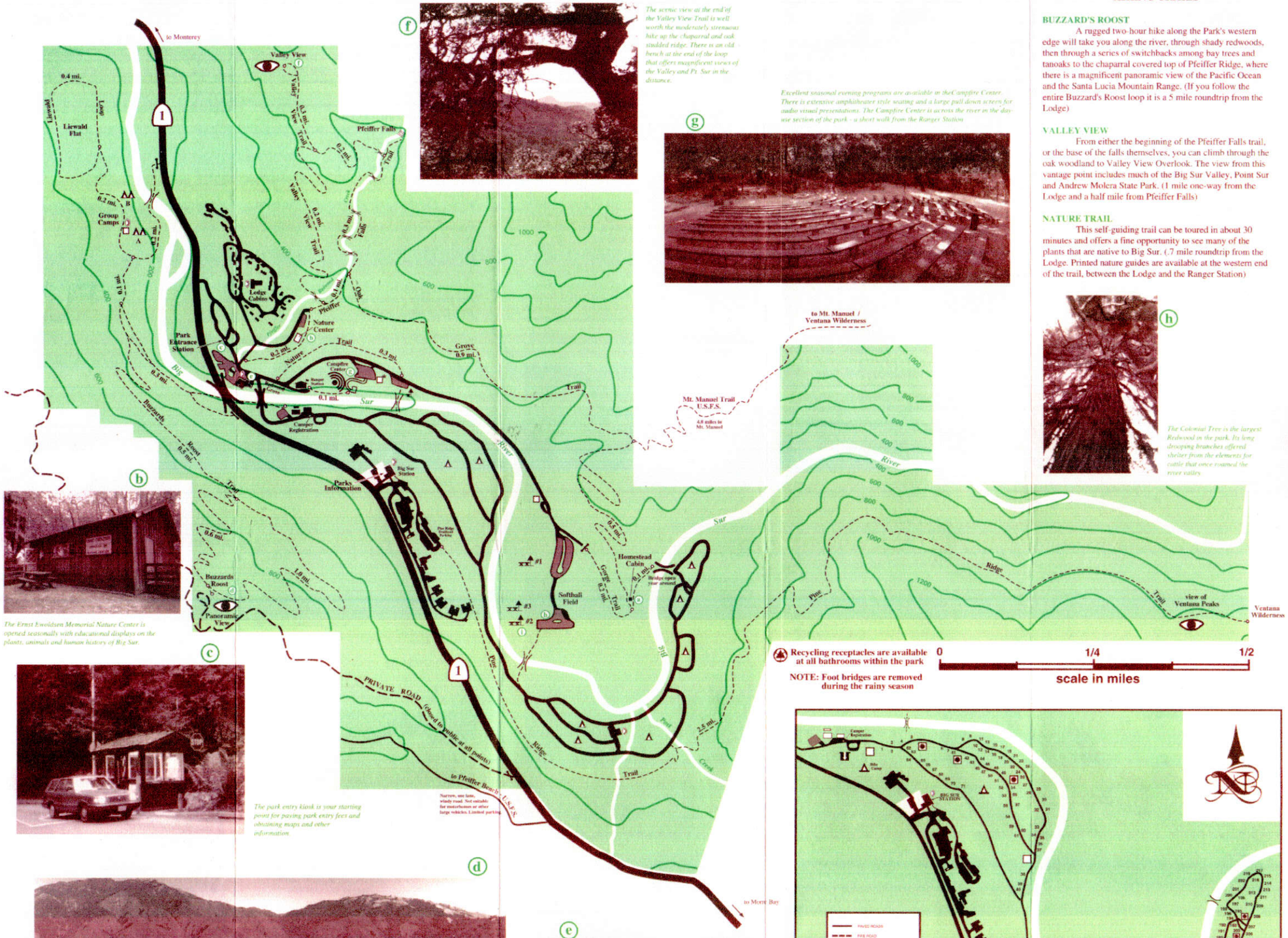
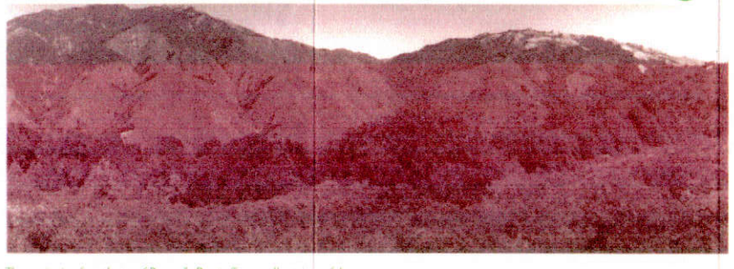


The scenic view at the end of the Valley View Trail is well worth the moderately strenuous hike up the chaparral and oak studded ridge. There is an old bench at the end of the loop that offers magnificent views of the Valley and Pt. Sur in the distance.

Excellent seasonal evening programs are available in the Campfire Center. There is extensive amphitheater style seating and a large pull down screen for audio visual presentations. The Campfire Center is across the river in the day-use section of the park - a short walk from the Ranger Station

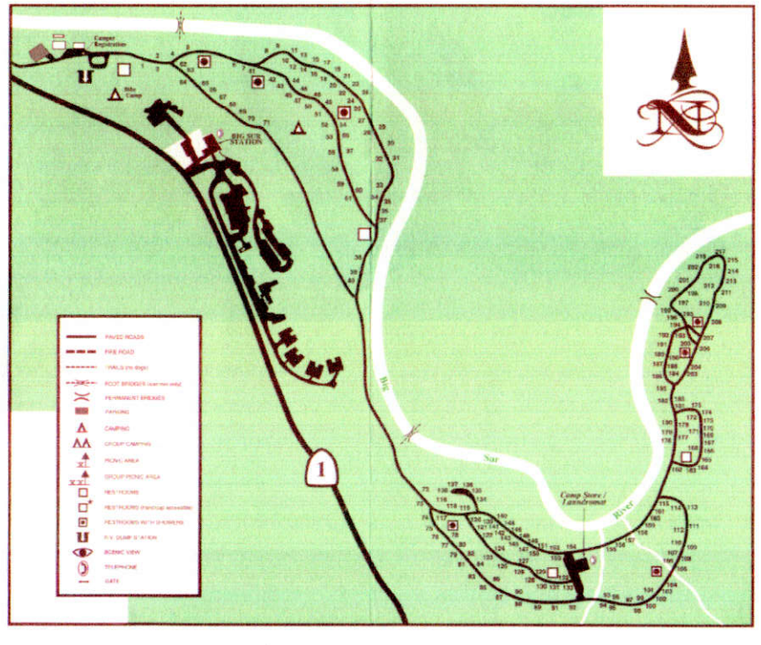
The Ernst Ewoldsen Memorial Nature Center is opened seasonally with educational displays on the plants, animals and human history of Big Sur.

The park entry kiosk is your starting point for paying park entry fees and obtaining maps and other information.



The scenic view from the top of Buzzard's Roost offers excellent views of the Santa Lucia mountains to the east, including the Big Sur River Gorge. To the west are chaparral covered hills that run to the blue Pacific.

The Big Sur Lodge offers fine accomodations, a swimming pool, store, gift shop and excellent dining.



HIKING TRAILS

BUZZARD'S ROOST

A rugged two-hour hike along the Park's western edge will take you along the river, through shady redwoods, then through a series of switchbacks among bay trees and tanoaks to the chaparral covered top of Pfeiffer Ridge, where there is a magnificent panoramic view of the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Lucia Mountain Range. (If you follow the entire Buzzard's Roost loop it is a 5 mile roundtrip from the Lodge)

VALLEY VIEW

From either the beginning of the Pfeiffer Falls trail, or the base of the falls themselves, you can climb through the oak woodland to Valley View Overlook. The view from this vantage point includes much of the Big Sur Valley, Point Sur and Andrew Molera State Park. (1 mile one-way from the Lodge and a half mile from Pfeiffer Falls)

NATURE TRAIL

This self-guiding trail can be toured in about 30 minutes and offers a fine opportunity to see many of the plants that are native to Big Sur. (.7 mile roundtrip from the Lodge. Printed nature guides are available at the western end of the trail, between the Lodge and the Ranger Station)

The Colonial Tree is the largest Redwood in the park. Its long drooping branches offered shelter from the elements for cattle that once roamed the river valley

PFEIFFER FALLS

This 40 to 60 minute stroll along Pfeiffer-Redwood creek features some of the finest redwood groves in the Big Sur region. Expect steps in the few steeper sections and a number of scenic bridges across Pfeiffer Redwood Creek. The 60 foot high waterfall at the end of the trail is a scenic highlight. A wooden platform at the base of the falls is fine place to rest, meditate or have a picnic lunch. (.7 mile one-way from the Lodge)

OAK GROVE

The great beauty of Big Sur is due in part to the variety of its natural ecosystems. The Oak Grove trail exemplifies this as it travels through a number of plant communities. From deep redwood groves to open oak woodland to hot, dry chaparral, this 60 to 80 minute hike makes it possible to enjoy the many different faces of Big Sur. (approximately 3 miles roundtrip from the Lodge)

BIG SUR RIVER GORGE

Beyond the end of the gorge trail is an undeveloped natural area. There are no maintained trails in this area. Persons using this area should use extreme caution, especially when hiking on rocks, logs, or wading in the river. Do not climb the steep canyon walls! Loose rock and unstable soils make this extremely hazardous. Jumping or diving into river pools is prohibited.

The group picnic area offers covered tables and cooking pits. There is a softball field and extensive parking nearby.

Camping and Picnicking

The campground at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park offers a wide variety of natural settings for your enjoyment. The 218 campsites are located alongside the river in redwood groves, oak woodlands, and grassy meadow areas. Each campsite can accommodate up to eight people and two vehicles, and includes a fire ring and table. Running water, restrooms and hot showers are located throughout the campground within easy walking distance of every site. There is also a small grocery store and laundromat within the campground.

Recreational vehicles under 32 feet are welcome and there is a dump station near the campground registration booth. A special bike-in camp is also available.

Campsite reservations can be made through MISTIX by calling 1-800-444-7275 and using your personal check, VISA or Mastercard. The campground is open year-round and non-reserved sites are available on a first-come-first-served basis. Reservations are highly recommended during the summer months and holiday weekends.

Two hike-in group camps are open from Memorial Day through September. Each group camp can accommodate up to 35 campers and includes tables, fire rings, and drinking water. Although restrooms are available, there are no shower facilities for group camp users. Reservations for the group camps can be made through MISTIX.

A large day-use picnic area is available with grills and picnic tables. Three group picnic areas, two that can accommodate 100 people and one that can accommodate up to 200 people, can be reserved through the park office.

During the summer, Junior Ranger Programs, nature walks, and campfire programs are held. Exhibits at the Nature Center are designed to further acquaint visitors with the area's plant and animal life. During the winter, groups gather at nearby Julia Pfeiffer Burns and Garrapata State Parks to view the annual whale migration.

Big Sur Lodge, which is operated by a concessionaire, features cabin rentals, a restaurant, and gift shop. For further information and reservations contact:

Big Sur Lodge
P.O. Box 190
Big Sur, CA 93920
(498) 667-2171