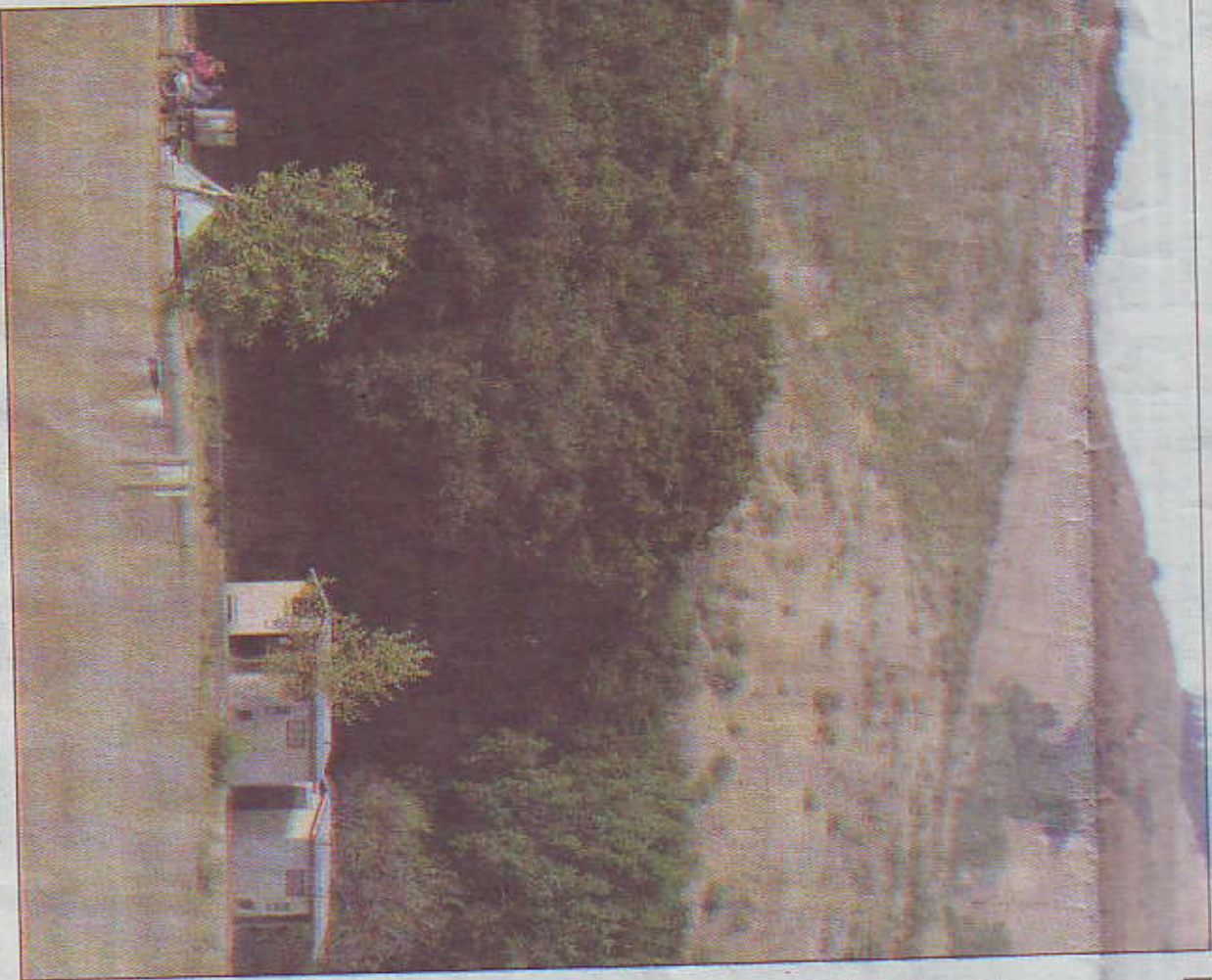


The eight-mile Ridge Bluff loop at Andrew Molera State Park offers views of the Pacific Ocean in the Big Sur area.

Meade Fischer/Contributed photos



Molera State Park has 24 walk-in camp sites about a third of a mile from the parking lot. Having to walk to camp discourages people with heavy camping gear, so one can sometimes find a site at Molera when other areas are full.

To the top

The views are worth steep hike at Molera State Park

By MEADE FISCHER
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

My first memory of Andrew Molera State Park was from the early '70s. The park was a recent addition to the State Parks system and still unimproved. The parking lot and most of the trails were not in place. The old dirt road through the meadow to the beach was a remnant from when the park was a working ranch. Today the park has primitive camp sites and trails, but the views remain stunning.

On my visit long ago, we walked the mile to the beach and the mouth of the Big Sur River. Even then, the surfers had discovered it, and three guys with boards were camped out on the headland at Molera Point. Otherwise, the area was deserted. The park was a chaos of meadow and forest. I imagined it to be as it was when the Esselen Indians had it to themselves.

In 1834, Juan Bautista Alvarado, the future governor of California, got a land grant of almost 9,000 acres from the Mexican government. The land stretched from what is now known as the Little Sur River to Cooper Point. In 1840, Alvarado traded Rancho El Sur to Captain John Rogers Cooper. The land was passed down to his chil-

If You Go

WHAT: Molera State Park.

WHEN: Open half-hour before sunrise to half-hour after sunset.

WHERE: 20 miles south of Carmel on Highway 1.

COST: \$6 parking.

DETAILS: 667-2315 and www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=582

dren, eventually to a daughter who married E.J. Molera, whose son was Andrew Molera.

It was a farm, dairy and cattle ranch for many years. Upon Andrew's death, his sister Frances took control of the property, selling it to the Nature Conservancy in 1965, while retaining occupancy and grazing privileges until her death in 1968. The land was transferred to the state, but remained a working ranch until 1972, about the time I first visited.

The park has 24 walk-in camp sites about a third of a mile from the parking lot. Having to walk to camp discourages people with heavy camping gear, so one can sometimes find a site at Molera when other areas are full.

The numbered sites are a fairly recent change. Originally, there was