

Molera

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just the large meadow, and campers would find a spot a comfortable distance from the next camper and set up a tent. In the '80s, it cost a dollar to camp, and often the camper would have cleared out before the ranger came around to collect. There were a couple of outhouses and no potable water.

Now one gets an actual site, and it costs \$10 per night, still a bargain compared to the rest of Big Sur.

For day use, one can pay the \$6 parking fee or park on the highway and walk in.

There are nearly 30 miles of trails in the park. Many people simply walk from the parking lot to the beach, a two-mile round trip.

For the adventurous hiker who wants spectacular views, the Ridge Bluff eight-mile loop is outstanding. The preferred route is to cross the river and take the River Trail to the Hidden Trail, a steep three-quarters-of-a-mile climb to the Ridge Trail. Then it's a gradual climb on a dirt road to the top, at over 1,000 feet in elevation. There's a bench at the top, affording a view of the park, Point Sur, Pico Blanco and Post Summit.

It's a great place for photography and lunch.

Return via the Bluff Trail, which wanders down toward the beach, through wild flowers and coastal brush. It affords a continually stunning view, and there are side trails to secluded pockets of beach. The trail back to the parking lot intersects the bottom of the Bluff Trail, but a few yards farther is the beach, a must-stop on a sunny day.

There is also a trail on the east side of the highway, a few dozen yards south of the entrance. This climbs almost 1,600 feet in two-and-a-half miles before exiting the park and continuing on another two miles and 1,600 more feet to the top of Post Summit. This is a very strenuous hike, best saved for a cool day.

For those who want to explore without hiking, Molera Horseback Tours will guide you along the river, meadows and along the beach. You can reserve a horse in advance or simply show up.



There is also fishing in the river and ocean and a sheltered surf spot at the mouth of the river, where the waves wrap around Molera Point.

At only 20 miles from the Monterey Peninsula, Andrew Molera State Park is well worth the trip.

Meade Fischer is a commentator and travel writer. You can listen to commentary from Meade Fischer on First Person Singular, airing 7:33 a.m. and 5:33 p.m. Monday on KUSP, 88.9.

