



## Trip Planning Guide

### What You Need to Know Before Backpacking the Lost Coast Trail

The Bureau of Land Management emphasizes the importance of personal safety, current regulations, and “Leave No Trace” principles in the King Range National Conservation Area (KRNCA). Before venturing out into the Lost Coast make sure you are well prepared. The King Range Wilderness and the Pacific Ocean come together on the Lost Coast as beautiful and powerful forces of nature.

#### The Lost Coast Favors the Prepared

Before planning your trip, log on to the BLM KRNCA’s website to obtain general information, maps, and current regulations.

<https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/california/king-range-national-conservation-area>

Just prior to your visit, make sure to check the online *Roads & Trails Report* for current trail conditions, closures, and fire restrictions.

[https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/docs/2021-07/KRNCA\\_Roads%20and%20Trails%20Report\\_%20July%202021%20%28003%29.pdf](https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/docs/2021-07/KRNCA_Roads%20and%20Trails%20Report_%20July%202021%20%28003%29.pdf)

#### Do you have the required for camping overnight in the King Range Wilderness & LCT?

The individual overnight wilderness permits are only available through an online reservation system at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). Permits are not required for day-use or in designated drive-up campgrounds.

Individuals can book up to 3 permits per trip (allowing a group size of 3). For larger groups additional permit holders are required. Please note there is a group size limit of 15 persons (so a group of 15 persons would require 5 permit holders).

Special Recreation Permits (SRP) are required for all commercial and organized groups and can be obtained through the King Range Project Office.

Read the following permit descriptions to determine what type of permit you need:

**Commercial Permit:** Any person, organization or company that makes or attempts to make a profit, salary, increase their business or financial standing, or supports in any part other programs or activities from amounts rendered from participants. Call the King Range Project Office at 707-986-5400 to obtain permit.

**Organized Permit:** An organized group in which charges to participants are limited to the sharing of group expenses. No paid staff accompanies the group and fees do not offset other costs of running the organization. Examples of an organized group include scouting troops, school clubs, meetup groups, etc. Call the King Range Project Office at 707-986-5400 to obtain permit.

**Individual Overnight Wilderness Permit:** All overnight use by an individual or family (as well as non-organized groups) require a wilderness permit obtained from [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). Groups are considered non-organized when no formal advertising of the trip occurs, no fees are charged, and the group is not affiliated with any established organization.

**Have you checked the tides?** Three sections of the Lost Coast Trail are impassable when tide levels are over 3 feet (see KRNCA Map & Guide). Sometimes, low tides don't get below 3 feet, or don't remain below 3 feet for the period of time needed to pass. Plan to start your travel through these sections on a receding tide and plan for enough time to pass through the entire section. Remember, the tide table is showing the apex of the low tide level—the tides are always going up or down. Generally, there will be two high tides and two low tides every 24 hours, occurring approximately 50 minutes later with each passing day. When planning your trip, check the tide predictions from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) prior to obtaining wilderness permits and/or your Special Recreation Permit for groups. Watch the ocean! On sloped beaches, avoid walking near the water as forceful large waves can surge up at any time without notice (sneaker waves). Visitors should never attempt to swim on this stretch of the Pacific Ocean due to strong undertow and rip currents. The water is very cold and survival is limited to 20 minutes without a wetsuit.

**Do you have a bear canister?** Hard-sided bear canisters are required. They protect the bear from your food and your food from the bear. All scented items including soap, deodorant, sunscreen, etc. must be stored in a bear canister. The canisters must be of sufficient size to permit storage of all food, trash, and other scented items for the duration of the trip. Each person must possess a minimum of one canister. Visitors failing to use canisters are subject to fines (43 CFR 8365.1-6).

Approved bear canister models:

- Model 812 Backpackers' Cache (Garcia): [www.backpackerscache.com](http://www.backpackerscache.com)
- BearVault 110B, 200, 250, 300, 350, 400, 450, and 500: [www.bearvault.com](http://www.bearvault.com)
- The Bearikade Weekender (1766 and higher) and The Bearikade Expedition MKII (1766 and higher): [www.wild-ideas.net](http://www.wild-ideas.net)
- The Bear Keg (Counter Assault): [www.counterassault.com](http://www.counterassault.com)
- The Bare Boxer Contender (101) and Champ (202): [www.bareboxer.com](http://www.bareboxer.com)
- Lighter1 Big Daddy and Lil' Sami: [www.lighter1.com](http://www.lighter1.com)
- UDAP No-Fed-Bear: [www.udap.com](http://www.udap.com)

**Bear Canister Rentals:** Canisters are available for rent for \$5.00 per canister per trip with a \$75.00 credit card deposit per canister (commercial groups must provide own bear canisters due to availability). These canisters have a 600 cubic inch capacity (8" x 12") and provide one person with storage for no more than three days' worth of food, toiletries, etc. During summer, canisters may not be available and cannot be reserved so plan accordingly. You may return canisters to any of the following locations during business hours. (\*Note: King Range NCA Project Office has a 24- hour drop box.)

Canisters are available for rent at the following locations:

King Range NCA Project Office  
768 Shelter Cove Road,  
Whitethorn  
707-986-5400  
Hours: Mon-Fri, 8:00am to  
4:30pm  
Accepts: Cash, check, credit card

BLM Arcata Field Office  
1695 Heindon Road, Arcata  
707-825-2300  
Hours: Mon-Fri, 7:45am to  
4:30pm  
Accepts: Cash, check, credit card

Petrolia General Store (near  
Mattole)  
40 Sherman Avenue, Petrolia  
707-629-3455  
Hours: Mon-Sat, 9am to 5pm  
Sun, 11am to 4:30pm

You may also find bear canisters for rent at the following locations:

Shelter Cove General Store                      HSU Center Activities  
7272 Shelter Cove Road, Whitethorn 1 Harpst Street, Arcata  
707-986-7733    707-826-3357

**Do you know the weather conditions?** Weather can change drastically; be prepared and have a backup plan. From October to April, the KRNCA is one of the wettest spots in the U.S. with annual rainfall averaging between 100 and 200 inches. Intense storms can quickly make creeks impassable. Do not attempt to cross creeks that are above knee high. No bridges are provided. Wait for water to subside.

**Thirsty?** Coastal creeks provide a year-round water source. Always purify your water. Water sources are scarce along upland trails. Bring plenty of water. Upland springs are unreliable during dry years.

**Are you aware of other potential hazards?** Ticks, poison oak, and rattlesnakes are common sights. Be able to identify and avoid them.

### **Good campsites are found, not made**

Wondering where to sleep? Find a campsite that looks like someone slept there before. This will concentrate use and keep undisturbed areas pristine. There is a 14-day camping limit.

### **Dispose of waste properly**

- **“Where’s the toilet out here?”** When nature calls, dig a 6–8 inch hole and cover it after you’ve made your deposit. While traveling on the coast, dig your hole in the intertidal zone (the wet sand near the ocean). On all other trails, go at least 200 feet (70 paces) from creeks, camps, and trails. Pack out your toilet paper; do not burn it!
  - The four goals of human waste disposal:
    1. Minimize contact with water sources.
    2. Minimize contact with insects and wildlife.
    3. Minimize social impacts. (No one wants to see human waste or toilet paper next to their campsite!)
    4. Minimize decomposition.
- **Do not burn trash** Foil, plastics, and food scraps do not burn and leave impacts on wildlife and other visitors. Pack out your trash.
- **Dishwashing** On the Lost Coast Trail, it is suitable to wash your dishes with biodegradable soap in the intertidal zone and bury food scraps. On all other trails, wash your dishes 200 feet away from campsites, trails, and water sources.

### **Leave behind the things you find**

- **After your last trip, did you clean your boots and gear?** Help reduce the spread of non-native plant species by cleaning your boots and gear.
- **So...you heard you can build a driftwood shelter to sleep in?** As tempting as this may be, please do not build driftwood shelters because they attract rattlesnakes/rodents and degrade wilderness character for backpackers behind you.
- **Want a keepsake from your trip?** Just remember the little things you find, leave them behind for the next person to find. Take a photo instead!

### **Minimize campfire impacts**

- **Do you see any campfire restriction signs posted?** The BLM imposes campfire restrictions late spring/early summer through fall. During fire restrictions, NO CAMPFIRES are allowed,

even on the beach with a campfire permit. In drought years fire restrictions might include no use of campstoves. Vegetation can be very dry, even when it's overcast and coastal conditions can be very windy. Check the current regulations by visiting the website or calling the office prior to packing for your trip.

- **When is the last time you built a fire in the backcountry?** When campfires are permitted please use existing fire rings and dead downed wood for fuel. When you put your fire out, please soak with water and stir. It should feel cool to the touch.
- Summer months often have Fire Restrictions, usually beginning in mid-summer restricting campfires outside of BLM established campground fire rings (that includes no campfires on the Lost Coast Trail). If it is a dry year, as was 2020 and 2021, another increasingly strict Fire Order may apply that prohibits any campfires and camp stoves (even backpacking stoves). In 2020 and 2021, this strict fire order was put into place in August and remained until substantial rains fell. You are responsible to check fire conditions per your backcountry permit. Signs will be posted at every trailhead. Fines for fires that don't comply with restrictions are dependent on infraction.

### **Respect wildlife—you're a guest in their home**

- **Are you planning to fish for food?** No fishing is allowed in any of the King Range NCA creeks due to threatened and endangered species. Ocean fishing is allowed along the coast outside of the Marine Protected Areas with a proper fishing license. For current ocean fishing regulations and information on Marine Protected Areas, contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- **Do you know what to do when you see wildlife?** Observe wildlife from a distance and do not follow or approach them. If your extended thumb is too small to block your view of an animal then you're too close. Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators. Keep pets away from wildlife and report any injured mammals (North Coast Marine Mammal Center 707-951-4722).
- **Excited to see marine wildlife?** While exploring the Lost Coast Trail there is a good chance you'll see harbor seals, Stellar sea lions or northern elephant seals. The presence of elephant seals on the Lost Coast is new, making it the most northern breeding colony along the West Coast! The elephant seals may seem slow and sluggish at first glance but if they are disturbed, they can move very fast. Weighing 1,500 to 4,500 pounds would make it easy for them to crush you. They are present on the beach below the Punta Gorda lighthouse and sometimes they lay up near or on the trail. When they aren't moving, they can appear to look like a piece of driftwood so stay alert in this area. They often cover themselves with sand so they blend in—be aware! Please do not take photos with the seals, stay far away to ensure your presence does not disturb their natural processes. Seals that are scared into the cold ocean water before they are ready can perish due to the cold (molting not completed). Dog Leashes are **REQUIRED** between Punta Gorda and Sea Lion Gulch. This rule will be enforced by rangers and citations will be given for dogs off leash in this area.

### **Be considerate of other visitors—we all seek silence and space**

You will likely see other visitors on the trail and share camping areas with other hikers. Keep noise to a minimum, especially during evening to morning hours. When possible, camp out of sight of other visitors. Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock.

## **Shuttle Providers**

Many hikers of the Lost Coast Trail choose to park their vehicle at one trailhead and be shuttled via local transport providers either to or from the opposite trailhead. In order to legally provide transport for hire on public lands, shuttle service providers must be issued a BLM Special Recreation Permit. This permit ensures that the provider is knowledgeable of BLM's regulations and requirements for hiking and camping in the King Range NCA and has the proper insurance and licenses for transporting people. If you would like to hire a shuttle between trailheads, you must call one of the providers to schedule a pick-up date, time, and location. Do NOT wait until you are at a trailhead to call a provider. Call a provider several months before your trip. The following shuttle services have been issued a special recreation use permit for the purpose of transporting people on public land in the King Range National Conservation Area:

Lost Coast Adventure Tours (707) 986-9895 or (707) 502-7514; Contact: Blu Graham  
[www.lostcoastadventures.com](http://www.lostcoastadventures.com)

Bill's Lost Coast Shuttle (707)442-1983; Contact: William G. Abram

Mendocino Insider Tours (707) 962-4131; Contact: David Lipkind [info@mendocinoinsidertours.com](mailto:info@mendocinoinsidertours.com)

## **Campgrounds (front country)**

All campgrounds are open all year, no reservations (first come, first served). Facilities are kept to a minimum in order to preserve the area's rustic and semi-primitive qualities.

### **Mattole Campground**

Location: North end of King Range at the beach. Facilities: 15 tent/trailer campsites with picnic tables, fire rings, vault toilets, no hookups. No water. Lost Coast Trailhead and parking area. Wheelchair accessible. No OHV access. Use Fee: Camping - \$8.00.

### **Tolkan Campground**

Location: King Peak Road, Whitethorn. Facilities: 5 trailer/4 tent campsites with picnic tables, fire rings, vault toilets, no water, no hookups. Wheelchair accessible. This campground provides easy access to the Paradise Royale Mountain Bike Trail and Tolkan Terrain Park. Use Fee: Camping - \$8.00

### **Nadelos Campground**

Location: Chemise Mountain Road, Whitethorn. Facilities: 8 tent campsites with picnic tables, fire rings, vault toilets. No water (campground is near creek; treat water before drinking). No hookups. Wheelchair accessible. Chemise Mtn. Trailhead. Entire campground may be reserved for overnight group use for \$85 per night. Minimum number of people in group is 30, and maximum group number is 60. All applications and fees must be received 30 days prior to the first day of use. To request a permit application please call the BLM King Range Project Office at 707-986-5400. NO group reservations are available Memorial Day weekend, Fourth of July weekend or Labor Day weekend. Use Fee: Camping - \$8.00

### **Wailaki Campground**

Location: Chemise Mountain Road, Whitethorn. Facilities: 13 tent/trailer campsites with picnic tables, fire rings, vault toilets. No water (campground is near creek; treat water before drinking). No hookups. Wheelchair accessible. Chemise Mtn. Trailhead. Use Fee: Camping - \$8.00

## **Driving Directions and Travel Times**

The King Range NCA is located about 230 miles north of San Francisco and 60 miles south of Eureka. All roads leading to the King Range NCA are narrow, steep and winding. Allow plenty of time between destinations, have a full tank of gas, and be alert to oncoming traffic. All main roads are normally accessible to passenger cars except

during heavy winter storms. Primitive roads may be closed seasonally. Directional signs mark all major intersections in the King Range NCA giving the road name and distances to primary recreation sites.

**NORTH ACCESS:** U.S. 101 to the Ferndale exit. Once in Ferndale, follow signs to Petrolia. One mile past Petrolia, turn right on Lighthouse Road; it is 5 more miles to the Mattole Recreation Site. Allow 1 1/2 hours for the 42 mile trip.

**CENTRAL ACCESS:** U.S. 101 to South Fork - Honeydew exit. Follow the signs to Honeydew (23 Miles). Turn left in Honeydew to Honeydew Creek Recreation Site and Smith-Etter Road. Allow 1 hour for the 24 mile trip. Turn right to Mattole Beach and Trailhead. Allow 45 minutes for the 18.5 mile trip.

**SOUTH ACCESS:** U.S. 101 to the Redway/Garberville exit. Follow signs to Shelter Cove/King Range NCA. Allow 45 minutes for the 22 mile trip to Shelter Cove.

### **TRAVEL TIMES BETWEEN SELECTED DESTINATIONS**

Black Sands Beach to Mattole Recreation Site, 2 hours

#### **Honeydew to:**

- A.W. Way Park, 8 miles, 20 minutes
- Mattole Recreation Site, 18.5 miles, 45 minutes

#### **Smith-Etter Rd./Wilder Ridge Rd. Intersection to:**

(Four –Wheel drive)

- North Slide Peak Trailhead, 7.5 miles, 1 hour
- Kinsey Ridge Trailhead, 10 miles, 1 hour 15 minutes
- Spanish Ridge Trailhead, 12.3 miles, 1 hour 30 minutes

#### **King Peak Rd./Shelter Cove Rd. Intersection to:**

- Tolkan Campground, 3.5 miles, 15 minutes
- Horse Mountain Campground, 6.5 miles, 25 minutes
- Lightning Trailhead, 16 miles, 1 hour
- Saddle Mountain Trailhead, 10.5 miles, 45 minutes
- Horse Mountain Creek Trailhead, 4.5 miles, 20 minutes

#### **Shelter Cove Rd./Chemise Mountain Rd. Intersection to:**

- Hidden Valley Trailhead, 1/4 mile, 1 minute
- Wailaki/Nadelos Campgrounds, 1/2 mile, 5 minutes
- Sinkyone State Park (Needle Rock), 10 miles, 45 minutes

