



## 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, visit the BLM KRNCA’s website at <https://www.blm.gov/programs/national-conservation-lands/california/king-range-national-conservation-area> to obtain general information, maps, and current regulations. Just prior to your visit, you can log onto [https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2023-02/KRNCA\\_Roads\\_and\\_Trails\\_Report\\_February\\_2023.pdf](https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2023-02/KRNCA_Roads_and_Trails_Report_February_2023.pdf) for current trail conditions and closures.

**Did you know permits are required for camping overnight in the King Range Wilderness & Lost Coast Trail?** The individual overnight wilderness permits are only available through an online reservation system at [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov). Special Recreation Permits (SRPs) are required for all commercial and organized groups and can be obtained through the King Range Project Office. Permits are not required for day-use or in designated campgrounds. Please note there is a group size limit of 15 persons.

The following permit descriptions to determine what type of permit you need:

**Commercial Group 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 recreation activities occurring on public lands. There is paid, public advertising and participants pay for a duty of care/expectation of safety. Call the King Range Project Office at 707-986-5400 to apply for an SRP permit.

**Organized Group Permit:** An organized group shares expenses, no fee is charged to participants, no public advertising recruits participants. 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/classes, meetup groups, etc. Call the King Range Project Office at 707-986-5400 to apply for an SRP 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?** It is imperative that you check the tides prior to choosing a date and purchasing a permit for the Lost Coast Trail. When planning your trip, check the tide predictions from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Tide Predictions website *prior to obtaining wilderness permits and/or your Special Recreation Permit*. See the “Guide to Tide Safety” brochure and Tide Safety Video for instructions on how to use this website. Use the “King Range Map & Guide” to find impassable zones, see mileages, to plan your itinerary, etc. Be aware

that there are many days, especially in the late summer, that the low tides don't get low enough for the trail to be passable during daylight hours. The BLM does not recommend hiking at night due inherent dangers and SRPs with itineraries planned outside daylight hours will not be approved.

On a normal day, there are three trail sections in which the tide must be under a certain threshold (in feet) for the entire time you are in those sections to ensure safe passage for your group. Please note that there are sections in the tidal zones called "pinch points" which are much narrower than others so it is important to follow these guidelines, from the north as follows:

Section 1: Punta Gorda--passable under ~6 feet;

Section 2: Sea Lion Gulch to Randall Creek--passable under 2.5 feet (always enter this section on receding tide);

Section 3: Miller to Gitchell--passable under 3 feet (always enter section on a receding tide).

Plan to start your travel through these sections on a receding tide and plan for 1mph pace 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. Plan to trek at approximately 1mph pace.

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 or wade on this stretch of the Pacific Ocean due to strong undertow and rip currents. The water is very cold and survival is often limited to 20 minutes without a wetsuit. (Do not ever assume it is ok to "just get a bit wet if we need to")

The Lost Coast sees many Coast Guard and local fire department rescues, and way too many close calls by backpackers who hadn't planned enough time to traverse tidal zone sections. The ocean on the Lost Coast can sweep a person off their feet and out to sea to their death at any time. Your group should NEVER be getting wet or assume its ok to wade through the water to traverse the Lost Coast Trail. Always err on the safety side!

**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, 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. These canisters have a 600 cubic inch capacity (8" x 12") and provide one person with storage for approximately 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 Rd, Whitethorn  
707-986-5400

Hours: Mon-Fri, 8:00am to  
4:30pm

Accepts: Cash, check, credit card

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

Shelter Cove General Store  
7272 Shelter Cove Road, Whitethorn  
707-986-7733

BLM Arcata Field Office  
1695 Heindon Rd, Arcata  
707-825-2300

Hours: Mon-Fri, 7:45am to  
4:30pm

Accepts: Cash, check, credit card

HSU Center Activities  
1 Harpst Street, Arcata  
707-826-3357

Petrolia General Store (near Mattole)  
40 Sherman Ave, Petrolia  
707-629-3455

Hours: Mon-Sat, 9am to 5pm  
Sun, 11am to 4:30pm

Accepts: Cash only/ATM onsite

**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 120 inches. Intense storms can quickly make creeks impassable. Do not attempt to cross creeks that are above knee height. No bridges are provided. Wait for water to subside. In addition to checking the weather conditions prior to your departure date, be sure to also check the marine forecast for current ocean conditions. You can find that here <https://www.ndbc.noaa.gov/data/Forecasts/FZUS56.KEKA.html> call and speak to a park ranger if you need assistance interpreting this information.

**Thirsty?** Coastal creeks provide a year-round water source. Always treat your water using an approved filtration method or by boiling it. Water sources are scarce along upland trails, so make sure to bring plenty of water if hiking in the upland trails, especially in late summer and fall months when springs become drier. Due to ongoing drought conditions many upland springs have become unreliable, be sure to check the Roads and Trails report for updated information.

**Are you aware of other potential hazards?** Ticks, poison oak, and rattlesnakes are common sights. Be able to identify and avoid them. Poison oak grows all over the KRNCA in many forms—vines on trees, bushes along coast bluffs, and even small waxy plants in the sand. The best way to not get poison oak is to constantly be aware of where you are walking and avoiding this plant. Ticks are also present, especially in spring/early summer. Always do tick checks after walking through brush.

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

Find a backcountry campsite that appears to have been used before. This will concentrate use and keep undisturbed areas pristine. There is a 14-day camping limit everywhere in the King Range NCA. Please do not build new fire rings.

### **Dispose of Waste Properly**

- **Where's the toilet out here?** While traveling on the Lost Coast Trail, dig a 6-8" hole in the intertidal/swash zone (the wet sand near the ocean) and make your deposit. Store your toilet paper in a plastic baggy with your trash, inside your bear can. Please do not bury toilet paper. On upland trails, dig your hole at least 200 feet (70 paces) from creeks, camps, and trails. Please pack out your toilet paper; do not bury it, do not burn it! This is a major issue on the Lost Coast Trail...people leaving their toilet paper human waste improperly.
  - 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 toilet paper next to their campsite.
    4. Maximize decomposition.

- **Do not burn trash** Foil, plastics, glass, and food scraps do not burn and leave impacts on wildlife and other visitors. Please pack out all your trash.
- **Dishwashing** On the Lost Coast Trail, it is suitable to wash your dishes with **biodegradable** soap in the intertidal zone at least 200ft away from freshwater creeks. On all other trails, wash your dishes at least 200 feet away from campsites, trails, and water sources.

### Leave Behind What 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?** Leave behind the things you find for the next person to enjoy. Take a photo instead!

### Minimize Campfire Impacts

- **Do you see any campfire restriction signs posted?** The BLM applies campfire restrictions usually in 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 camp stoves. **You are responsible to check fire conditions per your backcountry permit.** Fines will be given for fires that don't comply with current restrictions and may be more expensive in the wilderness area. Vegetation can be very dry, even when it's overcast. Coastal conditions can be very windy, especially in afternoon and evenings. Prior to your trip, check for fire restrictions on the King Range [www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) site, the BLM King Range website [King Range National Conservation Area | Bureau of Land Management \(blm.gov\)](http://King Range National Conservation Area | Bureau of Land Management (blm.gov)), or call the King Range Visitor Center at (707) 986-5400.
- **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.

### Respect Wildlife—you are 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 only (see locations on King Range Map & Guide) with a proper fishing license. For current ocean fishing regulations and information on Marine Protected Areas, contact the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.
- **Common wildlife** spotted in the KRNCA include black bears, rattlesnakes, coyote, osprey, fox, raccoon. We work hard to ensure the wildlife do not become habituated (used to/dependent on humans). Please help in this effort by staying your distance and always keeping your food, soaps, tissues, and other scented items in your bear can.
- **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. Report any injured marine 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 at least 100 feet 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. **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—e all seek solitude in the wilderness.**

You will likely see other visitors on the trail and will 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. To legally provide transport for hire on public lands, shuttle service providers must be issued a BLM Special Recreation Permit for Shuttle Driving. 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 when you are obtaining your permit. The following shuttle services are the ONLY businesses that have been issued a Special Recreation Permit for the purpose of transporting people on public land in the King Range National Conservation Area:

Lost Coast Adventure Tours (707) 382-1959 or (707) 502-7514; Contact: Blu Graham/ Silvia  
[www.lostcoastadventures.com](http://www.lostcoastadventures.com)

Mendocino Insider Tours (707) 962-4131; Contact: David Lipkind info@mendoinsidertours.com

**Campgrounds (Front Country)**

KRNCA campgrounds are open year around on a first come first serve basis, no reservations required. Facilities are kept to a minimum to preserve the area's rustic and semi-primitive qualities. There is NO POTABLE WATER at any of the four KRNCA campgrounds.

**Mattole Campground**

Use Fee: Camping - \$8.00. Location: North end of King Range at the beach. Facilities: 23 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.

**Tolkan Campground**

Use Fee: Camping - \$8.00 Location: King Peak Road, Whitethorn. Facilities: 9 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.

**Nadelos Campground**

Use Fee: Camping - \$8.00 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 20, and maximum group

number is 60. All applications and fees must be received 30 days prior to the first day of use. Harbor seals are extremely sensitive, do not approach or startle as to not disrupt their routines which could result in abandonment or death. 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.

### **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. Consult the Roads and Trails Report for the most up to date information.

**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

