

# GUIDE TO THE ANDREW MOLERA STATE PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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## ANDREW MOLERA STATE PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

### Park History

Andrew Molera State Park contains roughly 4,766 acres of natural, cultural, and historical resources. Located in Monterey County, the park is bordered to the east by Highway 1, to the west by the Pacific Ocean, and is transected by the Big Sur River; it is roughly 25 miles south of the city of Monterey. The park is accessible by car via Highway 1.

Andrew Molera State Park, named in honor of the early twentieth-century rancher and artichoke popularizer, was originally inhabited by the Rumsen and Esselen tribes. Calling the area "*Sargenta-ruc*," the native peoples first arrived in the area at least 4,600 years ago. Archaeological evidence suggests that the Rumsen and Esselen tribes cultivated a vibrant trading and fishing economy in the area. In the mid-to-late sixteenth century, the Spanish first sighted that portion of the California coastline. By the turn of the nineteenth century, they had virtually cleared the Big Sur area of its indigenous populations, compelling the various tribes (including the Rumsen and Esselen) into *La Misión San Carlos Borromeo del Río Carmelo*.

In 1834, Governor Jose Figueroa granted "El Sur," encompassing roughly 8,880 acres, to Juan Bautista Alvarado for cattle grazing. The future governor then leased the land to his uncle-by-marriage, John Bautista Rogers Cooper, before transferring title to him in 1840. Cooper also leased out the land and supplied cattle for butchering and dairying as well as some modest crop production. After the Mexican-American War and a protracted period of disputes with the California Land Commission, Cooper received his final patent for the land in 1866. He died six years later in San Francisco.

Cooper willed the rancho jointly to his widow Encarnacion, his son John B. Henry Cooper, and his trusted associate, George H. Howard, who soon conveyed his interest to Cooper's daughters. They divided the property into four lots. Cooper's daughter Amelia managed lots three and four—which contained the modern-day park—with her husband, Eusebius Molera. As early as 1899, Andrew Molera, their son, began managing Molera Ranch before taking formal control in 1915. At that time, the ranch grew more productive than ever. Molera hired several Japanese laborers and, in addition to dairying and cattle-raising, he developed apiaries, bred horses, dogs, and pigs, produced hay, grain, pumpkins, tomatoes, lettuce, cabbage, beets, and artichokes, and invited his friends from the city to hunt and fish on the property. In 1931, Andrew Molera died unmarried and his estate passed to his sister, Frances M. Molera.

In 1964, Frances Molera began negotiations with the State of California to create a state park out of her property. Upon her death in 1968, per their agreement, the Nature Conservancy, having purchased the land four years earlier, sold it to the State of California Department of Beaches and Parks and named the property "Andrew Molera State Park." The park was opened to the public in 1972.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Ventana Wildlife Society and the Big Sur Historical Society, maintains various natural, cultural, and historical resources at Andrew Molera State Park. The park includes such diverse geographical features as the

Big Sur River, a tidal lagoon, a coastal beach area, inland flats, coastal uplands, and Pfeiffer Ridge (**Figure 1**). Each habitat hosts a variety of plant and animal species, including seasonal monarch butterflies. In addition to its numerous natural resources, the park also contains seven archaeological sites, the restored Cooper Cabin—the oldest standing structure in Big Sur—and remnants of the old stagecoach road (**Figure 2**). The park also offers camping, hiking, fishing, interpretive walks, horseback riding, bird-watching, and beach-combing.



**Figure 1.** Coastal beach area, September 20, 2015. Catalog # 090-P90530.



**Figure 2.** Cooper Cabin, November 27, 2012. Catalog # 090-P78869.

## **Scope and Content**

The Andrew Molera State Park Photographic Collection spans the years 1968-2015, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1980-1984 and 2012-2015. There is a total of 225 cataloged images including 68 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 67 35mm slides, and 90 born-digital images. Photographs originated primarily from California State Parks staff.

The collection mainly depicts the park's landscape. Imagery includes numerous ground views of the Pacific coastline, featuring beaches, bluffs, and the mouth of the Big Sur River. Also depicted is the river at various points along its course; surrounding hillsides with grasses, wildflowers, and other vegetation; dirt roads; Molera Beach; Pfeiffer Ridge; Cooper Cabin; and several aerial views of the park that include such features as the Big Sur River, Pfeiffer Ridge, campgrounds, trees, roads, coastlines, and hills. Additionally documented are the 1980 restoration and dedication ceremony of Molera Cabin.

## **Related Collection**

Andrew Molera State Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Cooper-Molera Family Papers, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

## **Catalog Subject Search Terms**

Aerial view  
Big Sur River  
Coastline  
Cooper Cabin  
Dedication  
Headlands Trail  
Molera Beach  
Molera Cabin  
Molera Point  
Pacific Ocean  
Pfeiffer Ridge  
Reconstruction  
Wood shingle