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California's Lost Coast – 2020

Northern California's Lost Coast Trail, the most remote western coastline in the Lower 48, features precipitous 4,000-foot mountains dropping straight down to the Pacific Ocean's crashing waves. The beautiful 55-mile trail encompasses King Range National Conservation Area and Sinkyone Wilderness State Park.

Backpackers encounter a breathtaking, rugged landscape of sea stacks, remote coves, sweeping views, while crossing or camping in the "Impassable Zones" using tide charts. Witness Roosevelt Elk, sea lions and harbor seals, and perhaps migrating whales, sea otters, and bears.

Where is The Lost Coast Trail?

This thru-hike is located about a 4-hour drive north of San Francisco.

Southern Terminus:

- Usal Road Campground in Sinkyone Wilderness State Park
- Entrance is **not** clearly marked
 - Milemarker 90.88 traveling west of Leggett, CA on Hwy. 1

Northern Terminus:

- Mattole River Campground in King Range National Conservation Area

How long is the entire trail?

54 miles in total

35 miles in the Federal – King Range National Conservation Area

19 miles in Sinkyone Wilderness State Park

Shelter Cove is a town roughly halfway through the trail

Restaurants, inns, coffee shops, small airport, lighthouse, post office, general store

Permits - Required

For King Range NCA

- Reserve through www.recreation.gov
- \$6 (non-refundable)
- 5-person limit/permit
- 1st-come, 1st-served
 - No lottery & no walk-ups
- May 15 – Sept 15 = 60 people/day (30 the rest of the year)
- Opens Oct 1 for the following calendar year
- Campfire permits required



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- Fires are banned mid-June through mid-Oct
- Check current conditions for additional fire bans
- Must provide tentative itinerary
- Itinerary will be dependent upon tides
 - Must use tide charts for safe passage
- **Questions:** Contact the BLM Office nearest Shelter Cove
707-986-5400

For Sinkyone Wilderness S.P.

- Do **not** pay at the self-checkin box at Usal Road Campground (Southern terminus). That money will just get stolen.
- **Do** pay at the self-checkin box at Needle Rock Visitor Center (halfway through the trail). That location is very casually staffed.

Shuttle Service

If leaving vehicle at Usal Rd Campground, do not leave any valuables in the car. It is not staffed and there can be a lot of squatters at that campground.

There are currently three shuttle companies. I am listing only my favorite service here.

Bill's Lost Coast Shuttle [my preferred shuttle company]

Bill Abram

Office: 707-442-1983

Cell: 707-362-0052

No email or website

Provides shuttle service for half of trail or full trail

Note: If you are prone to motion sickness, bring ginger chews, Bonine or Dramamine. The drive is very windy.

Water

- Named creeks are generally reliable year-round
 - Be sure to check conditions right before your trip
- Unnamed creeks are ephemeral
 - Water availability depends on many things such as prior winter's snowpack, time of year, potential drought conditions, etc.



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Resupply

Contact the entities below for instructions before shipping any resupplies

- Mail to General Store for you to pickup
- Mail to the U.S. Post Office for you to pickup
- Bill's Lost Coast Shuttle will deliver your resupply to you at Shelter Cove

Bear canisters

Hard-sided canisters are required. They protect the bear from your food and your food from the bear. All scented items must be stored in a hard-sided canister. Canisters are available for rent for \$5.00 per canister per trip with a \$75.00 credit card deposit. These canisters have a 600 cubic inch capacity (8" x 12"). Canisters may be returned to any of the following rental locations during business hours. 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, CA
707-986-5400
Hours: Mon-Fri, 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

BLM Arcata Field Office
1695 Heindon Road
Arcata, CA
707-825-2300
Hours: Mon-Fri, 7:45 am to 4:30 pm

Petrolia General Store
(5 miles from Mattole trailhead)
40 Sherman Avenue
Petrolia, CA
707-629-3455
Hours: Mon-Sat, 9 am to 5 pm
Sun, 11 am to 4:30 pm
Note: Accepts cash only.

Other places that rent canisters
(call for availability, hours, and pricing):
Shelter Cove General Store
7272 Shelter Cove Road
Shelter Cove, CA
707-986-7733

Humboldt State University's Center of
Activities
1 Harpst Street
Arcata, CA
707-826-3357

Several outdoor gear stores rent
canisters. Availability, pricing, and
canister styles vary per location



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Maps

- Northern section – King Range NCA
 - King Range National Conservation Area Map (From Arcata's BLM Office)
- Southern section – Sinkyone Wilderness State Park
 - Wilderness Press – California's Lost Coast (King Range and Sinkyone Wilderness S.P.)

Electronic: Gaia, AllTrails, etc.

Some favorite campsites

Note: While in the King Range National Conservation Area, you can camp anywhere. However, most people camp close to freshwater sources.

- Cooskie Creek
- Buck Creek
- Jones Beach
- Bear Harbor
- Wheeler
- Little Jackass

Tide Charts – Impassable Zones

- 3 Impassable Zones
 - 1 Impassable Zone is just a point
 - 2 Impassable Zones are each at least 4 miles long
- What is an Impassable Zone? It is a stretch of trail that only be crossed during low tide
- Aim for a tide that is 3' or less
- Must calculate hiking pace for reaching Impassable Zone at optimal tide times

Where do I get tide charts?

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

- https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/tide_predictions.html
- Type "Shelter Cove" in the search box for current conditions

Waste

In all instances without an outhouse:

- 200 feet from drinkable water and campsites
- Dig a 6"-8" deep hole, bury your business, and **pack out your TP**

King Range NCA

- With access to the beach, use the intertidal zone (below high tide)
- Without access to the beach, use the woods while following the requirements above



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Sinkyone Wilderness State Park

- Use the outhouses at the campsites
- Without access to an outhouse, use the woods while following the requirements above

When to visit

Rainy October–April

Summer can be hot, but it's beautiful

Some Key Risks

- Ticks
 - Common on this trail
 - Treat clothing with Permethrin before your trip to minimize insects
 - Bring along insect repellent
- Rattlesnakes
- Poison Oak
 - Do not pet any of the pets you might see in the area. Their fur might be covered with the rash-inducing urushiol oil found in poison oak.
 - Bring Technu Soap and know how to use it ahead of time.
- Crossing Impassable Zones
 - Always use tide charts to gauge when to cross
- Sneaker waves
 - NEVER TURN YOUR BACK ON THE OCEAN
 - Lives have been lost
- Bears
 - Always use bear canisters
- Do not leave any valuables in the car at Usal Road Campground

Right before your trip

- Check conditions right before your trip
 - Roads, trail conditions, weather, earthquake activity, freshwater availability, fire hazard, bear activity, etc.

Another helpful pre-trip planning guide from the area BLM Office

<https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/programs-nlcs-california-king-range-trip-planning-guide.pdf>