

The Big Sur Blast

20 February 2012

Carmel, California

*Big doin's at
Big Sur*



Emily at McWay Falls, Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, Big Sur, Monterey County

- Story inside



The view north along the Big Sur coast from Helen Hooper Brown's front yard. Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, Monterey County.

Big doin's at Big Sur

Big Sur is California's big empty.

For 100 miles – more or less – of coastline there few people and fewer gas pumps. There's only been electricity since the 1950s.

What there is in Big Sur is a choice: cling to the land or fall to the sea.

The Spanish, who sailed up this coast in 1542, saw no place to land a ship, just a wall of mountains reaching up to 5,000 feet, and so they didn't try for 200 years.

Highway 1, which finally opened the coast to travelers, was finished in 1937.

The few residents had been there since the passage of the federal Homestead Act in 1862, which gave families like the Comings, Gamboas, Ewoldsens, Pfeiffers, Posts and McWays 160 acres each if they lived on the land and made improvements to it. Because the homesteaders spoke a mixture of English and Spanish, they condensed and

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Big doin's at Big Sur

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combined the Spanish name of the region – *el país grande del sur* (big country of the south) – with English to create Big Sur.

Much of the coastline is now state land, preserving the old homesteads and folds in the mountains that shelter redwood forests as state parks. Three of the most visited are Andrew Molera State Park at the mouth of the Big Sur River, named for the rancher who made artichokes popular in California by his sister, who donated the land of the Cooper-Molera families, and Pfeiffer Big Sur and Julia Pfeiffer Burns state parks, both named for a family that arrived in 1869 to farm the land.

The oldest building in Big Sur dates to 1861, a cabin built by the Moleras' grandfather Juan Bautista Roger Cooper.

The latter of the Pfeiffer parks was land originally bought by a wealthy New York congressman and his wife,



Emily looking up at the redwoods on our hike in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park.

Helen Hooper Brown. When she died in 1961, she donated her 1,800 acres to the state on the condition that it be named for Julia Pfeiffer Burns, the farm girl who became her lifelong friend.



The Big Sur Marathon is 26.2 miles of this.

Don't mess with my wife ...

... She can kick your butt.

Two of the 11 marathons Emily has run were the Big Sur Marathon, a 26-mile, 385-yard race from Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park to the town of Carmel.

Highway 1 is closed to all but runners during the annual race each April. Most of them stay on the Monterey Peninsula the night before and ride one of the shuttle buses down to the starting line at 4 a.m.

Then, as Emily tells it, you stand waiting in the cold and dark under fog-dripping redwood trees in your shorts and T-shirt while your muscles cramp for another hour or two until the race starts. All the while you know this is not going to be the miserable part of your day.

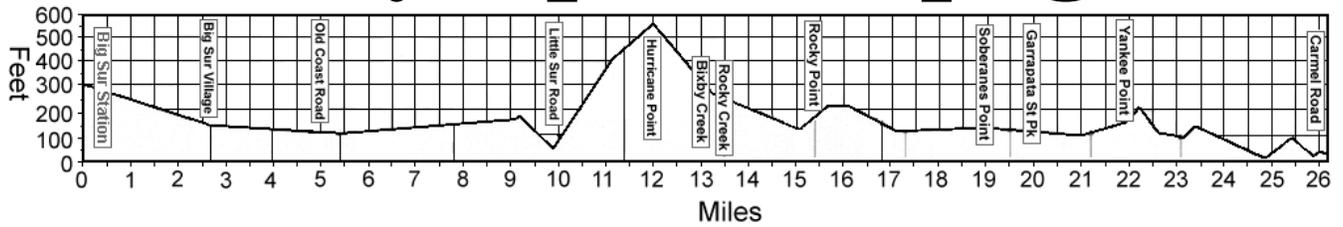


One of the musicians who plays for runners along the marathon route.

Rain fell pretty heavily during one of Emily's races. Near the much-photographed Bixby Creek Bridge, she mentioned to a fellow runner that the raindrops were getting so big they hurt.

"Lady," he said, "this is hail."

Today's picture pages



This is an elevation profile of the Big Sur Marathon with the start on the left. The picture on the previous page was made near Little Sur Road at Mile 10. The leftmost point of land in the photo is Hurricane Point at Mile 12, the high point of the marathon route. Runners climb nearly 600 feet over that two-mile stretch.



Winter storms frequently wash out sections of Highway in Big Sur leaving residents with 100-mile trips to the grocery store.

The Big Sur River in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park



Goodbye from Big Sur

