

Welcome to Big Sur and the Pine Ridge Trailhead

Please read this information before you venture out on the Pine Ridge Trail. This trail begins in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, but after a mile or so you enter the Ventana Wilderness, which is part of the Los Padres National Forest. There are several lovely backcountry camps along this trail, including heavily used Sykes Camp.

Sykes Camp/Sykes Hot Springs

You may have heard stories about a fantastical place in the Ventana Wilderness with redwoods, a clear-running mountain stream, and magical natural hot springs. That's all true. But another truth is that human visitation at Sykes has a profound impact on this special place. We need your help to keep Sykes from being “loved to death.” Everyone who hikes to Sykes Camp needs to commit strongly to Leave No Trace ethics to help protect this fragile place.

Please consider the following before you decide to go to Sykes:

- Sykes is a very popular camp. Over 200 people have been seen camping there on holiday weekends, despite the official capacity of only seven campsites. This overuse is not compatible with wilderness values.
- The 10-mile hike from Big Sur Station to Sykes is strenuous. Elevation gain and loss are considerable, and trees often fall across the trail making passage difficult.
- Be prepared to cross the chilly Big Sur River numerous times to get to the camp and hot springs, and always use caution. The river can become impassable during winter and spring due to high, swift water.
- As for the “hot springs,” two small tubs averaging 102° F can be found downstream from the camp. Each tub can hold 4 to 6 people. It is quite likely that the tubs will be occupied when you arrive, especially on weekends.

Practice these Sykes-specific Leave No Trace principles:



Plan Ahead and Prepare

- “Know Before You Go.” Check with the US Forest Service at fs.usda.gov/lpnf or by calling 831-385-5434 for current fire restrictions in the Los Padres National Forest and to obtain a **fire permit**, which is required for both fires AND stoves.
- Check the **Trail Conditions for the Pine Ridge Trail** at [ventanawild.org](https://www.ventanawild.org). Post a trail report upon your return.
- Allow approximately 6 hours of hiking time from Big Sur Station to Sykes Camp.
- Keep your group size to 4 people or fewer if possible.
- Bring food you can cook with a stove (not a fire).
- Avoid visiting Sykes on a weekend. The Forest Service recommends a one-night-only stay at Sykes due to the large number of visitors.
- Alternative camps to consider include Barlow Flat (3 mi. before Sykes) and Redwood (2.5 mi. past Sykes).



Minimize Campfire Impacts

- During Fire Restrictions (usually from June through October) campfires and smoking are not permitted ANYWHERE in the wilderness, and during extreme conditions even stoves are not permitted. (See “Plan Ahead” section on obtaining a fire permit.)
- Help to minimize impacts by only using existing fire rings. Do not build up fire rings or create new ones.
- Keep fires small. Use only sticks found on the ground that can be broken by hand.

- Use water (not rocks or dirt) to put your fire DEAD OUT. Test the ashes with your hands to make sure they are cold.
- Even when campfires are permitted, consider reducing your impact by not having one.



Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

- Camp at least 20 feet away from the water's edge.
- Do not camp directly across from the hot tubs.
- Do not alter the camp sites and fire rings.



Respect Wildlife

- Protect wildlife and your food by securely storing rations and trash.
- Never feed or handle wildlife.
- Please consider leaving your dog at home. If you do bring your dog, please use a leash.



Be Considerate of Other Visitors

- Respect the wilderness experience of others and let nature's sounds prevail.
- Keep your campsite small and focus activity where vegetation is absent. Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.
- Do not add sandbags or other materials to the hot tubs.
- Avoid loud voices and noises.



Dispose of Waste Properly

- The Big Sur River is designated by Congress as a Wild and Scenic River. Please help protect this special waterway.
- Whatever you pack in must be packed out. There is no garbage service in the wilderness. Consider leaving Sykes better than you found it by packing out trash left by previous visitors.
- Use the *wilderness toilets provided*. They are the only appropriate places to defecate.
- Pack out all hygiene products (*including toilet paper*). Disposable towelettes are NOT biodegradable, and toilet paper causes the toilets to fill more rapidly. Bring a dedicated plastic bag to pack out these materials.
- Do not put soap of any kind (even biodegradable) into the river or tubs. Wash yourself and your dishes as far from the river as possible.

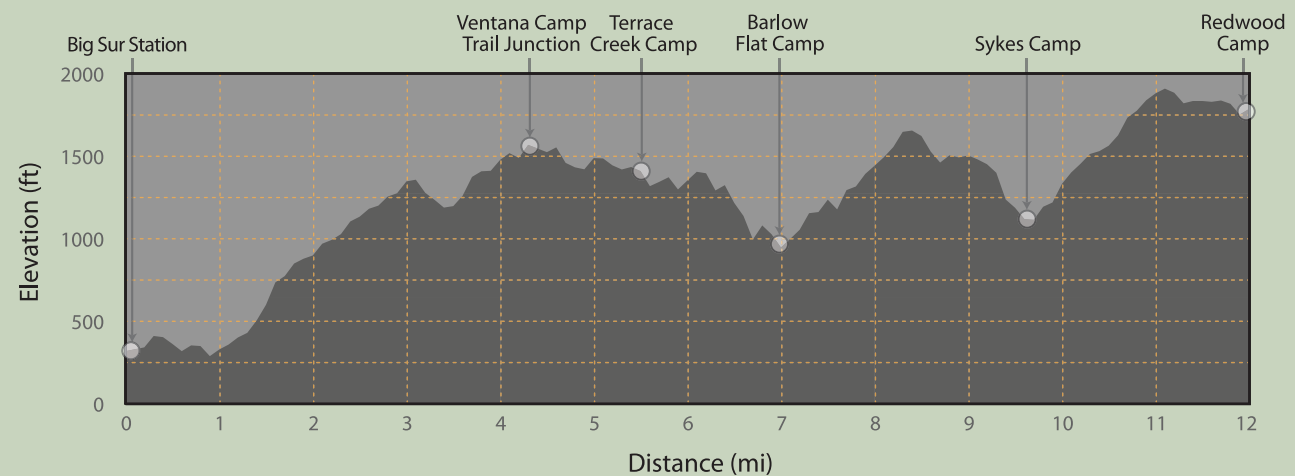


Leave What You Find

- Leave rocks, plants, and other natural objects as you find them.
- DO NOT build structures or furniture or dig trenches.
- Do not stack rocks.

THANK YOU for planning ahead! **THANK YOU** for practicing Leave No Trace ethics in the backcountry. Be sure to report any inappropriate or illegal backcountry behavior when you return to Big Sur Station.

Elevation and Distance Profile



If you'd prefer to avoid the crowds at Sykes Camp, the following are some great alternate choices for finding solitude in the Ventana Wilderness:

Barlow Flat Camp and **Redwood Camp** provide space and solitude not found at Sykes.

Vicente Flat Camp has spacious wooded campsites and the trail offers beautiful views of the coast.

Pico Blanco Public Camp is renowned for its amazing waterfall and grotto.

Pat Spring Camp has a wide-angle vista of Pico Blanco, the Pacific Ocean, and the Ventana opening out to the east.

Pine Valley Camp is a rare treat with its expansive meadow, beautiful cliffs, and ponderosa pines.

Visit [ventanawild.org](https://www.ventanawild.org) for much more information about the Big Sur backcountry.



ENJOY and PROTECT THE WILD and SCENIC BIG SUR RIVER

A Map of the Pine Ridge Trail
to Sykes Camp and Beyond



Ventana Wilderness Alliance



The USFS is an equal opportunity provider and employer.



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Visit ventanawild.org or scan the QR code
for trail conditions reports and more.

