

Introduction

Surely no more beautiful and spiritually uplifting coastline exists on this earth.

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FOR SEVENTY-FIVE MILES along California's central coast stretches an exceptional landscape known as Big Sur. The steep Santa Lucia Mountains of Big Sur contain some of California's most complex geology, including volcanic rock, sandstone, and the high-grade limestone of the prominent Pico Blanco. The mountains rise over five thousand feet from the Pacific Ocean in just three miles—a grade greater than that of any other coastline in the contiguous United States, and eclipsing even the eastern escarpment of the Sierra Nevada range. The mountains bring cool temperatures and thick fog in the summer. Big Sur is a place where disparate worlds meet. Two ecological ocean provinces bring not only flora and fauna specific to the areas to the north and south, but also those that exist only in the transition zone between the two.

Lush ferns, newts, salamanders, and the southernmost stretch of redwoods all thrive in the wet ravines. Chaparral and coastal scrub cover more than half of the Santa Lucia Mountains, with yucca plants from southern deserts, lupine, sagebrush, and manzanita growing on the drier slopes. Together, these two zones provide habitat for mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes, deer, squirrels, and numerous other animals. For over a century these animals have been free of the competition and predation of grizzly bears and wolves, large carnivores that also once roamed these mountains before ranchers and homesteaders eliminated them.

Young vegetation is common in these stretches, where fire is a regular ecological force and plants have adapted to fire-induced regeneration. The



FIGURE 1. A redwood grove and creek in Big Sur. The redwood is endemic to a narrow strip of land stretching from Big Sur to just north of the California-Oregon border. (Photo: author.)

redwood, with its natural resistance to fire, can continue to increase in girth despite charred bark. Other flora survives in less fire-prone stretches. The endemic Santa Lucia Fir stands in the high, rocky ravines, where little other vegetation grows, while maples, sycamores and alders do well in the riparian corridors. The steep hillsides pose a challenge to fire containment, and evidence of bulldozer cuts attests to the history of firefighting efforts along the ridge tops. A season of heavy rain following a fire brings mudslides where

new roots have failed to take hold in the steep hillside soil—a reminder that the angle of repose in Big Sur is, quite simply, steep.

Some of the more recognizable flora in Big Sur is not native to California's central coast but arrived intentionally or otherwise with settlers and their domesticated animals. Nonnative plants can spread rapidly in burned-over stretches; in this way, pampas grass, native to Argentina, and the South African ice plant have proliferated. In particular the feathery, golden pampas grass does so partly because of the so-called honeymoon effect, spreading seeds from reeds that visitors attach to their car antennas. Nearly half of Big Sur's grasses have been transplanted by local residents, often with the intention to create cattle pasture. Nonnative wild oats and ripgut brome are now common to the area.

For all the splendor of the mountains, the Pacific Ocean is the commanding feature of Big Sur. It defines the look, the feel, and the life of this region. Big Sur's flora, fauna, industry, and reputation all take their shape from the great expanse of cool Pacific water and its weather patterns. Throughout the summer, steady winds of the North Pacific high-pressure system keep storms at bay, and the dry months coincide with the prime summer tourist season. Rain returns in the late fall, when the pressure system moves south. This same system triggers effects that bring an upwelling of deep, cold Pacific water to the surface from March to July, producing coastal fog that enables certain species—like the redwood—to survive the dry period. This upwelling also brings deep-water nutrients to Big Sur's coastal waters that nourish a rich marine life. Gray whales, harbor seals, sea lions, abalone, sea urchins, numerous kelps, pelicans, and herons all thrive in this environment; so does the southern sea otter, a creature that was once thought to have been driven to extinction by overhunting but that had survived by taking refuge along Big Sur's rocky and isolated coast.¹

Countless humans also came to Big Sur seeking distance from society. Big Sur's timeless landscape compelled California legislators to cater to the growing automobile-based tourism of the 1920s by penetrating the isolated Big Sur with the Carmel–San Simeon Highway, later known as Highway 1. For over seventy-five years this ribbon of road, carved into the Santa Lucia Mountains, has delivered millions of admirers to the dramatic Big Sur coastline. Except when the mountainsides cease to be tamed by this road, and landslides, including the largest in state history, temporarily close the highway and remind an admiring public of nature's power along this stretch of coast.² These vivid examples of a dynamic landscape prompt further fascination with Big Sur, but visitors also flock here because this coastal community



FIGURE 2. The view looking southwest from Garrapata State Park. The park spans both sides of Highway 1 (California State Route 1). Within the park, a mortar ground into a creekside boulder and an old barn near the highway attest to the area's shifting land use. In the summer of 2016, an illegal campfire set in this park spread to more than 130,000 acres. The Soberanes Fire became the costliest fire in U.S. history. (Photo: author.)

has long been a cultural symbol of California and the West, a place rife with meaning in contemporary society.

Some of Big Sur's most ardent admirers have been iconic writers and artists who created an enduring mystique for this coastline. Through their interpretation of its charm and the allure of their very presence, the poet Robinson Jeffers, the authors Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac, and the photographer Ansel Adams have helped ensure that Big Sur would receive international attention.³ With the reputation built by these artists and a host of other creative and unconventional residents, the popular media started in the middle of the twentieth century to present Big Sur as a spot unique to California. Its impressive natural features represented the best of the West, while its avant-garde reputation beckoned to those who saw in Big Sur's way of life the opportunity to nourish or recreate themselves far from mainstream society.

The renowned poet Robinson Jeffers, considered by many to be California's finest, left an indelible mark upon Big Sur.⁴ As a young but well-traveled artist, Jeffers settled in California's central coast in 1914. Big Sur, situated to the south of his Carmel home, became Jeffers's place of inspiration and escape from a larger civilization that he perceived as "dying at the core."⁵ He used Big Sur's formidable backdrop as the setting for his popular works, many of which chal-

lenged the dominant American attitude regarding progress, material gain, and the seemingly indiscriminate transformation and destruction of the natural world. In his succinct verse Jeffers explained Big Sur's worth, what he characterized as an aesthetic or spiritual quality that was superior to any monetary value: "No better gift for men but one supreme, / Your beauty without price."⁶

In the mid-1940s, Henry Miller, author of the controversial *Tropic of Cancer*, settled in Big Sur and began to echo much of Jeffers's social criticism and, like the poet, heaped praise upon this remote coastline. Miller, like Jeffers, respected the longtime residents who adapted to the constraints posed by Big Sur's topography and chose to live at a pace that was out of step with much of bustling California. Miller's 1957 memoir, *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*, cast Big Sur as an earthly paradise: "the California that men dreamed of years ago . . . this is the face of the earth as the Creator intended it to look." Miller's representation of Big Sur, and his belief that its culture and landscape embodied "something truly American, something simple, primitive, and as yet unspoiled," juxtaposed this coastline with California as a whole. The state's growth was breaking all records as its jobs, its beauty, and its western life style attracted millions of new residents. As California's metropolitan areas exploded in this era, people looked to Big Sur as a place apart.

Big Sur held considerable appeal for those searching for meaning in the midst of a rapidly evolving society. Here along this stretch of coast was a place to reconnect with the landscapes of the old West; a place to find oneself, as so many adherents of the counterculture—following Jack Kerouac's steps—attempted to do in Big Sur's forests and beaches; or a place to experiment with the New Age spiritual and psychological developments of the Esalen Institute. The apparent freedom and looseness offered by Big Sur's open spaces and unconventional community beckoned to Jeffers, Miller, and Kerouac (all of whom hailed from the eastern seaboard), and to countless others. For all it came to represent, Big Sur was integral to California's status as a cultural trendsetter in twentieth-century America. Significantly, despite its popularity, Big Sur never lost its natural allure. By the time of Robinson Jeffers's death, in the early 1960s, the *San Francisco Chronicle* labeled the Big Sur coast a "Timeless Eden."⁷ Big Sur became a place as well as an idea worth preserving.

Notably, Jeffers's, Miller's, and later Ansel Adams's work all reinforced the idea of special preservation for Big Sur and complicated the issue besides by increasing the number of its admirers. But Monterey County officials, cognizant of the potential for tourism, had already begun to grapple with how to preserve Big Sur's particularly scenic stretch of coastline. Beginning with aesthetic zon-

ing during the interwar period, Monterey County, often at the behest of Big Sur residents, continued throughout the course of the century to develop low-density and environmentally sensitive planning measures for the coast. At midcentury, as the burgeoning California population transformed large swaths of the valuable coastline, Big Sur diverged from contemporary developments. Its residents and local government officials crafted land-management tools, including open-space measures, a land trust, and transfer-development credits, while also co-opting the state's resources and environmental guidelines, in order to protect the land and the place of the fortunate few who lived there. They worked to retain, and even cultivate, a look of timelessness for this region that ultimately corresponded with the reputation fostered by its rural residents. This coordinated effort became the basis for securing a local voice in state and federal debates regarding Big Sur's land management.

Big Sur's beauty and reputation inspired many different approaches to preservation, including Ansel Adams's plan in 1980 to incorporate Big Sur as a national seashore. His vision for this coastal region ran against the social and political realities of this era. The 1960s and 1970s had seen a national surge of support for environmental legislation, but Adams's proposal came during a backlash against government regulation of natural resources. Conservative western voters were beginning to employ rights-based arguments to successfully oppose government ownership of land and resources. Concurrently, diminishing state funds in the wake of Proposition 13 and a national economic recession both circumscribed preservation efforts. The discussion that ensued over whether to establish a public seashore in Big Sur ultimately rested on questions of individual rights, the reach of the federal government, and the importance of environmental protection.

The tensions in this debate reflected some of the paradoxes that characterized Big Sur during the late twentieth century. Though Big Sur attracted more visitors than Yosemite National Park, private ownership accounted for close to one-quarter of the land area, situated within and alongside Los Padres National Forest and numerous state parks.⁸ Residents, deemed rural by the quality of their environment, lived in homes that cost nearly four times the national average and nearly three times the state's.⁹ Aware of the power that their wealth commanded, residents boldly asserted their right to steward the land without a federal landlord. These residents, the majority of whom were Democrats, tapped into the growing movement for private-property rights and disenchantment with the federal government to argue for greater autonomy in land management. Yet to secure a voice in the regula-

tory framework, they worked with county and state officials to protect and promote a “semi-wilderness” in Big Sur by banning all new development within view of Highway 1 as well as other restrictive zoning and open-space measures.¹⁰ Paradoxically, then, even though Big Sur had long been synonymous with individualism, locals worked collectively in the name of the common good: they accepted unusual property restrictions that would preserve the remarkable scenery for themselves as well as for visitors.

In an era of increasing federal reach and authority, the independent-minded residents of Big Sur found that a measure of autonomy came not from trying to buck the government but from envisioning and helping craft a role for the individual community member to support federally and state-mandated preservation. That Big Sur could be both wild and inhabited is directly related to this ability on the part of the residents and the government to compromise some priorities in search of securing the larger goals of a viable community and a world-class scenic destination. To varying degrees this compromise has been sought in multiple locations along the California coast where communities wish to retain coherence and the government seeks to preserve natural habitats and public access. The creative coastal protection methods applied early on in Big Sur, including open-space planning, conservation easements, intergovernmental collaboration, citizen activism, land trusts, and to a limited extent transfer-development credits, became tools employed along California’s coast during an era of increasingly high land values, unpredictable government funding, and erratic voter support for preservation ballot propositions. Big Sur’s particular success lay in the fact that these conservation measures served the residents, the tourists, and, to a large extent, the land itself, which continued to at least appear wild despite (and because of) the government’s increasing management of the nature within. Henry Miller was right, Big Sur was indeed quintessentially American, but deceptively so.

MONTEREY COUNTY’S EARLY HISTORY

Much of Big Sur’s history reads like that of other western landscapes that passed from an undeveloped state to a highly governed space. The imposing natural elements that inspire so many admirers in Big Sur long served as an obstacle to settlement. Millennia ago, the Penutian peoples migrated south until they reached the steep Santa Lucia Mountains. Though the Penutians absorbed earlier inhabitants of the central coast, the Esselen remained

autonomous in the Big Sur region.¹¹ In the nineteenth century, few of the Esselen survived the Spanish missions to return to their mountainous coastal home. Nonnative settlers were slow to inhabit this coastal stretch, arriving only after other prime lands were no longer available. Under the Mexican government, Big Sur saw only two land grants established along its seventy-five-mile coastline. In the years after California statehood, homesteaders sought to make ranching and farming lucrative in a place lacking easy access to markets and where “any piece of flat-land big as a blanket has a name to itself.”¹² Last-chance gold miners and timber companies flourished briefly at the turn of the twentieth century but folded when the most accessible resources had been harvested. Transportation costs out of this rugged coastline rendered more extensive development uneconomical. Even the National Forest Service came late to Big Sur, during the third round of forest reserves created by the federal government in California. Established in 1906, the Monterey Forest Reserve encompassed the majority of the inland mountainsides. This forest, now called Los Padres, includes a small stretch of the remote Big Sur coastline, making it the only national forest in California to extend to the Pacific Ocean.¹³

Perhaps the most famous of Monterey County’s landscapes, Big Sur is but one area within this historic region. Monterey, once the capital of Alta California under Spain and Mexico, is an old and significant California city. The gold rush shifted economic dominance and political authority to San Francisco and Sacramento, but it was in Monterey that California delegates gathered to write the state constitution. In the 1880s Monterey turned to tourism, most notably with the world-famous Hotel Del Monte, and by the turn of the twentieth century its tourist economy was developing in tandem with industrial agriculture and the canning industry. Monterey Bay’s prolific sardine run gave rise to Cannery Row in the 1920s, with the fish renderings going to local farmers for chicken feed and the smell remaining for everyone along the city’s shoreline.¹⁴ The inland part of Monterey County—Salinas Valley—grew a large share of the nation’s lettuce and sugar beets. Within the Monterey Peninsula itself, the Methodist Church in 1875 founded the town of Pacific Grove as a restful and inspiring retreat, and Carmel-by-the-Sea became a quaint storybook-like village popular among artists. The peninsula’s demographic and economic diversity inspired a popular saying: “Carmel by the Sea, Monterey by the smell, and Pacific Grove by God.”

Unlike these towns, Big Sur was largely inaccessible at the turn of the century and provided neither significant property taxes nor other types of revenue for Monterey County. But as the construction of Highway 1

portended further tourism, leaders in Monterey County came to understand the economic importance of maintaining a scenic environment and the challenges of balancing this with other economic enterprises. In this way, Monterey County fit into a particular category of western locales that sought to incorporate tourism as an essential part of a diversified economy rather than allow it to dominate or be overshadowed by other economic endeavors.¹⁵ Tourism—whether along the county’s spectacular southern coast or in historic Monterey—was one element in the county’s larger economic equation, which also included large-scale agriculture and military installations. And though today tourism drives Big Sur’s economy, this stretch of coastline also encompasses private lands and community resources that add depth to Big Sur’s scenic qualities.

BIG SUR AND IDEAS OF WILDERNESS

To many of its admirers Big Sur is a wild place; but this coastline is also a storied landscape with a rich human history. This complexity is why Big Sur departs from dominant concepts of land use. The Wilderness Act of 1964 codified the idea of wilderness as a place “where man himself is but a visitor who does not remain.” As a result of both prevailing opinion and government policy, Americans tend to preserve wilderness for recreation and study while treating areas of habitation and work as largely separate from nature. The historian William Cronon critiques this illogical, sentimental relationship to the land and its resources in his influential and controversial essay “The Trouble with Wilderness.” Cronon argues that Americans have constructed and then preserved wildernesses to suit our ideas of sublime nature while disregarding the well-being of less striking landscapes. Americans most often view only the former as a true representation of nature and therefore worthy of preservation. The result, Cronon laments, is that Americans have subverted most efforts at sustainable, ethical relationships for people with nature.¹⁶ This dichotomy between places of nature and places of people does not explain Big Sur. Instead, the story of Big Sur reveals the complex processes by which residents and authorities have combined in at least one place to create a wild but inhabited land.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a *Nature*/PBS film labeled Big Sur’s well-preserved coastline a “Living Eden” for its remarkable beauty and powerful natural elements. Big Sur’s reputation derives primarily from its

physical landscape, but its cultural significance is closely intertwined with its popularity. Around the same time as this PBS film aired, *National Geographic Traveler* recognized Big Sur as one of the world's fifty greatest destinations—a fine example of “civilization and nature in harmony,” opined the magazine. More than a place of remarkable beauty situated between Los Angeles and San Francisco, Big Sur occupies a hybrid space somewhere between American ideals of development and wilderness. It is a space that challenges the way that most Americans think of nature, its relationship to people, and what in fact makes a place wild. Big Sur's preservation model may portend other creative responses to the priorities of tourism, private-property rights, and conservation, but its specific combination of social privilege and striking natural features may be the key to its success. What is clear, however, is that wilderness is a fluid concept—one that may benefit from greater flexibility in scholarship and within the American landscape.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The book opens with Robinson Jeffers's introduction to the Big Sur landscape in 1914. Jeffers's impressions of the coast led him to view it as a world apart—a place that shared few similarities with the landscapes and cultures he knew from Europe, the eastern United States, and southern California. Big Sur's rugged setting had long served as an obstacle to settlement or exploration, so that early in the century this coastline was sparsely populated and without modern technologies. Human endeavors had produced few permanent edifices, despite centuries of habitation and decades of small-scale extractive industries. The Spanish name for this coastline, *el sur* (“the south”) represented how most people viewed the area in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even into the twentieth: as a rather inconsequential place that existed to the south of the more manageable, and profitable, Monterey Peninsula and its surrounding valley. Not until the 1920s, when highways and commercial tourism proceeded at a rapid pace throughout the country and Jeffers's published verse on Big Sur gained popularity, did Big Sur's isolation and underdevelopment become recast as a great asset. Chapter 1 examines how Jeffers's approbation of locals' archaic mode of life helped to establish the sense that nature's elemental forces and Big Sur's inhabitants could together produce the most appealing landscape.

Despite Big Sur's apparent immutability, Jeffers's haven was a shifting landscape, and he came to know it on the eve of its greatest transformation. Chapter

2 examines the transformative effect of the opening of Highway 1 in 1937 and Big Sur's incorporation into California tourism. This chapter argues that planning foresight positioned Big Sur to become one of the state's best-preserved coastlines while popular representations of its dramatic natural elements provided the justification for such preservation. As the highway slowly advanced along the coastline during the 1920s, Monterey County established some of the first ordinances in the nation to prohibit billboards and require well-designed construction along the highway. Tourists responded with enthusiasm. They were drawn by Jeffers's powerful verse and countless national newspaper stories extolling Big Sur's beauty, all of which depicted this coast as a vestige of early California. In 1944 the avant-garde writer Henry Miller stumbled upon an unexpected treasure when he arrived in Big Sur. Demoralized and disgusted by international politics and modern American society in particular, Miller saw in Big Sur the perfect meeting of people and nature, and he chose to make it his home for nearly twenty years. Like Jeffers's work, Miller's representation of Big Sur left the impression that people belonged in and to this landscape. The highway set Big Sur on an irrevocable course toward participation in contemporary society, but aesthetic zoning, praise from the national media, and laudatory accounts from residents like Miller worked to blur the modern aspects of this coastal destination. Visitors to Big Sur sought a glimpse of the frontier that had supposedly closed four decades earlier, but ironically the frontier that they encountered derived at least in part from government regulations that responded to California's phenomenal growth.

The West that emerged from World War II—a rapidly growing, suburban, industrialized, consumer-oriented region—shaped American culture, and this culture became the foil against which Miller and many others imagined Big Sur. Big Sur sat perched at the literal, and increasingly at the figurative, edge of the United States, and its cultural significance grew as the state continued to flourish. Chapter 3 examines the efforts from within and without to paint Big Sur as a place apart, but also as a hyperrepresentation of California, complete with an exceptional landscape, a relatively young and flexible culture, a compelling life style, and a place of perceived personal freedom. Notably, this freedom and flexibility thrived within the zoning parameters established by Monterey County. A growing number of the diverse inhabitants of Big Sur, including the beatniks, the artists, the professionals, and the upper-class residents, all shared at least one quality: they possessed social privilege and could use this capital to work with county officials to protect their haven from becoming one more commercialized coastal strip.

Chapter 4 revolves around the pivotal year 1962, when Monterey County planners and Big Sur residents crafted a pioneering open-space master plan that foreshadowed the state's commitment to coastal conservation in the following decades. At a time when even the National Park Service fell into line with the national pro-growth sentiment, Big Sur residents and county officials sustained a critique of this resource-dependent relationship to nature. But this did not place them in the same camp as the wilderness advocates who gained traction in the early 1960s. Residents of Big Sur did not want to create a wilderness; they wanted to retain control of their home environment, and their strongest ally was their local government. Some residents balked at the idea of submitting to increased regulation, but the majority of residents understood that the government was going to have growing influence over the shape of landscapes and acknowledged the paradox that in order to retain a sense of the wild residents would have to work alongside the government to determine viable residential and tourist features. Their combined efforts helped to secure in Big Sur a landscape quite distinct from two other notable California destinations: the rapidly commercializing Tahoe region and the newly established Point Reyes National Seashore. By accommodating a spectrum of visitors while restricting the numbers who could settle here, Big Sur locals and county officials secured the appearance of a democratic landscape long associated with the West while in fact creating an increasingly exclusive landscape more representative of contemporary California.

By the late 1960s Big Sur retained its alternative image despite accommodating an increasingly wealthy population and registering as a top tourist destination in the state. During the counterculture era of the 1960s and early 1970s, Big Sur became a magnet for hippies, back-to-the-land activists, and New Age visitors exploring the mind-expanding retreats at the Esalen Institute. Added to these arrivals was the steady stream of families flocking to the state parks and beaches. Chapter 5 examines the arrival of these various admirers, including the new residents, and their influence on Big Sur's image and land management. This chapter also broadens the picture to examine the impact of the increasingly affluent California population that solidified environmental legislation to protect such places as Big Sur. The 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill was a wake-up call to the state and the nation, reinforcing the linkage between the quality of the environment and Americans' quality of life. It spurred the passage of Proposition 20 in 1972, which led to the creation of the California Coastal Commission to protect California's prized coastline. New state regulations required environmentally sensitive

land-management plans from all coastal counties. This chapter argues that Big Sur residents understood the importance of coalescing into a vibrant community as they began to draft one of the most stringent antidevelopment plans in the state. Their sophisticated knowledge of land management helped retain this coastline's distinction and their prized place within it.

By the late 1970s residents and county officials were operating against the grain as they sought to limit residential, commercial, and resource development. The nation's faltering economy challenged bipartisan support for environmental protection and helped prompt western property-rights advocates to call for deregulating the use of the nation's natural resources. In response, Ansel Adams turned his considerable influence toward securing federal protection for this increasingly popular coastline. Adams endeavored to secure the designation of a Big Sur National Seashore while Democrats still controlled Congress and the White House, but he had an uphill battle during the conservative ascendancy in 1980. Adams also misread the vehemence with which locals guarded their right to steward the land and live without a federal landlord. Chapter 6 examines the battle over Big Sur as Adams, U.S. congressmen and senators, the Wilderness Society, Monterey County officials, and Big Sur residents debated the cultural, political, and environmental borders of this prized landscape. The chapter argues that like other debates of the era, the question of management authority for Big Sur became value-laden as issues of constitutional rights, personal freedom, and spirituality played key roles in shaping opinions on the appropriate relationship between people and nature. A place as popular as Yosemite could not escape such national attention, but remarkably Big Sur's small number of residents could harness the conservative turn to argue successfully for local management of a national treasure.

Chapter 7 argues that in the 1980s, while California dealt with the financial impact of Proposition 13, and while the federal government called for reduced-cost preservation as a growing number of Americans rejected federal land acquisition, Big Sur became a successful test case for an emerging preservation model that relied upon private and public partnerships and novel conservation methods. The impetus behind the Coastal Act represented the growing sense among Californians that their coastline was a public commons. This 1,072-mile band of prized California landscape therefore became a flash point for hashing out shifting ideas about the role and responsibility of the government and private citizens to protect the coast, public access, and property rights. This chapter examines the work of the California Coastal Commission, the California State Coastal Conservancy, Monterey County

officials, and Big Sur residents to protect the region's natural and cultural resources. Embedded in Big Sur's state-mandated Local Coastal Program was a form of preservation wrought by the political and economic possibilities of the late twentieth century, premised upon the cultural significance of this coastline as a last best place.

Big Sur is compelling not only for its exceptional beauty but for what it reveals about Californians' relationship to their coastline. The epilogue examines several key people and places that illustrate contemporary economic and social realities along the Big Sur and California coast, including Peter Douglas, the late, influential executive director of the California Coastal Commission; Bill Post, a fourth-generation Big Sur resident who helped design the luxury resort Post Ranch Inn; and the idiosyncrasies of the Big Sur softball league. Today Big Sur epitomizes the contradictions and paradoxes of coastal preservation in a society simultaneously committed to a developmental ideology of property rights and material opportunity, as well as to the idea that a profound relationship to the land has shaped the nation's character.

Finally, a note about the terms: while the term "Sur" long applied to the coastal area south of Monterey and north of the San Luis Obispo County line, this label often came from the outside. The early inhabitants of this region more often oriented themselves to some smaller, more specific location, such as Little Sur along the river of the same name, or any number of creeks, such as Rocky, Mill, or Granite. Companies lent their names to certain areas, such as the shipping spots Bixby's, Anderson's, and Notley's landings. As certain settlers became established figures, their names and homesteads defined an area, like Partington Ridge or Gamboa Point. In 1915, the local post office took on the name Big Sur, thereby providing a label for this long stretch of coastline.¹⁷ The less densely settled southern portion of this region has old names of its own—Pacific Valley, Gorda, and Lucia—and though these places are encompassed within the area regarded as Big Sur, local residents may feel less connected to the region as a whole than to their nearby community. I use the term "Big Sur" throughout to connote the region included within Monterey County's Big Sur Planning Area, from Mal Paso Creek in the north to the Monterey–San Luis Obispo County line in the south. In all, this is a 234-square-mile area stretching for seventy-five miles along the Pacific coast and reaching about three miles inland.