



Backcountry Beach Camping on Santa Rosa Island

Backcountry beach camping is available mid August through December along Santa Rosa Island's extensive, beautiful, and undeveloped 55-mile coastline. This coastline is reminiscent of a California in days gone by. The rocky coast and sandy beaches are much the same as the ones the Chumash Indians, Spanish explorers, and early ranchers may have known. This remote, fragile environment is critical for sea and shorebirds, marine mammals, and plant communities.

In 1992, the National Park Service opened the island to backcountry beach camping in recognition of its rare wilderness values. As you explore these wild areas by kayak or on foot, please take responsibility to help us protect and preserve these delicate natural resources for future generations. The following information will help you enjoy your visit while leaving the smallest impact on the island.

WARNING: *While backcountry camping is an incredible experience, it is not for the inexperienced backpacker or kayaker. Due to difficult weather, rugged terrain, and off-trail hiking, backcountry camping is an arduous endeavor and should be undertaken only by experienced, well-conditioned backpackers and kayakers.*

Open and Closed Dates

January 1 - August 14

Backcountry beachcamping is closed to protect pupping seals/sea lions and nesting seabirds.

August 15 - September 15

Only East Point to South Point Beaches (Southeast Quadrant) are open to backcountry camping for boaters, kayakers, and backpackers.

September 16 - December 31

All beaches are open to backcountry camping except those around Sandy Point and those between Carrington Point and East Point.

Destinations and Distances

The park boat concessionaire, Island Packers, usually drops off and picks up kayakers and backpackers at the pier near the ranch area in Bechers Bay. Channel Islands Aviation drops hikers at the end of the airstrip near Water Canyon, approximately one mile from the pier and a 1/2 mile from the frontcountry campground in Water Canyon.

Hiking is along the beach, dirt roads, or unmaintained paths created by island animals. ***These roads and paths are rugged and mountainous with no signs.*** All distances that follow are approximate and measured from the pier, unless stated. Please refer to topographical maps for more accurate mileage and to help with the following descriptions. It is recommended that all backpackers purchase topographic maps (USGS 7.5 minute maps or the Trails Illustrated map of all the islands) and kayakers purchase nautical charts before departing on their journey.

Although the closest beach that is open to camping between August 15 and September 15 is just south of East Point (approximately seven hiking miles and eight kayaking miles from the pier), it is not recommended for camping. This beach is a small pocket beach and often washed out at higher tides. In addition, pounding surf and strong winds constantly reshape this beach.

If hiking beyond East Point to Ford Point, it is recommended that you follow the ridge line or road until you reach the northeast ridge of San Augustine Canyon. Follow this ridge down to the mouth of the canyon. Hiking along the beach from East Point to Ford Point is impossible due to sections of vertical cliffs that drop directly into the ocean. However, kayakers can access beaches throughout this area. Once hikers reach Ford Point, they may follow the low terrace or higher ridge

(both eventually run into a coastal road) down to the Johnsons Lee area. Refer to topographical maps for more details.

Direct access to beaches between Johnsons Lee and Ford Point (including La Jolla Vieja) is also possible via the Main (Soledad) or South (Wreck) roads. Both of these routes are long hikes (see mileage chart to the right) with a considerable amount of elevation gain and, once again, like all hiking or kayaking on the island, is recommended only for the experienced, well-conditioned traveler.

Beginning September 16, all beaches are open to backcountry camping except those around Sandy Point and those between Carrington Point and East Point. In addition, Lobo Canyon beach in the northwest quadrant is closed to beach camping and only available for day use. Backcountry camping in the Northwest and Southwest quadrants is extremely difficult and only recommended for experienced backpackers due to long distances, frequent high winds, washed-out beaches at high tides, and lack of reliable water sources.

Hiking Distances

Destination (from pier unless stated)	Approximate distance in miles	
	Hiking	Kayaking
Ford Point via South (Wreck) Road	10	--
East Point	7	8
East Point to Ford Point	8	5
Ford Point to Johnsons Lee	4	3.5
Johnsons Lee (via East Point)	18	16
Johnsons Lee via Main (Soledad) Road	14	--
Johnsons Lee via South (Wreck) Road	13.5	--
La Jolla Vieja via South (Wreck) Road	11.2	--

Weather

Backpackers and kayakers should be prepared for strong northwest winds throughout the year, with the possibility of strong east or Santa Ana winds from October through January. The average wind speed is 15 knots, although speeds of 40 to 50 knots are not uncommon. Occasionally, the south side of the island (South Point to East Point) offers protection from these strong winds.

Dense fog is common during the summer months, but may occur at any time, making chart and compass navigation mandatory. Weather conditions are generally best from August through October, with relatively calm wind and sea conditions and virtually no rain. Ocean water temperatures range from the lower 50s (°F) in the winter to the upper 60s (°F) in the fall.

Kayakers may encounter strong ocean currents around the islands. Intense wave and surf conditions exist around the Carrington Point area. Sheer cliffs rise out of the ocean, reflecting incoming waves back out to sea, creating a washing machine effect. In this turbulent area there are no places to land, even in an emergency. The first landable beach is Lobo Canyon, six miles west of the ranch area pier. Rounding Skunk Point may be tricky as well because of merging currents. The wind often increases in the afternoon, and the prevailing northwesterlies can make paddling back to Water Canyon difficult. During the summer months, large swells often pound the south side of the island, making landing and launching from the beaches extremely challenging, requiring advanced skills.

