

## **Military campgrounds**

*by Alice Zyetz, updated by Jaimie Bruzenak*

Located on military bases, military campgrounds provide an option for many people who want to camp in beautiful areas, but prefer not to pay the prices asked for by private facilities. Military campgrounds are restricted to career and retired military, disabled veterans, Department of Defense workers, and various others connected to active service and their guests.

Unfortunately, the average soldier who served a short enlistment is not allowed to use the facilities unless invited as a guest. Each campground has slightly different criteria so always check first before you go.

### **The Campgrounds**

Sue McCarron, whose husband retired from the Navy after 21 years, enjoys the beautiful settings. "We were parked within one hundred paces of the beach when we stayed at the campgrounds at Pt. Mugu Naval Base, California, the San Onofre campground on Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base, California, and the Blue Angels Navy Recreation Campground in Pensacola, Florida. The campground at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs is like being in a national park."

Sue loves visiting a tourist city without paying the high prices. "The Admiral Baker Navy Campground in the heart of San Diego is a real bargain running between \$21 and \$25 per night while private campgrounds in the area are \$45 to \$65 per night. Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California, is a good place to stay while in the San Francisco Bay Area."

"An added benefit of military camping," Sue says, "is the convenience of having the commissary, exchange and sometimes a hospital nearby."

Gaylord and Sandy Stalker, both retired military, used their RV about thirty days a year while they were still on active duty. Now they are full-time RVers. They particularly enjoy the beauty of the campground connected to Miramar Marine Corps Air Station in the mountains of Big Bear, CA, and the ocean views at the campground at the Coronado Naval Base in California.

### **How to Stay in Military Campgrounds**

Full-time RVer Larry Farquhar, who travels with wife Connie, retired in 1998 from twenty years active duty with the U.S. Air Force. They use military campgrounds about one-third of the time. Larry was frustrated because there was no single source of current and complete information available about these campgrounds, and some sources were very much out of date.

So Larry created a website, <http://www.MilitaryCampgrounds.us>, to provide the information he needed. Well-organized, the site is updated frequently with additional locations, reader ratings, free articles, discussion forums, and a photo gallery.

Visit Larry's website first and then contact the campground to verify the rates and availability. Another popular website is run by the Army. If you want to join an organization, consider S\*M\*A\*R\*T (Special Military Active Retired Travel Club). The club's website lists many military campgrounds as well as a number of travel activities and group gatherings. If you prefer your information on paper, check out a book published every 18 - 24 months by Military Living: Military RV, Camping and Outdoor Recreation Around the World: Including Golf Courses and Marinas.

### How do the Facilities Compare to Non-Military Campgrounds?

According to Larry, they are about the same. "Some military campgrounds are old and run down, others are new, fancy resorts. Some have 50 amp full hook-ups (FHU) with cable, while others don't have any hook-ups. Some have modern showers, recreation room, WiFi, exercise room, kitchens, and organized activities. Some may only have a "porta-potty." Some are over fifty years old; others just opened this year. Some are located in popular resort locations, like the California or Florida coast, while others are in the middle of nothing. Some have 300+ FHU sites.

Of course, the cost is reflected in the newer, fancier, popular locations. Some places you can't get into without a reservation. However, most of them have room for dry camping when the FHU sites get full. We explored Florida for two months last winter, staying 75 percent of the time in military campgrounds without reservations. But we also didn't have hookups in almost every location. The other advantage of a military campground is being near other base facilities, and security. Larry likes to say that military campgrounds are "the most exclusive gated RV parks, complete with armed guards."

### Are There Facilities for Children?

Larry says, "We've seen playgrounds at about 75 percent of the campgrounds. Sometimes, there's also a recreation room with games, TV, Internet, maybe a computer, maybe a kitchen, maybe an exercise room, and maybe organized tours and activities (potlucks, crafts, shows, etc.). Since most military campgrounds are on a base, there's also usually a swimming pool, gym, volleyball, baseball fields, a park, picnic areas, movie theater, etc. nearby."

Thanks to Larry Farquhar, Sue McCarron and husband, and Gaylord and Sandy Stalker for sharing their information, their love of the campgrounds, and their service to our country.

When I asked Roger Pechacek (retired Army) what he enjoyed most about the campgrounds, he immediately replied, "I love camping there because it brings me close to the soldiers. When I'm running, I try to run on the track with those stationed there. It gives me a chance to say thank you to our brave young men and women."

**Note:** It is a good idea to call ahead and make sure there is an available spot. Readers have reported recently that in some cases long-term tenants have taken available spaces and there were no spaces when they arrived. Be on the safe side!

*This article was originally published at RoadTripAmerica.com, October 2006. Updated June 2013.*