

Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Director, Institute of Marine Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

#62 August 28, 2010

Walking around the bay



The entrance to Moss Landing Harbor/Elkhorn Slough presents an obstacle to our walk around the bay's shoreline.

In the last column I wrote about our trek around the bay, and while walking 33 miles in the soft sand over 3 days was a work out, it was also a rewarding educational experience for the whole group. After reading about our local marathon swimmer's attempt to swim across the bay, heading out in the middle of the night and being tortured by stinging jellyfish until she couldn't continue, I realized we took the easy route.

We had no pests to contend with, and we had a support vehicle that carried our lunches and cold drinks. Our dedicated driver found access to the coast every few miles along the northern bay (the southern bay is a bit more remote), and could have rescued anyone needing assistance, but no one needed help. Everyone was motivated, had gotten some hiking in before hand, and wanted to claim their certificate of completion and be able to show friends the walk that they had completed on the map of the bay.

In an era when first-time adventure accomplishments are harder and harder to come up with, like 13-year olds climbing Mount Everest and attempting to sail around the world alone, our circumambulation of Monterey Bay may seem like a modest effort. But it's here in our backyard, it's doable without endangering your life, and when you arrive on the other side, you feel quite accomplished. You also have a new perspective on the bay's coastline and what's out there that you never see driving by on Highway One at 65 miles an hour.

There are actually only four places that present potential problems for a complete beach walk around the bay. You don't really have a choice at the entrance to Moss Landing harbor, unless you want to take up rough water swimming. But it's a not a bad hike along the edge of the slough, where we were fortunate to see a large raft of resident sea otters. It's about a mile diversion from Moss Landing State Beach, along Jetty Road, and then along Highway One, over the bridge and then out to the beach again.

On the left side of Highway One is the Dynegy Power Plant where natural gas is converted to lots of electricity to power much of the bay area. The first plant was originally constructed in 1949 and over the years it has been modified, rebuilt and upgraded. Next to the power plant are the former Kaiser refractories where magnesium was first extracted from seawater to support metal production for the World War II effort, and then later for the production of high temperature bricks for steel furnaces. The plant closed in 1999, but Calera ("green cement for a blue planet") now uses the facilities as a test site for producing cement from seawater, eliminating the production of carbon dioxide that accompanies cement production.

There are three other potential barriers to the complete bay walk on the beach; two of these are wet ones. Depending upon the month of the year, the river flow and tidal stage, you may have to swim or wade across the Pajaro and Salinas river mouths. You may also be lucky and be able to walk across on a sand bar. On our first weekend the Pajaro was too deep to wade so we ended our first day's hike here. A week later the Salinas River ended in a sand spit, and we just boldly walked across.

One other obstruction is in Sand City where local concrete trucks poured their end-of-the-day dregs over the edge of the bluff for decades to form a very resistant stretch of shoreline that now protrudes into the surf zone like the prow of a ship. It's a lot easier, however, to hike over this mass of concrete than risk your life trying to get between it and a breaking wave. When you get over this barrier, you only have about 3 miles left to go.