

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

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A walk to remember



This aerial photograph from 1931 shows very well developed arcuate-shaped beach cusps along the entire shoreline in the Rio Del Mar-Seacliff area.

Have you ever looked at that wonderful high altitude photograph of Monterey Bay and wondered what it might be like to walk completely around the bay? Can you even walk all the way around it? Eighteen years ago, Sandy Lydon, a local historian and national treasure, walked the entire coastline over a two-day period and wrote several articles for the *Sentinel* about his adventure. Other than needing an armed guard as an escort while he passed in front of the firing range at Ft. Ord, he completed the trek on his own and lived to write about it.

Two years ago Sandy talked me into retracing his steps with him and bringing along 40 others who signed up for this adventure challenge through a Cabrillo Extension course. People were actually willing to pay money to hike 33 miles on sand over a two-day period! Fortunately we did this over two different weekends, which gave the participants a chance to nearly recover from the 15-mile first day ordeal. The agreement was that I would cover the first 200 million years of Earth history, geology and related trivia, and Sandy would generously cover the last 200 years. I thought that sounded fair.

Day one would take us from New Brighton State Beach to Moss Landing, and day two would start on the opposite side of the Moss Landing harbor and, with any luck, everyone would survive and we would get to Monterey before nightfall. Other than having to cross the nearly waist deep, cold water of the Pajaro River late in the first day, we arrived intact but tired at Moss Landing. The second day was a bit rougher going, in part because there was only one rest stop with a bathroom, at Marina State Beach. The bigger challenge, however, was the steep scalloped beach along Ft. Ord, which left everyone leaning over like they were at the Mystery Spot. By 6:00 that evening we had only reached the Monterey Beach Hotel, 3 miles short of our destination, and we were dragging. Most of the group returned another weekend to finish the walk and earn our merit badge and certificate. We all discovered that a 15-mile hike on beach sand is a lot more challenging than 15 miles on a trail.

Adventure has been defined as gross discomfort seen in retrospect, and his trip fell squarely into that category. But it also provided a unique look at this bay we all call home from a perspective that most of never have the chance to experience. Walking the beach from Capitola to Monterey not only takes a lot longer than driving, but also allows you the time to see and hear about what makes the bay so special. Sea otters and snowy plovers, sand mining and shipwrecks, seawalls and submarine canyons, and a history that includes gold mining, whaling, military bases and magnesium extraction.

Sandy and I had such a great recollection of the trip two years ago that we decided to repeat it these past two weekends. Forty brave souls signed on for the trek. Learning from our first experience, we broke the trip into three days: New Brighton to the Pajaro, the Pajaro to the Salinas River, and from there to Monterey. A hearty group hiked the entire shoreline and arrived tired but invigorated and inspired by what they had seen and accomplished.