

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

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So long Sewers



The Pleasure Point area in 1972 showing the brown discolored water where the East Cliff sewer outfall discharged (note surfer in the effluent).

Over the past several months my writing was deep into coastal erosion and seawalls, and then Sandy Lydon and I took this hike around the bay and my column went sideways for four weeks. So I'm back on track, although I'm not so sure that there is such a thing in the writing of newspaper columns as being on track.

Forty-two years ago this month, I arrived in Santa Cruz to join the early faculty at UC Santa Cruz. After four undergraduate years surfing at UCSB, I felt a bit landlocked in graduate school at Oregon State University. I was looking forward to being on the coast again and getting back in the water. I'd heard about Pleasure Point, so not long after arriving in town I threw my old long board in the car and took off for the east side.

I immediately discovered several things. The first was that the water was a whole lot colder than Santa Barbara, where no one wore wet suits simply because there weren't many around in the early 1960's. We all just got out of the water about December and then started surfing again in March when the water was tolerable. But I quickly realized in my mild hypothermia that surfing here was going to require some insulation. So I bought my first wet suit from Jack O'Neill.

I also noticed that the other surfers in the water had leashes, which hadn't been around in my Santa Barbara days. It wasn't a big deal to swim after your board when the water was reasonably warm. But I soon realized after losing my board a few times and swimming through the ice water to get it back that the leash must have been invented in Santa Cruz. Necessity or survival was the mother of invention.

The other thing I noticed as soon as I paddled out was the smell and discolored water right off Pleasure Point. I had minored in Civil Engineering in graduate school and had taken an interesting course in Sanitary Engineering, which is really all about sewage treatment- and the odor that day was unmistakably that of sewage. I soon discovered that in addition to being called Pleasure Point, the spot was also known by locals as Sewers.

This experience and a concern about the potential problems of nearshore discharge of treated sewage got me involved in my initial ocean research in Santa Cruz, which focused on wastewater disposal and ocean currents around Monterey Bay. In the late 1960's the wastewater from Capitola and the Live Oak area was treated and discharged about 200 feet off of Pleasure Point in several feet of water. In general, depending upon the level of treatment and disinfection, the nature and volume of the discharge, the distance offshore where the outfall terminates and the circulation and mixing at that point, as well as the recreational use of the discharge area, there can be significant health risks.

After several years of study and increasing public health concerns, the discharge at Sewers was terminated and waste water from the east side was piped to the Santa Cruz Wastewater Treatment Plant in Neary's Lagoon. At that time, Santa Cruz used only primary treatment (settling and chlorination) and discharged the treated effluent 2000 feet of West Cliff Drive at the end of Almar Avenue. On a calm day you could see the cloudy discharge emerge at the ocean surface.

A hundred million dollars and several years later, the Santa Cruz plant had been expanded and upgraded, the treatment level increased, and a new outfall pipe

constructed that took the effluent several miles offshore of Natural Bridges. This investment greatly improved the situation that existed at that time and eliminated any water quality issues from both the Pleasure Point and West Cliff areas. Sewers was no more, but we still had an eroding bluff to contend with.