

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

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Return to Pleasure Point**



The low cliffs in the Pleasure Point area have been eroding for decades and at high tide have no beach protecting them from direct wave attack.

Steamer Land and Pleasure Point both enjoy almost sacred status in Santa Cruz, and like Malibu and Rincon, are known widely in the California surfing community as having nearly ideal waves. It is not surprising then that any proposal or plan to alter either area would be met with some resistance and opposition. The cliffs at Steamer Lane have experienced both erosion and protection for decades. There used to be two Seal Rocks, but one has now disappeared beneath the waves. The rock pedestal on the beach in front of the stairs where surfers get down to the water is the base of a much-photographed arch that collapsed during the winter of 1888. The stairway traverses a rock revetment installed in the mid-1960s, which has held up well to wave attack for nearly 50 years.

During the 1970s, a concrete plug was placed in the cave in front of the lighthouse in an effort to halt undermining of the point and protect public access, but this has

gradually succumbed to the impact of winter storms. Perhaps 15 years ago, the City Parks and Recreation Department briefly contemplated building a rock revetment which would have filled the cave and extended well out into the area where surfers take off. Wisely, this project was quickly abandoned. Eventually, this cave and the much deeper cave on the west side of the point will collapse and the point will change again. It's all part of the gradual retreat of the cliffs we see along the Santa Cruz coastline.

Pleasure Point has faced similar challenges. The bedrock in both areas is the Purisima, a relatively young (geologically speaking) rock formation consisting of interbedded sandstone, siltstone and mudstone. While there are zones or layers that are harder and more resistant to wave attack, Lighthouse Point, San Lorenzo Point, Black Point, and Pleasure Point for example, overall the Purisima is relatively weak rock. By the way, are there any thoughts on why it is called Pleasure Point? The name took hold in the 1930s, gradually replacing the formal name, Soquel Point. One unconfirmed story reported in Donald Clark's book, Santa Cruz County Place Names, is that it got its name from a house of pleasure in the area.

While we are asking questions, how about Black Point? Early sailors described it as much darker than the surrounding cliffs and initially gave it a hybrid name of Prieta Point (prieta being Spanish for "blackish").

The stretch of cliffs from Pleasure Point to New Brighton Beach has almost no natural beach to protect the bluffs from wave attack, the exception being at Capitola, which owes much of its beach to a groin constructed in 1969. So the combination of weak bedrock and no beach to buffer the cliffs from wave attack has led to average long-term erosion rates along this stretch of East Cliff Drive of about a foot/year. Over the years as failure continued, there were scattered efforts to protect the cliffs and the roadway. Loose rock and broken concrete were dumped on the beach from time to time although there doesn't seem to be any record of who did this and when. Several concrete crib walls (think Lincoln logs made of concrete) were also built to support the roadway from collapsing as bluff erosion continued landward.

As the cribbing gradually failed East Cliff Drive was threatened, and ultimately reduced to one lane. This also narrowed the space for bikes and pedestrians. In addition, water and sewer lines beneath the roadway were also getting closer and closer to being undermined. These concerns led the Santa Cruz County Redevelopment Agency nearly 10 years ago to look at a project that could stabilize

the road, improve pedestrian and bike access, clean the rock and concrete off the beach, and provide improved access for surfers.