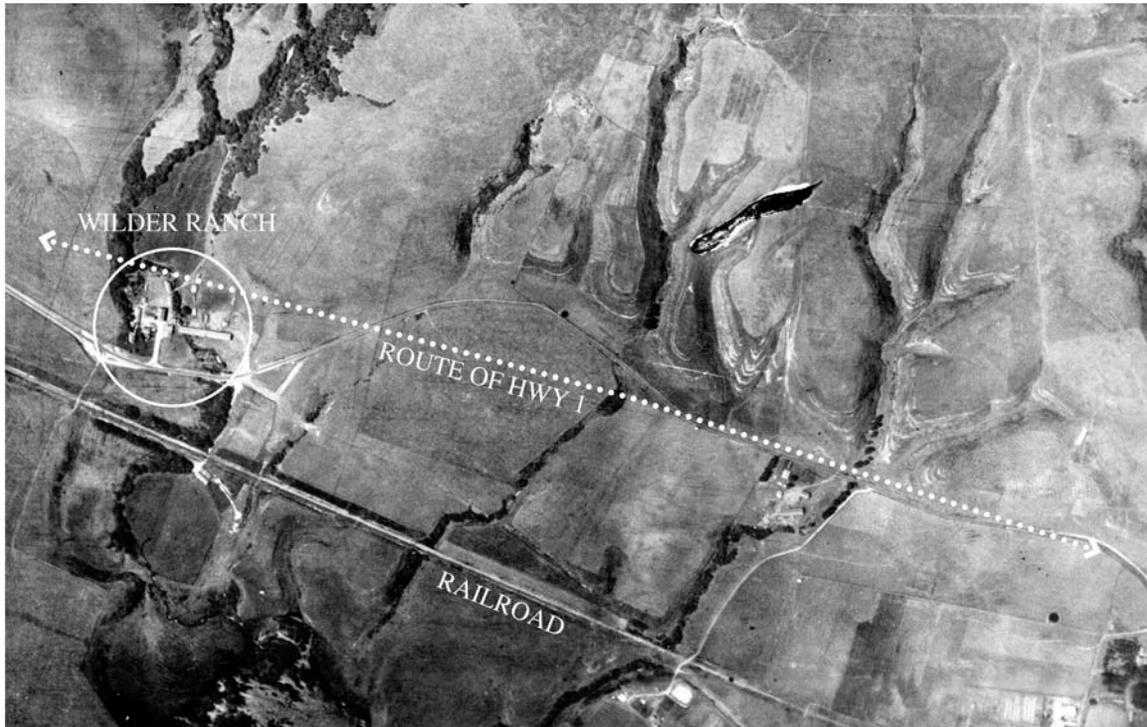


Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Director, Institute of Marine Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.

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The old Coast Road**



This 1928 aerial photograph was the first taken along the Santa Cruz north coast and shows the original route of the coast road.

While the Santa Cruz section of the old Ocean Shore Railroad was pretty much a straight shot from Nearys Lagoon to Swanton, the Old Coast Road was a different story. The railroad required long straight stretches that were nearly flat or had very low grades, which meant it had to get across each of the stream valleys at the same elevation as the terrace on either side. This was achieved by first building timber trestles spanning each valley, and then filling around these to create massive embankments that essentially dammed all of the streams.

This did require some engineering, as well as a solution for allowing each of the now dammed creeks to continue to flow to the ocean. Somewhat puzzling was the approach used back in 1905. For some reason, not completely clear to me or to my traveling companion, Sandy Lydon, they chose to dig tunnels through the mudstone bedrock on the north side of each stream valley, rather than build

culverts. Maybe they hadn't invented culverts yet; but if necessity is the mother of invention, the work of hand digging a tunnel through solid rock for a creek to flow through on its way to the ocean might have been an incentive to design the first culvert. But the tunnels work and remain as interesting landmarks of the coming of the railroad and the displacement of the original streams a century ago. You can easily find them emptying from the bedrock tunnel onto the beach at the north end and ocean side of every one of those embankments. You can even walk through them, if you are adventurous and have a rubber boots and a good flashlight. If there were any steelhead or salmon that originally spawned in these creeks, the embankments and tunnels unfortunately terminated their migratory activities.

The road up the coast in first half of the last century didn't really go anywhere as it was constrained by Waddell Bluffs, so traffic and use were limited. It started as a wagon road, was gradually paved, and took the easiest route in order to minimize bridges or fills. The original road can be clearly seen on the old aerial photographs (and the oldest aerial photographs of the county, taken in 1928, are now on-line on Ken and Gabrielle Adelman's California Coastal Records Project-<http://www.californiacoastline.org/>).

Mission Street extension marks the beginning of the Old Coast Road. It headed north from Swift Street past the packing sheds and the old Wrigley's building to Moore Creek, where it angled uphill and crossed over the creek. It continued inland a ways and then turned north and essentially followed the present Highway 1 path for about half a mile. At this point, just past the horse stables, there is a driveway that turns off on the right side. This was the old highway, which then swung north and ran along the base of the hill. The old road then turned towards the coast and crossed the present Highway 1 right where the bike path enters Wilder Ranch today. As you pass around the gate and start down towards the ranch buildings you are on the Old Coast Road with the white center line still visible. You can follow the original route as it crosses Wilder Creek and then goes right in front of the old ranch houses. The road heads back up the hill to join Highway 1 where vehicles enter the state park today. It then turned north to follow the present highway alignment.

For the next several miles, until the little settlement of Majors, the Old Coast Road followed the route now occupied by Highway 1. It crossed Majors Creek where it does today, on a wide earth embankment because it was constrained by the railroad on the ocean side and the steep canyon walls just inland. After crossing the creek it followed a route closer to the railroad; one that you can still drive on today. The old road passed through Majors, which was a former stop on the Santa Cruz to

Davenport line of the Southern Pacific Railroad. This area was earlier known as Enright, named after Joseph Enright who owned a thousand acre ranch and dairy here. He was a member of the County Board of Supervisors and also an organizer of the Santa Cruz Oil Company. The old road intersects the present highway at a very high steep cut that was part of a highway straightening effort in the 1940s and 1950s.

At each of the next four creeks, Laguna, Yellow Bank, Liddell and San Vicente, the old road turned inland so as to avoid the problem and cost of having to build a huge embankment across each stream valley. Instead the Old Coast Road descended down the side of each valley and crossed over the creeks further upstream on small bridges. The old road and bridge still exists at Laguna Creek where it is still called the Coast Road. Time has eliminated parts of the original surface from the Yellow Bank and Liddell crossings but each of these old curved inland remnants are still clearly visible on Google Earth.