

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

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**Shipwrecks in the Sanctuary**



*The wreck of the La Feliz in 1924 on the rocks immediately in front of the Seymour Marine Discovery Center at Long Marine Laboratory.*

On the night of October 1, 1924, the combination of high seas and a course too close to the shoreline put the *La Feliz* on the rocks directly in front of where Long Marine Laboratory exists today. The 100-ton vessel was carrying canned sardines from Monterey to San Francisco when she was wrecked. Local residents drove out to the top of the 30-foot bluff and used their headlights to illuminate the ship and help rescue the crew of 13. The mast was removed, leaned against the cliff and used with a block and tackle to recover the cargo of sardines as well as equipment from the ship. Somewhat surprisingly, comparing photographs of the shipwreck with the site today, neither the rocky shelf where the ship was grounded nor the cliff has changed much in the subsequent 86 years.

Standing today on the deck of the Seymour Marine Discovery Center at Long Marine Laboratory, you can see what looks like a tilted telephone pole, rising from the shoreline and extending up above the cliff top. Amazingly, this is the mast of

the *La Feliz*, still standing proudly, 86 years later. While 2000 feet away at Natural Bridges, two of the three arches have collapsed over the years; the cliff in front of the Marine Discovery Center remains intact. One important reason for this difference is the presence of a very hard rock platform in the Santa Cruz Mudstone at the base of the cliff. The very resistant rock that impaled the *La Feliz* has protected its mast and also buffered the adjacent cliffs from direct wave attack. On low tides you can also see the remains of the ship's drive shaft on the beach just east of the mast.

The *La Feliz* wasn't the only local shipwreck. Forty-eight years earlier in October 1876, the *Active*, a 92-foot schooner, went aground on Its Beach just below the old lighthouse. The *Active* had taken on a load of railroad ties from the wharf in the morning but didn't set sail until 8 pm that evening. Shortly after getting underway, however, the wind died, and left her about a mile off the lighthouse. When the wind came up later in the evening, and as the crew was working to get underway, the *Active* was hit suddenly by heavy seas. Even dragging two anchors, the waves still washed the schooner onto the beach. At daylight a line was thrown from the cliff below the lighthouse to the vessel. The crew used the line to work their way to shore, hand over hand.

October seems to have been a bad month for shipwrecks. On October 11, 1912, the submarine named F-1 was washed ashore at Port Watsonville, which was a short-lived wharf located at the end of Beach Road. Two seamen were washed overboard and drowned.

Looking at a statewide database of shipwrecks reveals that the Santa Cruz County coastline has been a whole lot safer for ships than many other sections of coast. Santa Cruz comes up pretty infrequently compared to Humboldt, Mendocino, San Francisco, the Channel Islands and the Monterey Peninsula. A catalog of ship losses completed by the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary lists 463 individual vessels, but only 25 of these met their end along the coastline of Santa Cruz County. Most of these were listed cause of loss as foundering or sinking offshore, with a handful of others stranded on the shoreline and two burned at sea. The *SS Palo Alto* at Seacliff was the only vessel that was intentionally stranded and also the only one intact today.