

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

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Walking Around the Bay... Again



Camp McQuaide was an active military facility in World War II.

If you are reading this column on Saturday morning, Sandy Lydon and I will be starting on the final day of our 4th annual, 33-mile hike around the shoreline of Monterey Bay. We discovered the hard way on our first trek around the bay in 2009 that attempting the 33 miles on the sand in two days was asking a bit much of the 40 hikers, as well as ourselves. Shoot, Sandy and I were at the upper end of the hiker's age range.

So in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th years we decided to break the hike up into three nearly equal segments, each about 10-11 miles, essentially determined by natural barriers. Embarking at New Brighton State Beach two weeks ago on June 2nd, we managed to again convince 40 people to join us.

New Brighton Beach was known for years as China Beach, from the small Chinese fishing village that was located on the back beach in the late 1800s. In 1880 there were 29 men living in the camp, all born in China, and ranging in age from 16 to 43 who fished in the offshore cove with nets. The summer residents or tourists either walked down into Capitola village to buy fish or waited until the Chinese peddlers with their fresh fish would come by their doors.

The first day's hike is so full of stories of history, geology and coastal disasters that by about 11:00 we had told a lot of stories but only covered 2 of our 11 miles. Between the repeated wave attack and seawall reconstruction at Seacliff State

Beach, the life and times of the World War I concrete ship (its not really cement), the filling of the swampy Rio Del Mar Flats for homes, the construction of what was reportedly the world's largest fresh water swimming pool along the channeled mouth of Aptos Creek, and the creek's frequent desire to flow downcoast towards the homes built on The Island, there was no shortage of stories.

A short distance downcoast, the 1983 El Niño storm damage to homes and seawalls along Beach Drive and Via Gaviota have long since been repaired. Newer, larger and more expensive seawalls have been built to provide protection against future storm waves and high tides. So far, so good.

We finally reached Manresa State Beach for lunch and tales of iron and gold mining from the Aptos beach sands, climate change and sea level oscillations, before we started the casual 5-mile afternoon stroll to the Pajaro River.

This portion of the hike follows a little less developed section of shoreline, although during World War II, the former Camp McQuaide housed hundreds of US Army deserters and other military troublemakers up on the bluff south of Manresa. It was also home to the 250th Coast Artillery Regiment, the Signal Corps, Cavalry Medics and a naval radar group. The Camp even had a small landing strip so airplanes could take off and practice dropping bombs on offshore targets. When the war ended, Camp McQuaide was determined to be surplus and decommissioned.

Although the 400-acre site was considered for a junior college, and there was local support, the location and highway access weren't ideal and building refurbishing was going to be costly. So with no interest from any government entity, the Seventh-Day Adventists, who subsequently founded the Monterey Bay Academy, purchased the 400 acres of ocean view land for one dollar.

Day One ended at the mouth of the Pajaro River. Littoral drift from the north nearly always pushes the river mouth south, which added an extra half-mile or so to our walk.

Starting at the south side of the Pajaro River on the morning of June 9, at Zmudowski State Beach, we carefully avoided any nesting Snowy Plovers and started on the 9-mile hike to the Salinas River mouth. This section of shoreline is fairly serene and little used, with the stacks of Moss Landing always appearing to be closer than they are.

You can't walk across the entrance to Moss Landing Harbor, so we had to leave the beach, hike out Jetty Road, which collapsed due to liquefaction during the 1989 earthquake. We then carefully walked along about a half-mile of Highway 1. After the morning solitude of a quiet and isolated stretch of beach, it's a shock to your senses to find yourself along the narrow shoulder of Highway 1 with cars and semis passing at 60 miles an hour a few feet away.

The state's largest thermal electric power plant looms on the left, next to what used to be Kaiser Refractories. For decades, magnesium was extracted from seawater for the production of magnesium oxide bricks for high temperature steel furnaces. The factory was closed a number of years ago when importing the material from China became more economical.

We returned to the shoreline after crossing the Sandholdt Bridge, also damaged during the Loma Prieta earthquake. Moss Landing Marine Laboratories now sits comfortably on a hill, well inland from the sand spit where it was formerly located, another victim of seismic shaking and liquefaction in 1989. More to come on the final 16 miles.