

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

#142 October 5, 2013

Early North Coast Ranchers

Immediately inland from Sand Hill Bluff is a short section of the Old Coast Road, now bypassed by Highway 1. There is a small settlement of perhaps a dozen homes here that goes by the name of Majors, which was a former stop on the Southern Pacific Railroad.

The next major drainage to the south is known as Majors Creek, which has been one of the city's important north coast sources of high quality water for over a century. This steep rugged canyon, visible just inland from Highway 1, empties into what was originally named Majors Beach, but for nearly 40 years was better known as Red, White and Blue Beach.

Joseph Ladd Majors, originally from Tennessee, came across the Santa Fe Trail and arrived in California in 1834, settling in Santa Cruz the next year. Majors married Maria de Los Angeles Castro and became naturalized as a Mexican citizen. He was soon granted Rancho San Augustin and Rancho Zayante, totaling just over 7000 acres. He became a leading citizen and was elected as the first American Alcalde of Santa Cruz in 1845, which gave him the combined role of judge and mayor.

Joseph Ladd Majors, his son Joseph Joaquin Majors, and two of his grandsons, owned cattle and dairy ranches on the north coast, although it is unclear which of the family member(s) the beach, the creek and the settlement were originally named for.

Shortly after arriving in Santa Cruz in 1968, I headed north on Highway 1 one Saturday looking for access to the shoreline for places I might take students for geology field trips. I turned off at the first road I encountered that seemed to head towards the shoreline. To my surprise, I soon ran into a gate and a tollbooth.

After inquiring whether there would be a problem bringing students down to look at the cliffs and beach, the caretaker told me that this was a clothing optional beach and it might not be the best place for a field trip. For 40 years the road to the beach

was marked with a Red, White and Blue mailbox right off Highway 1 and was well known destination for campers and day trippers. The beach closed in 2007, however.

Heading south, the next easy public access is usually marked by lots of cars parked on the ocean side of Highway 1, about 4 miles north of the Western Drive. Known as Four Mile Beach, this point break has been a favorite surfing spot for years, at least since I arrived in Santa Cruz. My experience has been that while it's a bit of a walk from the parking area, it's much less crowded than many other spots in town.

The formal historic name for the beach was Baldwin Creek Beach, named after the creek that empties into the ocean here. Although there are two early Santa Cruz pioneers with the name Baldwin, who were unrelated, Donald Clark in his book believes that the creek and beach were named after Alfred Baldwin.

Alfred migrated to California in 1846 from New York, and settled in Santa Cruz in 1847. He served under Captain John C. Fremont, spent some time looking for gold in the Sierras, but returned to Santa Cruz where he was a shoemaker and also owned clothing stores. Baldwin owned a farm on the north coast in the vicinity of Baldwin Creek. The confusion regarding whom the creek was actually named for arose when Alfred Baldwin sold the farm to Levi Baldwin.

One of the remarkable parts of the lives of both Joseph Majors and Alfred Baldwin is that they, like a number of other rugged and adventurous individuals, left what perhaps were comfortable lives and homes in the east, and struck out for California with little knowledge of what to expect along the way or what they might find when they got here.

Gold hadn't been discovered yet, so that wasn't the attraction. These guys were committed and it took months across some pretty unfriendly terrain to get here in the 1840s. Today it's a piece of cake; buy a ticket and fly out in several hours. Rent a car at the airport and you can be in Santa Cruz on the same day you left New York. All you need is \$500 and if you don't like it, you can fly back the next day.