

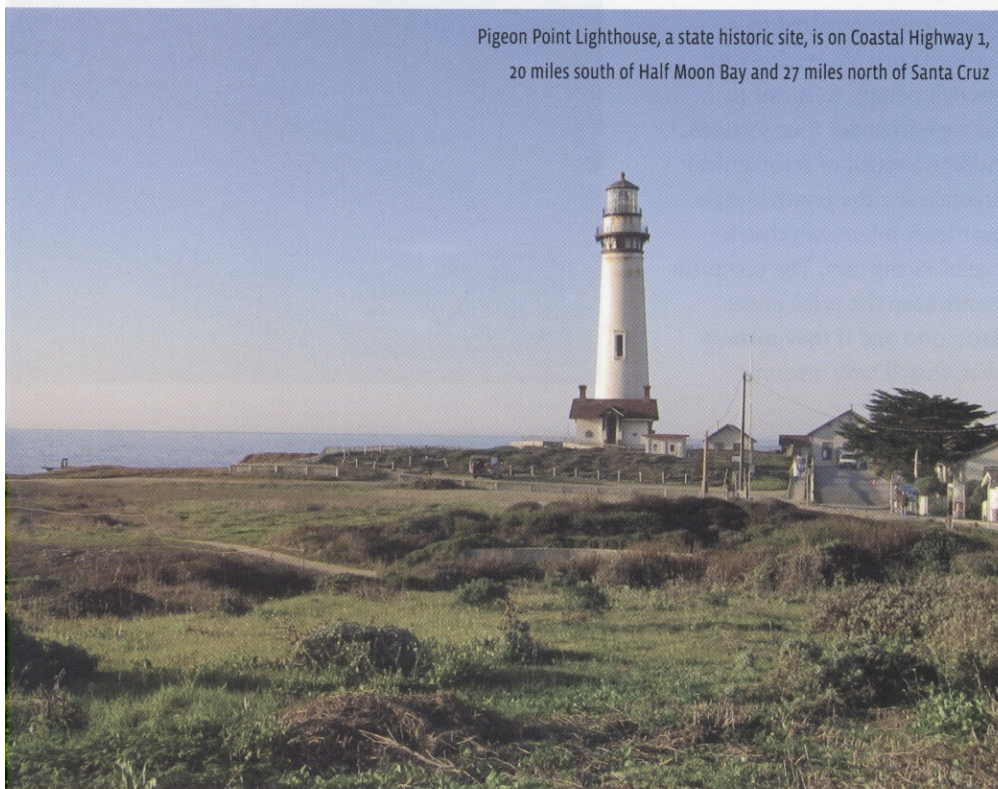
Exploring Northern California On Foot

"You're going to do what?" Richard exclaimed.

"I'm going to walk from Santa Cruz to San Francisco," I replied. "I just read in today's paper about a group called Coast Walkers. They're walking — in stages — from the Mexican border to the Oregon border. I noticed your buddy Ron was in the group, so I called, and he said I'd be welcome

designated van driver. "The organizer" had booked motels along our route and figured out a network of state beaches and coastal access points that would allow us to walk most of the way on the sand or on a cliff top overlooking the ocean. Our sainted driver did her best to keep track of our whereabouts (not easy with patchy cell service) and ferry us past highway construction and

Pigeon Point Lighthouse, a state historic site, is on Coastal Highway 1, 20 miles south of Half Moon Bay and 27 miles north of Santa Cruz



to join them for the next section."

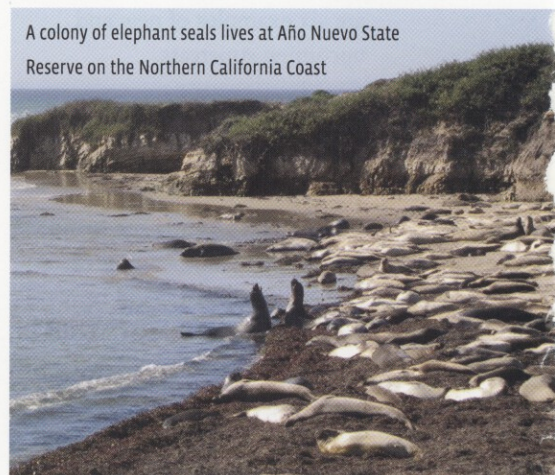
My husband — ever the practical man — said, "But you don't even own a backpack."

What followed turned out to be an eye-opening adventure and — barring a few bumps in the road — a genuinely good time. We were a group of nine, mostly La Jollans, including one

other obstructions.

The first day we started walking at Greyhound Rock, about 20 miles up Highway 1 from Santa Cruz, where I was captivated by the wild waves that crashed on windswept beaches and the fact that we saw no signs of human habitation. Certainly, this is what the first European voyagers came upon — globs of pink seaweed

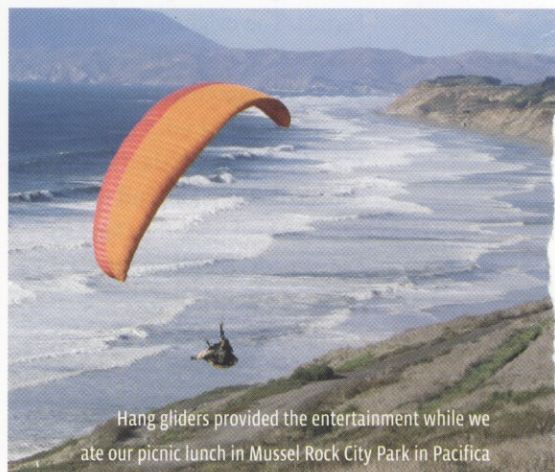
A colony of elephant seals lives at Año Nuevo State Reserve on the Northern California Coast



that looked like overcooked red cabbage on the beach, pods of seals and sea lions, and huge flocks of seagulls that took flight as we approached.

Since I've been a frequent visitor to Santa Cruz for many years, I felt foolish that I was exploring this part of the coast for the first time. That feeling intensified five miles up the road when we hiked through the sand dunes of Año Nuevo State Reserve to observe a colony of elephant seals. The massive animals were sunning themselves on the beach and sparring in the shallow water of a cove. It was a glorious sight — >>

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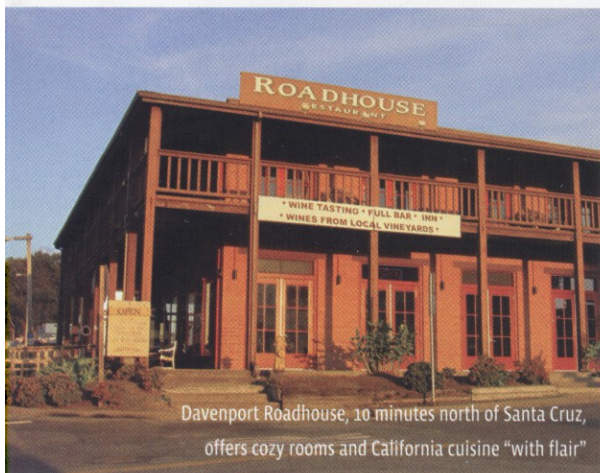


Hang gliders provided the entertainment while we ate our picnic lunch in Mussel Rock City Park in Pacifica

<< just like the flock of Canada geese we saw as we hiked toward the viewpoint at Franklin Point.

That night we stayed at the Davenport Roadhouse, a cozy inn with a popular restaurant serving innovative California cuisine. Some Coast Walkers stayed up to enjoy the live music, but — having just walked 12 miles — I was happy to put my head on a pillow. (www.davenportroadhouse.com)

Day two started with a visit to Pigeon Point Lighthouse, a state



Davenport Roadhouse, 10 minutes north of Santa Cruz, offers cozy rooms and California cuisine "with flair"

historic site with a great ocean view. We saw dolphins offshore and later, when we were walking on Bean Hollow State Beach, I was fascinated by "plants" that appeared to be growing right out of wave-washed rocks. I later learned that they are actually sea palm algae.

The walk from Pomponio State Beach to San Gregorio was isolated and beautiful, so when we came upon the elaborate high-tech movie set for *Of Men and Mavericks* in the San Gregorio parking lot, it seemed more than



The grand finale of our walk was crossing the Golden Gate Bridge — on foot, of course

slightly incongruous.

The scenery became less dramatic and more commercialized as we approached Half Moon Bay. In fact, the Ritz Carlton Hotel — a place I would normally enjoy — felt foreign on the natural landscape.

However, HMB did provide some appealing restaurant options. At Chez Shea, I enjoyed a memorable seafood salad, and in El Granada, Ketch Joanne Harbor Bar served excellent clam chowder and grilled artichoke hearts. Farther north in Pacifica, we got great sandwiches at Colombo's Italian Delicatessen and enjoyed them at oceanfront Mussel Rock City Park. (www.chez-shea.com, www.ketchjoanne.com, www.colombosdeli.com)

After reaching San Francisco, we walked from the Cliff House Restaurant to Baker Beach via the city's upscale Sea Cliff neighborhood, but the grand

finale was walking across the Golden Gate Bridge. From here, we stopped and gazed at the panorama of the city and Alcatraz Island, and looked straight down on the sailors, surfers, and kayakers making the most of a stiff breeze. Sixty miles from that first step at Greyhound Rock, none of us could wipe the grins off our faces. ELIZABETH HANSEN

California Coast Walkers will hit the road again on May 13. This time, the group will fly to the Bay Area and walk north to Bodega Bay and Fort Ross. If you are interested in joining them, contact Ron Williamson (858/245-9338) or Nick Haritatos (858/454-7661).

Also, keep in mind the next time you're driving Highway 1 between Santa Cruz and San Francisco: anyone can stop at the state beaches we visited and enjoy the view and a walk.