

**Subject: Northern California's Coastal Redwoods**

**Date: Wed, 15 Dec 1999 08:47:30**

The Coastal Redwoods are impressive trees, the world's tallest living thing. The Redwoods are found in a thin strip along the coast and have to be seen to be believed. I can give you some neat statistics but they really don't sum up looking up at a tree over 300 feet tall and over 21 feet in diameter. If you are in a one of the standard 8 by 10 foot cubical offices popular these days, go from your office and look at the office next to you, then look at the next office, the tree is about that big in diameter. Oh, the hallway your standing in, it's also inside the trunk of the tree. Now look up and see if you can find a 30 story building nearby. If you look down on the ground the cones you see are the size of an olive

and the trees themselves grow from a seed the size of a tomato seed. The trees do not have a taproot and often do not reach more than 4-5 feet deep. They spread sideways with a root system that interlocks with other redwoods to create an web of powerful roots. One of the greatest dangers to these massive trees are people walking nearby. The compaction of the soil by walking on it reduces the trees ability to suck up water in the fine root hairs. They also are pretty careful about balance. If a tree is starting to lean over it will sprout a "tree" from one of it's limbs and grow just like we would see a tree on the east coast. We saw several that were easily 2 feet in diameter and 80 feet tall standing 8-16 feet out from the stock of the tree, 40 feet off the ground. We saw a tree called the "Family Tree" that had a dozen of these trees growing up from horizontal branches. The tree was estimated as 100 feet wide and weighting 150 tons.



*Bonnie in the redwood forest*



*The drive thru tree (Entrance on left)*

Redwoods don't give up life easily either. Many have hollow core which can ignite if stuck by lightening. A lot of old trees show fire damage but still cling to life. There is one we say that was build as a "drive through" tree. Not Millie sided "drive through" but we did see a full size Dodge half ton go through one. The tree had been hit by lightening and burned out the core you could look right out the top of the tree. It was held up by steel cables and it was tilted over pretty hard, but it was still putting out green shoots and bearing cones. They estimated it is over 5000 years old. There were a number we saw that were supposed to be over 2000 years old some of the biggest and oldest living things on the planet. The trees have a thick and resin free bark which is fire resistant and the trees themselves put out hundreds of gallons of water vapor a day.

It is said that they create their own weather. They certainly seemed to the first day we were in the redwoods. The campground we were in (as the only customers) was amazing to walk around, immense trees everywhere. We were walking in the rain but with our foul weather gear were quite comfortable. It wasn't until we walked down to the river bank out of the trees that we noticed that it was a pure blue sky overhead with not a cloud in the sky.

The state and national park systems have joined forces to preserve the redwood forests. These trees that covered over 2 million acres are now preserved in a 51,000 acre stretch of the coast, about half of all that remain. The Coastal Redwood is the tallest living thing in the world.

Like the Great Sand Dunes, you can't appreciate them until you walk among them. Amazing.

We spent three days in different parks looking at the Redwoods and enjoying being in their presence. We had a funny experience on the way back from the visitor center at Prairie Elk State Park. When we arrived at the campground we saw a herd of Roosevelt Elk on the other side of the campground. So rather than disturb them we parked on the opposite side and watched them for awhile. Then we walked over to the visitor center and did a few of the walks among the redwoods. On our way back we discovered Millie surrounded by the herd. Since it was getting dark we had the choice of trying to wait them out and hope they would go away, trying to get back to Millie in the dark surrounded by Elk, or working our way along the edge of the woods toward Millie disturbing them as little as possible. We slowly moved them back along the edge of the woods until the Elk started to snort and watch us as we approached. They moved off to the other side of Millie. We snuck in the driver's side and watched them from inside.



*Bonnie in the rain with blue sky overhead*

There is a spectacular scenic drive that is an alternate to the freeway, called the Avenue of the Giants. It is a 31 mile section of road that weaves its way through the redwood forest. On a bright sunny warm day it was dark enough to use headlights in the thickest section of the trees. In other places the sun poured through shafts of light that were captured by brilliant green ferns and highlighted the bright red bark of the trees. The trees are real close to the road and in places they have a profile that is quite similar to an RV in shape with a bit of rough bark. A number of places were posted as being not advised for vehicles over 30 feet, Millie's 28. The Avenue is well worth the trip, but go slow and give those poor RV'ers a break. They are quite worried adding to the profiles of those trees.

**Subject: San Francisco**  
**Date: Wed, 15 Dec 1999 20:50:56**

What a neat city. Tourism is the number one industry in San Francisco and they do a good job of it. We were camping in one of the bedroom communities called Greenbrae and walked to the Larkspur Ferry Terminal. To catch one of the ferries over to the city. We wanted to go across the Golden Gate bridge ONCE! Parking Millie in a small town is bad enough I had no interest in the trying to get Millie into a real city.

The public transit systems are really good and pretty cheap. We took one of the slow ferries over to San Francisco and got a great view of Angel Island, Alcatraz, the Golden Gate Bridge, and The Bay Bridge. Angel Island, the Ellis Island of the west, was the quarantine island for immigrants. It is now a state park and one of the popular anchorages for local yachtsman. The weather was clear and sunny and we really enjoyed the trip across the bay.

We caught the bus across to Pier 39 and Fisherman's Wharf. It was a great place to do some shopping, try some local food, and see the resident California sea lions. We walked around and then took one of the Gray Line tours around the city. We got to see Fort Point and the Golden Gate Bridge up REAL close, Alcatraz, Chinatown, Japantown, the Presidio and Union Square.

Under the southern end of the Golden Gate Bridge is Fort Point. A fort built to protect California and San Francisco in particular from the Confederate Navy. The Fort would set up a target on the opposite side and fire at it. On one occurrence with Samuel Clement's in attendance, the firing didn't go well. "From the barbette some shell practice was had, the target being on the opposite shore, at Lime Point. But the fuses proved imperfect, the shells exploded almost immediately upon starting on their journey. This will be at once remedied" San Francisco Call, July 14 1864 Samuel Clements



We enjoyed the tour and were going to ride a cable car back toward the Ferry Terminal, but the cable system was down. We hoped a bus and landed back in time to catch the fast ferry (a catamaran) for a sunset trip across the bay.

We lucked into a great tour guide in the form of a mayor of one of the local small towns. He was an extremely outgoing and a sailor. He gave us a great tour of the harbor, a view of local politics, and experiences with earthquakes that kept Bonnie and I in stitches the whole way across. The trip was pretty short as the fast ferry is doing 40 knots at speed.

They are having a runoff election for Mayor of San Francisco between the incumbent and a write-in candidate. The local radio stations were quite interesting with their comments. If we had not had our introduction to local politics on our trip back across the bay, we would have missed at least half of the jokes. There seems to be a feeling that the incumbent has been creating San Francisco as a Mecca for yuppies and lower income people are being shoved out of the city. Given the number of expensive cars we saw there certainly seems to be lots of well to do people. Some of the real estate prices that we heard quoted were really impressive.

We got up in the morning and did a little Christmas shopping while waiting for the traffic to clear on the Golden Gate bridge. When the traffic was down to reasonable levels we headed down Route 101 and across the bridge. The traffic was not too bad as we made our way through the city, at a yellow light we hit the brakes and something gave, we slid about half way through the intersection before coming to a safe stop. We could pump the brakes up well enough to actually stop Millie but it wouldn't be a quick stop. We were just on the outskirts of town and as we got farther out of town the brakes kept

getting worse. We saw a brake shop and stopped, they were booked solid, they gave us directions for another, he was down with sick staff and was not be able to do it. There were two options after that, the Ford dealer and another person on the other side of THE hill. Since the advice was "don't do THE hill without good brakes" that left us the Ford dealer. \$370 US later we were looking for a campsite in the dark, but we had brakes! After dealing with THE hill in the dark I'm glad the Ford dealer was able to do the work. The back brakes had completely packed it in, when they took the left rear hub off a few pieces literally fell out.

We ended up parking in Half Moon Bay State Park and it was a welcome stop. We didn't get in until well after dark and we were tired. We just registered, had supper and went to sleep with the sound of surf in the background. In the morning we were up to look around. It was a spectacular beach with large waves rolling in. We even saw our first surfer. We watched him paddle out and surf back in a few times before strolling on down the beach. Bonnie even found a few pieces of small etched glass.

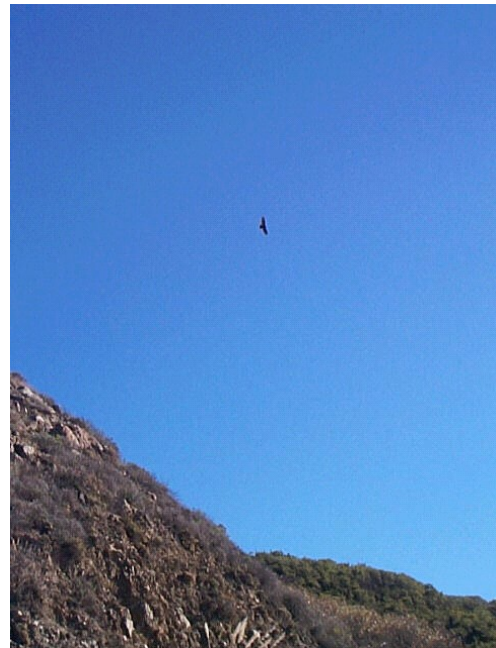
We were only about 330 miles from LA and about 270 from the state park where we are planning on staying for Christmas. We are going slow and enjoying the coast. It is fairly warm during the day but it is cool at night and we usually run the furnace for a little while before going to bed.

**Subject: Condors, Monarchs, and Elephant Seals**

**Date: Thu, 16 Dec 1999 20:42:41**

After leaving Half Moon Bay we headed down the central coast. This is a great stretch of road for scenery. The road is windy and slow, and MAN am I glad we have brakes! We didn't go very far as we stopped to watch for gray whales. We stopped at a few places, no luck. We aren't worried about making big distances considering we have about eight days to go about 250 miles to our Christmas site. We stopped at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, we got it early and walked around the park looking at the Coastal Redwoods. We drove through Carmel and Monterey on the way.

The ranger at the campground was really nice and we talked to her quite a while. There was a information poster on the California Condor. I asked if they had seen any lately and to our surprise she said to come down to the lodge in the morning, "They have been hanging around the lodge in the mornings lately". The next morning we were our usual draggy getting up and I figured by the time we were out to the Lodge they would have been long gone. We stopped at the dump station just a few hundred yards from the Lodge and started to fill our fresh water tank. Over the redwoods next to the lodge were 5 condors sailing in large circles. They are HUGE birds. Nine to eleven foot wing span, finger-like feathers on their wing tips and distinctive markings on the underside of the wing. We watched them for quite a while before they drifted out of view. We were happy to see them.



*California Condor*

We left the park and headed down the coast. This is a long stretch of coast that is pretty and the road hugs the contours VERY tightly in places. I have no idea what the official speed limit is but the corners

range from 15 to 35 mph with enough frequency that I usually didn't have to worry about slowing down to 35.

We had stopped a couple of times to look for whales as well as sighting another couple of condors. We probably saw 10 or 12 during the day. Didn't have any success with whales, but we did see seals along the way.

We were driving along and saw a number of people pulling into a wildlife viewing area and looked down on the beach there were large seals there, VERY large seals. We pulled in and sure enough they were Elephant Seals. California Sea Lions bark like a dog. The Elephant Seal sounds like water going plug in a water pipe. The females haven't started arriving yet so the males are pretty laid back. According to one of the guides as soon as the females start to show the males start acting a lot more aggressive. The Elephant Seals have great big noses and are the largest pinniped in the northern hemisphere, with males weighing between 2 and 2.5 tons. They come out of the water in spurts of activity. They look like 2 ton, short, fat, caterpillar moving out of the water with great jiggling activity for about 10 seconds. After resting for a while they might do another big spurt of 10 seconds before stopping to rest up.

A couple of males were starting to make noises like they wanted to fight with someone but that didn't last long as soon as a challenger showed up he laid down and slept. The beach will be full of seals later in the season, but now there is only a few males and quite a few juveniles. The females should start arriving within the next couple of weeks.

The elephant seal can dive up to a mile deep for food and feeds on squid, Black Rockfish, Hake, Dogfish, and stingrays. They typically are loners and the males will migrate as far as the Aleutian Islands. Females don't go quite as far but do travel a long way north. The females come on shore and about a week later will have their young. The new pups weigh in between 60 and 80 pounds at birth. The females will nurse the young for 25-28 days with milk that is up to 55% fat. Near the end of the nursing period they will mate again, but the fetus won't grow for four months allowing the mother to regain her strength.

We started running (unfortunately literally) into Monarch Butterflies. They winter here in the area. Nice to see them again.

Traffic was really light most of the day and there are few real settlements for long stretches of the coast. There was a couple of gas stations that we stopped in to get gas but choked on the price. We need gas but at \$2.54 per gallon or even \$2.44 (\$2.89 for high test) we still need gas. There is still 10 gallons on the back bumper and I may put it in the tank tomorrow morning before we break camp. A dollar a gallon is a bit too much of a location surcharge for my liking.

We stopped at the Hearst Castle. A mansion built by William Randolph Hearst, Sr. It is an impressive building. It was given to the California State Park system and is open for guided tours to the public. It was a pretty impressive place. I loved the gardens



and landscaping. The artwork was incredible. We might take a different tour tomorrow, we caught the last tour of the day and were just coming down the hill as the sun was setting. We stopped at the state park just a few miles southbound and were parked just as it got dark.

**Subject: Pismo Beach and 60,000 Monarch butterflies**

**Date: Fri, 17 Dec 1999 18:37:55**

After leaving San Simeon, we did a short trip to Pismo Beach State Park. There is a small grove of trees that collect many of the Monarch Butterflies from the west coast of North America. There are only about 60,000 butterflies here now, by February there should be around 2 million. They are hanging together in clumps on a tree. They will be here for about 4 months. They are here just to survive the cold winter months.



After leaving the guide we walked up out onto Pismo Beach and walked up to the north end of the beach. It is a great beach with a long slow slope to the water. The surf was pretty good and we watched quite a few surfers playing in the waves. At the north end the cliffs are bright white sandstone, just like the white cliffs of Dover.

The sunset was really pretty but no green flash.

Pismo Beach is near Vandenburg AFB and they are suppose to launch a rocket tomorrow, it has been delayed twice so far so we might get lucky and see launch. We are planning on sticking around for another day so it looks good.

**Subject: Carpinteria**

**Date: Mon, 27 Dec 1999 21:34:25**

We settled into Carpinteria State Beach a few days before Christmas. We were looking for a place that was within easy striking distance for Pasadena and we wanted power, things are a little easier if you are plugged in. Of course the fact that it was on the beach certainly didn't hurt. We figured a new Christmas tradition might be in order, Christmas on a beach sounded like a good one to start. It certainly is a popular tradition here.

The Carpinteria area was used by the Chumash Indians when it was discovered on August 14, 1542. The indians were building wooden canoes and using the tar sands to waterproof the boats. Later is was named La Carpinteria, "the carpenter shop".



Less than a hundred yards from where we are, there is a large mound of what looks remarkably like asphalt. So much so that Santa Barbara and Carpinteria used to pave their streets with it. It is a mixture of the sand, rocks and the tar leaking out of the side hills. There is a couple of places where tar is flowing out of the side hill just as shiny black as any pool of oil you have ever seen. This also explains why there are 11 oil drilling platforms between the beach and the Channel Islands. They look like Christmas trees lit up brightly at night.

Down in front of the asphalt is a tide pool. We lucked into a tour being offered by the Park Rangers. The tour consisted of walking around the rocks and looking for things. There is an incredible amount of life in a tide pool. We saw large Green Anemones, Aggregated Anemones, Sea Stars, Hermit Crabs, Octopus, Turban Snails, and a bunch of other stuff I can't remember. It was a real interesting. We enjoyed it and had a great time, matter of fact I might go for a visit again today. The ranger was surprised at the amount of wildlife. They usually see a few Turbans, that day there were dozens, normally they might see an octopus or two, that day we saw one active in a little pocket of water and practically every well in the rock seemed to be occupied.

Just down the beach is one of the four birthing grounds for harbor seals on the coast of California. They have it posted so we couldn't get real close. There are lots of seals in the water and the last few days dolphins have been close to shore.

The surf has been good and a lot of the local boys are having fun surfing. Surfing seems to be a guy thing, no girls at all. A couple of young girls are on boogie boards further up the beach.

We went walking around town and stumbled across the local museum it was closed but they had a plaque out front and we stopped to read it. There was a couple of plants beside the plaque, one about four feet and the other about six feet tall, both covered in light pink almost white blossoms. They were Jade Trees. We have seen a couple before that were about the size of Bonnie's big Jade at home. Down the street were even bigger ones. When you walk around you see lots of neat plants. There are many different kinds of palms as well as oranges, greatfruits, and even a banana tree in someone's yard. Next to the dump station in the campground is a Bird of Paradise in blossom. Just down a few sites in the campground is a Euclyptus tree in blossom. Someday I would love to live in a place where I could have a citrus garden in our back yard. Both Bonnie and I agree, California is not the place.



**Subject: Pasadena and the Rose Floats.**

**Date: Fri, 31 Dec 1999 10:34:55**

We arrived by noon at Pasadena High School where we were meeting the Good Sam Club for the tour. When we arrived there were many rigs already set up. We learned early that with this crowd if they post a time for leaving at 8:00, the last bus is at 8:00 not the first. Bonnie can't tease me about being first in line for anything. By the time we get there we are usually about 100th in line. There are 171 rigs with about 350 people. Everything from HUGE busses to small trailers. They have kept us pretty busy

and feeding us pretty good too.

Our first day was a venture to the Knotts Berry Farm. Originally it was a berry farm but now it is an amusement park. I think I created a monster. The first ride Bonnie and I went on was "Monazuma's Revenge". You start off with a very sudden acceleration that is strong enough to launch you through a 360 degree loop and then up an incline until you are about vertical. It hauls you up until you are and then lets you go backward through the 360 through the loading area into another near vertical which you come screaming (in more ways than one) down to a sudden stop at the loading area. I figured that after that I would get the "I'll hold the stuff and you go" routine. Then we went on a couple of more traditional style roller coasters, the Jaguar and Surf Racer. We didn't like the Surf one it was really rough and bounced our heads between the padded bar that holds you into place. We came out with sore necks. The next one was Boomerang. You get to do a loop followed by a arch that defies description through another loop and then stop on a near vertical, which they haul you up what seems like a lot further. It was during this little interlude that Bonnie described the trip as "Mercifully short", just before being released to rip through the ride, backwards. After lunch we headed to Ghost Rider, the new wooden roller coaster, the highest and longest wooden roller coaster in the west, "Rated Best in the West" the lineup was about an hour and a half which allowed "Mrs. Knott's Chicken" to settle before the ride. It was on the way up that we got to see some very wonderful scenery, as far as you could see in any direction, smog. Actually what you could see through the brown haze was pretty. Then Bonnie said "Oh shoot this is the 130 foot vertical drop they talk about". "What?" I said. "The brochure said there was a 130 foot drop" that lined up near perfectly with the crest and the start of about 2 minutes of roaring thunder with drops and hair pin turns, punctuated by moments of near silence before the cars regained the track and snapped you into a hairpin turn. It was worth the hour and a half wait.

We took a few more rides more sedate than the roller coasters. In the Calico Gold Mine, a grand-daughter pointed to my Good Sam badge and said "Look Gram, New Brunswick". She said she had moved from New Brunswick to California when she was three, seventy years ago, her name was Mitton. We asked her where she came from she said "Turtle Creek". She was shocked when I told her my mother operated a store in Turtle Creek in the late 70s and early 80s. We had a nice chat as we waited for the ride to start.

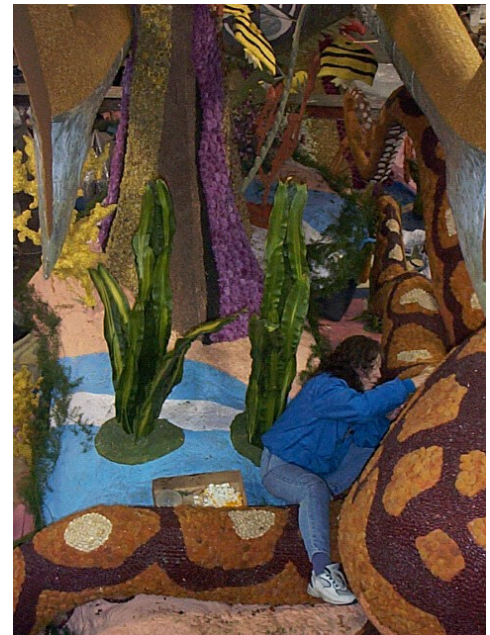
The next stop was for a musical play "The Glory of Christmas" at the Crystal Cathedral. We had never heard of the Crystal Cathedral and were walking around the grounds trying to figure out what denomination it was. The brochures said that this was where the "Hour of Power" was broadcast from. That was vaguely familiar but more on the vague and less of the familiar. While we were waiting outside we looked around and the grounds were dressed up really nice with the Christmas lights and the sculptures. The building has a glass exterior and we could see some of the actress angels lit up in flood lights flying around the inside of the building.

The musical itself was spectacular with a cast of professional actors with a large contingent of volunteers. The whole production was well done and the appearance of Roman Gladiators on horseback, wise men on camels, Mary on a burrow and the shepherds with sheep were really impressive. When angels were supposed to appear they did flying out of the wings, the ride back to the wings left us all thinking of the amusement park rides and how tame they are in comparison to the angels flying back into the darkness at an impressive speed. At one point there were eight angels suspended above the audience. We really enjoyed the performance.



The next day we were off to see the floats being decorated. We went through two buildings. There are many, many volunteers. They had just finished Wilma Flintstone's hair, crusted chili peppers. They said the girl had to wear gloves to protect her hands from being burned. There seems to be lots of frenzied activity and then a wait until the next dash of activity. One group was idle in one barn but they were asked to come back at 12:30 because there was lots of work then. We saw a number of floats being built and had a great time trying to figure what the different colors on the floats were. We took lots of pictures.

From there we went to Bandfest. Six bands from around the states and one from Japan. They had traced out a football field in a parking lot and many of the bands barely had enough space to perform. Huge bands, most had over 300 students. We had a great time watching them do their performances.



**Subject: Rose Parade**

**Date: Mon, 03 Jan 2000 19:37:37**

We had a great New Year's Eve dinner and dance. There were about 350 people from a good cross section of the U.S. and even a few from Canada. We had the record for the farthest from home, 2820 in a great circle route. Which just beat out the person from Honolulu at 2600 miles. As midnight passed in each time zone there would be a contingent that would count down the midnight hour. There was a live band playing and the selection of music suited the audience well, since we were about 20 to 25 years younger than the average, we found the music not quite what we were used to. It was fun to watch the people who really knew how to dance to the old tunes.

Dinner was a Steak and Lobster Tail dinner followed by Baked Alaska. It was excellent but the lobster wasn't like the lobster we are familiar with. There is a great difference in flavor and texture between the warm and cold water versions of the two.

Shortly after the midnight hour in Pasadena we were off to catch the busses home. We had to get the busses to the parade area before they closed the roads, scheduled time of departure was 6:45. A number of us debated partying the whole night long might have been a better strategy than going to bed.

We figured it would be a long time before any of the floats showed up where we were. We arrived and some of the people who spent the night camped on the side of the street were still in their sleeping bags. Some had lawn chairs parked beside a small drum which they were burning boards for heat. It was a cold night. It ended up being only about 20 minutes before the stealth bomber flew over. People were playing football in the street and selling hot dogs and coffee. It was a festive



atmosphere slightly subdued by the temperature.

The motorcycle motorcade showed up to signal the coming floats and to clear people from the streets. They would roar up and back a few times and then stop and wait for the parade to catch up before taking off to clear the next section. However before they took off again a lady ran up with donuts so they could continue with the parade, it was near coffee break time and no coffee shop in sight!

The floats were amazing to see and almost every one of them had at least some form of animation. Some were almost hard to watch, they were so busy it was almost impossible to follow them. The bands were great and Stanford's was an absolute scream, all of the other bands were doing their choreographed routines and all was precision and orderliness, then there was Stanford. Everybody seemed to be doing something different and it was chaos theory in action. They had the same basic uniform except that everyone had different hats and crazy ties. It was a hoot to watch. Bonnie heard that the band had been cited a number of times for inducing riots. They were the hit of the bands for our crowd. The RCMP had only four of the horses out from the musical ride, I was hoping to see the whole contingent. They had a number of different groups of horse back riders out to represent different groups, some of their outfits were brilliantly colored and the horses were groomed until their coats and tack gleamed.

We were back to the High School for a barbecue. They were cooking something called a Tri-tip roast something I had never heard of before. All I can say is it was extremely tasty and tender. The real football fans in the crowd said the game was going to be a complete blow out. Wisconsin was going to wipe Stanford off the map. We went to the post parade float viewing area. Millie was parked about 200 yards from one set of floats. During the parade the floats are spaced well enough that you don't realize how many there are. Seeing them all lined up is really something. Unfortunately, they were turned off so the animation was stopped.

In the afternoon, the sun was peaking through and when it would hit one of the floats, it seemed to just pop into a brilliant display of color. The colors and smells were hard to believe. The floats were amazing in the level of detail. All of them covered in something organic. Besides the thousands of multi-colored roses, there were brilliant displays of orchids, seeds, nuts, grasses, and vegetables. We saw potatoes as a walkway, brussel sprouts as scales on the dragons, purple cabbage as skin and walnuts as ladybugs. The imagination required to create these floats is really something.

They had a number of "white suiters" available to answer questions about the floats. The Rose Parade committee standard uniform is a white suit, white shirt, white shoes, and red tie, hence the name "white suiters". We stopped and talk to a few of them and asked a few questions and always tried to eavesdrop on others questions. One of the "white suiters" was a foreman in one of the float building shops. She was really neat to listen to and answered lots of questions about what kinds of flowers and what the schedule was for the construction of the floats. They have to have the number of flowers, what colors, and what kind of flowers figured out six months before they need them in order to get them from the growers. We were surprised that most of the



roses come from South America. Most of the North American crop is already committed. Another interesting note is that the roses that are kept on the float are kept in 7-up not water. 7-up keeps them fresher.

Bonnie and I are happy we went but we doubted we would ever go to the parade again. If we were in the area we would probably go to see the Post Parade instead of the parade. There are many who would disagree with us, some of the people in our group were doing their 11th tour. It was not uncommon for people to have seen at least one before. We met some super nice people. We had four or so couples that we spent a lot of time with and chatted with many, many more. Many were full timers and many were just coming from a few miles away. Some of the couples were from less than a couple hours drive from Pasadena but had never been to the parade.

One of the couples we met had a long history in California. One of her ancestors raised the first official California flag. He has a farm that is one of the centennial farms. It has been in the same family for over 100 years. He grows almonds, black walnuts, and english walnuts. (Almonds has a silent 'l'.) Black walnuts are used for making extracts. English walnuts are the kind we buy in stores. Bonnie and Ken spent hours talking about his farm, a very interesting man.



Another person we talked to quite a bit was from Northern Ireland. He immigrated to Canada and then to California (too cold in Regina). He was a great guy for telling stories and kept us entertained whenever we crossed paths. I beat him to the "top of the morning to you" greeting one morning and he replied "and the rest of the day to you". I always wondered what the reply was to that old saying.

We also spent a lot of time with another couple and when we left they invited us up to their Riverside home. They are retired, she was a social worker, he an elementary school principal. They have a wonderful home high in the hills overlooking the valley. We spent the afternoon in their hot tub and relaxing. They took us out to dinner and then over to the Mission Inn. A historic inn that was all dressed up for the holidays. The owner has over \$1.5 million in animated decorations around the inn. It was wonderful to see. We were back to Lisa and Larry's and an absolutely incredible view of the valley, and mountains. It was exceptionally clear the night we were there, the mountains were pretty clear. There is a joke about people arriving in LA in April and not knowing that it is surrounded by mountains until October when the winds change. Smog is pretty bad at times. We could see a difference between late afternoon and early morning. Smog builds during the day.

It was good to note that apparently it is getting better. When Larry was principal there were always at least a few days of "level one alerts", days when the kids activities had to be restricted (no running). Last year there were no level one alerts.

We left their place and headed toward Dana Point, the only natural harbor between San Diego and Santa Barbara. We arrived without a hitch although we were shocked to see four levels of highway stacked one on top of each other, three over our heads at one point. The highway varied between five and eight lanes of traffic most of the way, I couldn't see the other side but I would assume there were

just as many going the other way.

We have three days to make the 60 miles to San Diego before we pick up Norman and Sara. We are looking forward to seeing familiar faces.