

**A WEEKEND AT MORRO BAY**

1988 April 29 - May 2

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## ***The University of California Hiking Club***

In 1949, Richard L. Bower was a student at the University of California, Berkeley. Richard was both an inveterate promoter and an enthusiastic hiker. In order to exercise his skills in these two areas, he decided to start a hiking club for students: the UC Hiking Club. To get the club going, he offered Charter Memberships to all first-year members.

After some hesitation, I decided to join. I didn't expect too much, first because I was very impecunious, and so could not afford to go on expensive hikes; and second, because I was not much of a joiner. I liked to go on solitary hikes in the Berkeley hills, but was not much attracted by the thought of a hike with a large group of people. At any rate, I did become a Charter Member.

Not long after I joined, I attended a meeting of the club, and heard Richard explain that he needed people to volunteer for various committee posts. I somehow volunteered for the job of Transportation Chairman, which meant that I had to keep track of how many people signed up for each hike, and then tried to arrange transportation for them. In the first few hikes, we used chartered Greyhound Buses. On later hikes, we started depending on the cars owned by a few (very few!) of the members.

In order to pay for the buses, we had a Treasurer who collected money from each hiker (in advance), and saw to it that the Greyhound people got paid. The Treasurer of the club at the time that I joined was another Charter Member: Phyllis Young, a slim, dark-haired girl that had a biting way of speaking up at meetings. My first impression of her was somewhat indifferent - she was a little too overbearing.

But one day in the cramped quarters of the Hiking Club office in Room C of Eshleman Hall, Phyllis was leaving the room, and I was seated in a chair in the aisle. She had to squeeze past me in order to get out, and in that brief physical contact I noticed her for the first time as a woman. By then, I had come to respect her for her ability as Treasurer, and for her common-sense outlook. So I pondered the possibility that she might be a nice girlfriend.

I started courting her in a roundabout way, and found that she was agreeable to the idea. About six months later, we became engaged, and the next year - 1950 (just before our final year of college) - we were married.

A few years after graduating, we found that some of the members of the UCHC were holding reunions. We started attending them, and found much pleasure in renewing

acquaintances and in meeting the children of our old hiking friends. Over the ensuing 20 years, we had reunions almost every year. But gradually, as the children entered their teens, and as more people moved away, the frequency of the reunions diminished. As of the first of this year, Phyllis and I had not attended a reunion for about 15 years - which amazed us when we stopped to consider it.

But Paul and Ellie Sorensen, who had been the prime instigators of many past reunions, sent a proposal on their 1987 Christmas cards that they we have a reunion this spring at Morro Bay State Park. Phyllis and I were delighted by the idea, and wrote back to support the proposal.

Early in February, they sent us application forms to use for reserving a campsite at the park. We sent the application in as soon as was allowed - 8 weeks before the weekend of the trip - in order to assure ourselves of space. And we eagerly looked forward to the weekend of April 30-May 1.

### *Friday, April 29*

We decided to make a four-day weekend out of it. We each took the preceding Friday and the following Monday as days of vacation. We spent Friday morning getting all the weekend chores done, and in packing up. After lunch, we set out for Morro Bay.

Morro Bay is on the coast of California, about halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco - about a 200 mile drive from each area. That is why it was a good spot for our reunion, since some of the attendees came from each area.

We drove up the San Diego Freeway to the Ventura Freeway (also known as U.S. Highway 101), and turned north on the latter. We followed it through the western end of the San Fernando Valley, and over the hills to Thousand Oaks. Then we drove down the grade into the coastal communities of Camarillo and Oxnard, through Ventura, and north along the coast to Santa Barbara.

The day was perfect for such a drive. The skies were clear and bright, and the sun was shining warmly. It was a beautiful spring day. The ocean sparkled in the sunshine.

We hit our first and only traffic jam in Santa Barbara, where the freeway ends and there are a few traffic signals on the road. Just north of Santa Barbara, a freeway is under construction, and this also slowed us a bit. But this did not delay us much, and we were soon up to full speed again.

About 25 miles north of Santa Barbara, I stopped and asked Phyllis to take over the driving. Just past there, Highway 101 turns inland, goes through a short tunnel, and rises up to a plateau which is a few hundred feet above sea level. The road then turns north again, going through a few wide valleys and the town of Santa Maria.

A few miles later, the highway comes back to the coast briefly at the town of Pismo Beach. It then heads back inland, and stays inland the rest of the way to San Francisco.

We followed it only another 20 miles or so, to the town of San Luis Obispo ("Bishop Saint Louis"), where we left the highway to stop for gasoline. From there, we took Los Osos ("The Bears") Road west for about ten miles, to within a couple of miles of Morro Bay. We turned north on South Bay Boulevard, and followed it for about 4 miles, which brought us to the road into Morro Bay State Park. We entered the park just after 5 p.m., which gave us plenty of time to set up camp and fix dinner before dark.

When we stopped at the Ranger Station to register, the Ranger told us that all of our group had been assigned places in one area of the campground, and the Sorensens, Applemans, and Houldings were already there. We thought it was very nice of the Park staff to see that all the members of our group were assigned campsites near each other - such personal consideration seems all too rare these days.

Phyllis and I set up our small backpack tent (see Photo 1), and then fixed dinner using our backpack stove. We were pleased that it worked (albeit somewhat crankily), since we had not used it in six years. We were also pleased that we had a stone fireplace at our campsite, not because we built a campfire in it - we did not - but because it was large enough to afford a windbreak. It was about two feet on each side, and about three feet tall. We positioned our backpack stove on the ground on the leeward side, and did very well.

We needed a windbreak because that evening, and the next two days from late morning to well past sunset, the campground was beset by gale-force winds. I am guessing, but I think the wind speeds were between 30 and 40 miles per hour most of the time. It would have been very bad if not for the fact that the campground is situated in a grove of large eucalyptus trees. (See Photo 2.) While they did not exactly break the force of the wind, at least they moderated it so that it was bearable.

After dinner, I took a few pictures of some of the group (See Photos 3 and 4.) We then joined the rest of the group in the Sorensens' roomy trailer. We naturally talked about old times. We were all somewhat surprised to see how old everyone had gotten - not too surprising when we realized (1) that this was the 40th year since the founding of the UC Hiking Club, and (2) that it had been about 15 years since we had seen one another at the last UCHC reunion.

Later on, Neil got out his prized accordion, and passed out song sheets. He invited each of us in turn to choose a name from the song sheet, and give him the letter that followed the name. He would then play the song (by ear). Some of the group would sing along. Others of us, whose singing voices were very rusty, were content to listen.

I was intrigued by the meaning of the letters following the song names. At first, I assumed that they denoted the keys in which the various songs were to be played. But this

notion was dispelled by mounting evidence that all the songs were being played in the key of C, and by the fact that the notation beside some of the songs was "hiest" - which turned out to be shorthand for "highest". As it turned out, the letters simply told Neil what key to press at the start of each song; a simple but effective way to get going!

In the old days, we would have stayed up until all hours of the night talking. But in our dotage, we mostly went to bed about 9:30 - a much healthier hour. The wind died down, and the weather was mild, so we had a good night's sleep.

### *Attendees*

I will pause at this point and list the names of all 17 of the attendees at the reunion:

Mike and Irma Appleman  
Tom and Jeanne Buckingham  
Bob and Marge Hoskins  
Neil and Phyllis Houlding  
their daughter Carol and her son Austin  
Mickey and Phyllis McKinney  
Herb and Fran Petschek  
Lorie Scott  
Paul and Ellie Sorensen

We had known the Sorensens and the Houldings for decades. Phyllis tells me that we had met the Applemans at a UCHC reunion a quarter-century or so ago; I fear my memory is not so good. We found out that Irma Appleman is the sister of Herb Webber, who was either a Charter Member of UCHC or joined the year following its founding. Both Mike and Irma Appleman were UCHC members, having gone to Berkeley in the early 50's - just after Phyllis and I graduated.

(Herb Webber, who lives with his family in Auburn, California, is affectionately known as "Moose", because of an incident which happened in the fall of 1950 on a trip to Echo Lake, near Lake Tahoe. While fooling around in the cold wind at the campsite on the east shore of the lake, Herb took the metal spout from a Coleman fuel can, inverted it, and blew a tremendous snort through it. Someone said that it sounded like a moose, and so Herb's hiking club nickname was Moose from then on. I understand that Herb's wife Lillian does not care for the nickname, but it is second nature to those of us that knew him back then.)

Phyllis Houlding had to leave early Saturday morning (abandoning Neil, in expectation that their daughter Carol would indeed arrive, and would take him home on Sunday). The reason was that a concrete sidewalk was to be poured in front of their house that day, and Phyllis wanted to keep watch to make sure that people didn't inscribe their names etc. in the fresh concrete.



Photo 1. View of our campsite, tent, and car. This was taken just after we got the tent set up; about 6 p.m. The stone fireplace is half-hidden by the wood food cabinet at the left of the picture.



Photo 2. Eucalyptus trees to the northwest of camp. Taken Friday evening about 6 p.m. The road is the campground road.





Photo 3. Irma, Mike, Ellie, and Paul, plus back of Phyllis, standing in the campground.



Photo 4. Neil, Irma, and Mike in campground.

Tom and Jeanne Buckingham arrived about 11 p.m. Friday night; Bob, Marge, and Lorie arrived midday Saturday; Herb and Fran a short while later; and Carol and Austin somewhat later still, I believe.

### *Saturday, April 30*

This was the 36th birthday of our first child (Dorothy). Another reminder of how long we have been around!

I got up at 6 a.m. took a hot shower, and shaved with my electric razor. At this State Park, they have four or five restroom/shower/laundry houses, each with a couple of showers for men, and a couple more for women. The hot water is nice!

After that, I went for a walk around the area, to pass the time until Phyllis would be getting up. It was a nice day. There was as yet no wind, and the sky was cloudless. The sun had just come up over the eastern hills, and was shining on the sparkling waters of Morro Bay.

### **Morro Bay**

I walked a short distance from camp, crossed the road around the park, and walked out to the marina - just a few hundred feet from our tent. The immediate view was of a row of boats moored along the marina, which is perhaps a couple hundred yards long, and maybe fifty yards wide. At the west end, it opens into Morro Bay, which is a moderately large bay, but a very shallow one. It is four miles long and a mile or so in width, except for one area where it is almost two miles wide. But at its deepest, it is only 14 feet deep. And for the most part, it is only 2 or 3 feet deep. At low tide, it is mostly mud flats, with a few channels used by the boats.

What makes it a bay is a spit of sand between it and the Pacific Ocean. This sand spit is four miles long, and blocks all but the northern tip of the bay from the ocean. The spit is a chain of sand dunes, the highest of which is just under 100 feet above sea level. The spit averages about 500 yards in width.

### **Morro Rock**

At the north end of the bay is Morro Rock - a landmark along this section of the coast. First sighted by the Portuguese explorer Cabrillo in 1542, it was called "The Moor" - El Moro in Spanish - because it resembled the turbaned head of a Moor. As far as I know, it is the only geological feature of its kind along the California coast. It is a dome-shaped rock that rises 580 feet out of the ocean, and is connected to the shore by a landfill which is 0.4 miles long. The landfill was constructed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in 1933 out of material that was blasted from Morro Rock itself.



Morro Rock is a volcanic plug - a mass of magma that cooled underground. It was formed some 22 million years ago. It is the youngest and farthest west of a chain of 7 to 9 such plugs that lie in a line between there and the town of San Luis Obispo, some 10 miles to the east. (Actually, there are one or two submerged plugs off the coast, so there are perhaps 9 to 11 plugs in all.) The next plugs to the east of Morro Rock are 26 million years old, so the oldest one (near San Luis Obispo) is perhaps 50 or 60 million years old, and the submerged ones to the west may be only 15 to 20 million years old.

All this points to a geological hot spot over which the continental plate passed. The plate must have moved east with respect to the hot spot. By the above reasoning, the hot spot now is perhaps 5 miles off the coast. Perhaps a new plug is forming there at this very moment!

As I stood on the marina admiring the view, I noticed that the area is largely covered with scrub brush. The extensive patch of trees that covers the campsite and surrounding area is an anomaly in the area. Indeed, eucalyptus trees are not native to California, having been brought here from Australia in the late nineteenth century. Hence the grove in the park is a man-made affair. But it is very picturesque.

### **Knoll; Golf Course**

At the north end of the marina is a small rock outcropping - small, that is, in comparison to Morro Rock. I walked up to the top of this outcropping which is about 80 feet above sea level. Over the edge of the rock to the north, I looked down on the top of the park museum, which we planned to visit later in the day. Looking farther afield, I had a very nice view of the town of Morro Bay to the north, and the golf course to the east. This golf course is part of the state park, and its fairways are lined with eucalyptus and pine trees. It is a lovely looking area.

After admiring this view for a few minutes, I turned and headed back to camp. For a half-hour walk, I had seen a remarkable amount of beautiful and varied scenery!

Phyllis got up at 7 a.m. We fixed breakfast shortly after, and then went over to Paul and Ellie's trailer to see what the plans were for the day. After some discussion, we agreed to meet at 9 a.m. for a hike to Black Mountain, which is in the northeastern part of the park. This left us with 40 minutes to kill, so Phyllis and I walked out to the marina, taking the camera this time. We went around the east end of the marina basin (see Photo 5), and then along the south side out to the bay proper. It was a sparkling day, with the sun shining brightly on the clear waters of the bay. The wind had not yet come up, although there was a steady breeze blowing from the northwest. We had an excellent view north to Morro Rock (See Photo 6), and to the right of it, the town of Morro Bay (see Photo 7).



Photo 5. Morro Bay Marina. Taken at about 8 a.m. looking west. The marina is at the right, just off the edge of the picture. In the middle, across the bay, is the sand spit.



Photo 6. Morro Rock from south edge of marina. Taken about 8:30 a.m., looking northwest from the south edge of the marina entrance.



Photo 7. Looking north across bay from south edge of marina toward town of Morro Bay. Taken about 8:30 a.m. The three smokestacks of the PG&E power plant are near the right side. The entrance to the marina is the closest inlet on the right side of the picture.



Photo 8. Phyllis, Irma, Jeanne, Tom, and Neil prepare for hike. Taken about 9 a.m. just outside of Paul and Ellie's trailer.



We then walked back to the east, going along the edge of a wide marsh at the south end of the park. This marsh is the delta of Chorro Creek, which splits into several meandering brooks on its way through the marsh. The marsh covers an area of perhaps 700 acres, and is filled with scrub brush. A mile to the southeast is another similar marsh, also a part of the park, which is the delta of Los Osos Creek. These two marshes are designated as a wildlife refuge natural area, and play host to thousands of migratory birds every year. The area is a birdwatcher's paradise.

We continued along the edge of the marsh until we had circled around to the east of camp, and in fact just east of the Ranger Station at the entrance to the campground. We then turned and went back to Paul and Ellie's trailer, which was to be the center of action for the weekend. There we met the rest of the group; at least, those who had arrived by then. Some of them are shown in Photo 8. And we all set out for our morning hike.

### **Black Mountain**

We walked to the west edge of the campground, under the tall eucalyptus trees. What a sweet, pungent odor they have! Along that edge is an athletic trail: The park rangers have installed a series of exercise points by the side of the trail. The idea is to stop at each point and perform the exercise posted there, then hike to the next point, and so on. We didn't feel any compulsion to do the exercises! Indeed, the trail was rather run-down, so that at some points it was not clear what exercise was intended.

We followed the exercise trail northeast toward our real objective, Black Mountain, until the trail made an invisible jog to the right. We might have followed it further, had we seen the jog, but by the time we realized that we were off the trail, it was way behind us. We then found ourselves out on the golf course, wondering which way to go. Fine thing for a bunch of old Hiking Club members! Knowing no better, we just kept on up the slope of the hill.

We were about a third of the way across a main fairway (!!!) when a golf course marshall whizzed up in a golf cart and told us not to cross. He was obviously rather angry that we were out on the course. We explained to him that we thought we were following a trail, but had lost it somehow. We asked him which way to go to get from there to Black Mountain. After a moment, he told us just to continue across the course! I guess he decided that we were respectable people - after all, we had a lot of grey hairs among us! He did caution us to watch out for golfers, since he didn't want the park to get into a situation involving liability.

So we set off up the slope and across a couple of fairways. There were not enough golfers out yet to make it really dangerous - at least, none of us got hit by golf balls. On the upper edge of the higher fairway, we came to a road. The marshall had told us to turn right when we got to the road, and so a few of us did. But Ellie turned left - not out of



contrariness, but because she had been up to the peak a day or so before, and recognized where we were.

In fact, we were on a road that takes off from the entry road at the east side of the park, and goes up to the golf clubhouse. From there, it descends to the west, coming out on the shore road that leads north to the city of Morro Bay. At the highest point of this road, just south of the clubhouse, a side road takes off to the east, and winds up the west side of Black Mountain. When we emerged on the clubhouse road, we were east of that point, and so Ellie rightly went left (west) to go up to the junction. The rest of us, after vainly trying to convince her of her error, decided she might know what she was doing, and turned around to follow her.

There were a lot more golfers in the vicinity of the clubhouse, so we were careful to stay on the road, or on the occasional golf cart paths by the side of the road. The road wound up around the highest part of the golf course, and then went another third of a mile up through the brush on the hillside. Finally, two hundred feet below the peak, it did an abrupt U-turn, and eased into a small parking area.

As we walked up the road, we stopped to take pictures every so often. We had a very nice view of the coast, a view which got progressively more spectacular as we climbed toward the peak. We could see several miles to the south, including the entire bay, and also several miles to the north of Morro Rock. It was a magnificent panorama in the bright morning sun.

From the parking lot, we went up the easy dirt trail to the summit of Black Mountain. It sounds formidable when put that way, but it is really just a small hill, attaining an elevation of 661 feet above sea level. (The USGS topographical map of Morro Bay calls it Black Hill.)

Photo 9 shows the view west from the top. At the base of Morro Rock, you can see the narrow channel where the bay connects with the ocean. The north breakwater is visible at the left side of Morro Rock; a boat is in the channel near the ocean end. At the right is the PG&E power station with its three smokestacks. In the middle of the picture is the town of Morro Bay.

Photo 10 shows the view to the south, including the south part of Morro Bay, culminating in Shark Inlet (upper middle). The sand spit is at the right, and the Chorro Creek marsh is at the left. The town of Los Osos is at the upper left. On the lower right is the golf course, nestled among the eucalyptus and pine trees. The campground is hidden behind the eucalyptus trees in the center of the picture. Note that the brownish-green trees are eucalyptus, while the dark green ones are mostly pine. A careful look at the bay shows that most of it consists of slightly dark blue areas. The boats are all in lighter blue areas. The dark blue areas are mud flats that are under only a couple of feet of water. The only navigable water in the bay is in a few channels (lighter blue water).



Photo 9. View looking west from the top of Black Mountain, showing Morro Rock, the PG&E power plant, and the town of Morro Bay. It was taken about 11 a.m.



Photo 10. South Morro Bay from the top of Black Mountain.





Photo 11. View southeast from the top of Black Mountain, showing the marsh (wildlife refuge area) and towns of Baywood Park and Los Osos.



Photo 12. Group shot taken by Ellie. Front row: Lorie, Marge, Bob, Jeanne, Tom, Irma, Mickey. Back Row: Neil, Phyllis, Fran, Herb, Paul, Mike.

Photo 11 shows the view southeast from the peak, with the marsh in the foreground. Note the meandering creek channels through the marsh. In the background is the town of Baywood Park, and behind and to the right of it, the town of Los Osos. At the lower right of the picture are two roads. The nearer one is the road going from the east entrance of the park up to the golf clubhouse. The farther road goes on past the campground entrance, then turns north and heads into the town of Morro Bay.

We stayed on the peak (a very flat peak, with room for a dozen or more persons) for about half an hour, enjoying the beautiful scenery, and taking pictures of it and one another. Once at the top, we could also look out to the east, where we saw green valleys and also the next volcanic plug in line (Cerro Cabrillo, which is somewhat higher than Black Mountain - 911 feet above sea level, in fact). Cerro Cabrillo is shown in Photo 16 from a quite different vantage point.

Going down the hill, we followed the trail to the parking lot, and found that it continued on down the hill from there, on a route that took it quite a ways below the road. So naturally we took the trail. It was a pleasant walk, except that we passed rather close to some freshly blooming poison oak bushes! But we steered clear of them, I guess, for nobody seemed to get any rashes from them.

The last part of the trail went between two rows of eucalyptus trees as it headed down into the east end of the campground. There was a thick layer of detritus on this part of the trail; eucalyptus trees shed large quantities of bark, leaves, small branches, nuts, and sometimes large branches. I found one of the large branches when Tom Buckingham, who was walking next to me, stepped on one end of it, so that the other end came up and whacked me in the shin.

We got back to camp about 11 a.m., and decided to see the marina before lunch. The wind had come up by then (it began to blow when we were on top of Black Mountain). By the time we walked up the granite knoll behind the museum, it was blowing with gale force. We didn't stay there long. Some of the group decided to go into the museum, but Phyllis and I opted to return to camp and have lunch.

While we were eating, Bob and Marge Hoskins and Lorie Scott arrived, and we chatted with them a while. After lunch, Phyllis and I went to see the museum, passing the rest of our group as they returned from there.

### **Morro Bay Museum**

Morro Bay Museum sits on a small cliff above the bay, looking northwest at Morro Rock. (The cliff is merely the west side of the granite knoll that we had walked up previously.) The museum is in a nice modern building, and has a lobby with books and pictures for sale, then a hallway in which were many exhibits of the natural history of the area, plus pictures of the early attempts to mine rock from Morro Rock. At the south end of



the building is a small auditorium where they have slide shows and lectures. The museum has an entrance fee of a couple of dollars or so, but campers are allowed in for free; the use of the museum is part of the campsite fee. Phyllis and I spent about an hour there, and enjoyed it very much. Then we went back to camp, where we took an hour's nap in the wind-sheltered tent.

When we woke up, we heard that Herb and Fran Petschek had arrived. We went over to (where else?) Paul and Ellie's trailer, and found Herb and Fran sitting inside. We had not seen them for 20 years - since Phyllis and I had taken a trip to Brazil, and had visited them in their home near Buenos Aires. We were very glad to see them again. I guess I have known Herb longer than anyone else in the hiking club - he was one of the first people that Richard Bower introduced me to, some 39 years ago.

The Petscheks had flown from Oregon (their home now for many years) to Oakland, I believe, and had rented a car there for the 200 mile drive south to Morro Bay. They had asked that Paul bring some camping gear for them to use, and so Paul brought a large umbrella tent for them. We all stood around making helpful comments on how to set it up, and perhaps some of us actually assisted in the process - no mean trick in that awful wind.

### **An Afternoon Hike**

By this time, it was about mid-afternoon. With Bob, Marge, Lorie, Herb, and Fran to swell our ranks, we decided to take another hike. This time, we went southwest, across the road and past the east end of the marina basin. As Phyllis and I had done that morning, we went east along the edge of the marsh. We came to a bare patch of ground, in the middle of which was a nice log - an ideal place for a group picture. So I set up my camera tripod and took a couple of pictures, and then asked Ellie to take one with me in it; see Photo 12. I include this one because it was one of the two best group shots (thanks to Ellie), and the only picture that I am in. (Ellie is in other pictures of this set.) I had forgotten how to use the timer on the camera.

Unfortunately, most of us were wearing headgear as protection from the wind. That, coupled with the high sun, threw most of the faces into shadow. And I was too inexperienced to know how to compensate for it. As a result, the pictures don't show the faces very well. (I later learned that using a flash attachment helps in such cases. So maybe at our next UCHC reunion...)

Well, then we wound around the marsh to the east of the entrance station, and then wandered farther to the northeast. We crossed to the north side of the road and found another part of that elusive exercise trail going along above the road. We took it for a ways, and actually tried some of the exercises. We soon came to a trail junction, where Bob, Marge, Lorie and I (being in the lead at that time) turned to follow the exercise trail back to the west, and up the hill. After a few minutes, I stopped to wait for the rest of the group to catch up. But nobody came. Finally, I waved goodbye to Lorie and the Hoskins, and went

back to the junction. From there, I turned northeast and walked at a brisk pace for several minutes.

Eventually, I caught up with the rest of the group, who had by then started up a very steep trail which followed a ravine up the side of Black Mountain. Going up that trail was about the only time that weekend that I really felt warm! For one thing, we were somewhat sheltered from the wind there, and for another, it was a *very* steep trail.

At the top of this trail, we found ourselves on the trail we had taken down from the top of Black Mountain that morning. The junction was at a point where a ruined pump shed stood. We looked in the shed and found a ruined 25 horsepower motor, which had presumably been used in former times to pump water up to the large storage tank located just south of the parking lot at the end of the road. The purpose of that tank is to supply water at a respectable pressure both to the campground and golf course, and to fire hydrants used for fighting fires on the hillside above camp.

From there, we retraced our steps of the morning and descended into camp, arriving at about 4:30 p.m. The winds were really fierce by then. My estimate is that the average wind velocity was somewhere around 40 miles per hour.

We all trooped into Paul and Ellie's trailer for 45 minutes of rest and conversation, after which some of the group decided it was time to play frisbee golf. So despite the wind, they set off for the frisbee golf course, which is next to the exercise trail northwest of the campground. Phyllis and I decided to fix dinner instead, so we went back to our campsite. We cooked in the open, but sat in our car to eat.

After dinner, we met Neil's daughter Carol and her son Austin, who is about 6 years old. They had arrived while we were on our afternoon hike. Carol remembered being at our house in Pleasanton at some UCHC gathering about 22 years ago. She also knew the Winslows, who had bought the house from us. It was interesting to think back so far in the past!

### **Morro Rock**

Phyllis and I decided to go for a drive after dinner, since the wind was so fierce, and standing around camp was no fun at all. So we drove north into the town of Morro Bay, which borders the state park on the north. We went to the center of town, turned left on 8th Street and headed for the bay. Most of the town is on a plateau that is 40 feet above sea level. So as we got near the bay, we had to drive down a short, steep hill, at the bottom of which the street ended at the bayshore drive.

We turned right, and went up by the Pacific Gas and Electric Company's giant powerhouse, whose three tall chimneys are a landmark (eyesore?) that can be seen for miles around. Just after that, we came to the road out to Morro Rock itself. The road goes out on a spit of land that was made early in the century by filling in the shallow water between the

shore and the rock. This was done to provide better access to Morro Rock, so that it could be mined. Nowadays, the whole area is part of Morro Bay State Park, and Morro Rock itself is off-limits to everyone. (There are many birds which nest on the rock. Moreover, before the ban, people had been known to get stuck up on the side of the rock.)

There is a parking area on the south side of the rock. It looks out over the narrow entrance to Morro Bay. To the west is the breakwater, which starts at Morro Rock and goes about a third of a mile to the south. The wind was blowing as strong as ever, and was whipping the ocean waves up against the breakwater so that the spume sailed over the tops of the rocks in a curtain of spray. We had arrived there at 7:40 p.m., which was five minutes before sunset. We watched the sun drop into a cloud bank far off shore. I walked out near the edge of the breakwater, but the wind was so strong that I didn't dare go clear to the ocean. As it was, I had to fight to keep my balance as I crossed the wet rocks.

Inside the channel at the entrance to the bay, the waves were traveling westward, toward the breakwater. But the wind was so strong, and pushed so hard at the waves, that (1) it caused the waves to break backwards; (2) it slowed them down to a crawl; and (3) it flattened them out before they reached the breakwater.

After watching this spectacle for a few minutes, we drove back around the east side of Morro Rock and parked at the north edge of the spit of land, where we watched the waves breaking below us. They were thrashing the rocks at the edge of the spit, and whitening the whole of the small bay to the north of the rock. It was an impressive sight. It also caused us to get salt spray all over the car. On leaving the area, I stopped briefly to try and remove the salt deposit from the windshield, but was not very effective. It was too much for the built-in windshield cleaner!

From there, we drove back into town, and looked for an open market. We found none in the center of town, and so we drove north for about a mile. We finally came to a small convenience food store, where we got some cashew nuts and M&Ms to bring to the gathering later that evening. And then we drove back to camp.

We joined the rest of the group in Paul and Ellie's trailer, and spent the next couple of hours in pleasant conversation. We went to bed about 10:30 p.m.

### *Sunday, May 1*

The wind did not prevent us from getting a good night's sleep, and in fact it died down late at night. The morning dawned clear and calm, another nice day.

I got up at 6 a.m., took a shower, and shaved. Such fancy camping is only found in state parks! Phyllis got up not too long thereafter, and we had our usual camping breakfast of oatmeal and fruit juice.

## **The Sand Spit Wild Area**

After breakfast, the whole group piled in a few of the cars, and we all drove down to the south end of Morro Bay, passing through the small town of Los Osos - a town which is far bigger than it was when Phyllis and I were last up here (in 1979). Just past the town, the road curves south to head for Montaña de Oro state park. But we turned off the main road just 400 feet past this curve, onto West Woodland Avenue. We thought it might be the way to get out to the Sand Spit Wild Area, which forms the west side of Morro Bay, and is a part of the state park.

However, a resident of the area told us to go down the main road for another third of a mile. So we turned around, went back to the main road, went a little further south, and found a graded road that headed straight out toward the beach. Phyllis and I were riding with Paul and Ellie in their capacious International Travelall. Paul bravely headed down the road, which had a few large sandy areas. It quickly became more sand than dirt, and soon Paul decided that we should hike the rest of the way.

His caution was vindicated a few minutes later. We had gotten out of the vehicles and started hiking down this sandy road. We saw a car on a little spur road to the north - stuck in the sand. There were several people working on getting it out, so we didn't stop. But it showed us that we might have gotten into the same fix if Paul had not stopped where he did.

The road ended in a valley just south of Shark Inlet, which is the name of the south end of Morro Bay. Before us was the row of sand dunes that form the final barrier before the ocean. As a whole, these dunes bear a remarkable resemblance to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. For they rise very gradually from the ocean on the west, until they reach their crest. Then they drop precipitously down into Morro Bay on the east side (see Photo 16).

There is a trail from the road's end up into the dunes, through a small pass, and out to the beach. We hiked up this trail, and finally came to the ocean. We then strolled north along the beach for a mile or so. I took a few pictures, such as Photo 13, which shows the view of the coast to the north, and Photo 14, which shows the view of the sand dunes to the east.

We had an excellent view of Morro Rock, four miles to the north. And the ocean itself was ever fascinating to watch. We looked for shells, but found few. (And those we left, for this is a state park, and collecting anything is illegal.)

We decided to go up to the ridge of the sand dunes. On our way up, we came to an area of perhaps a quarter of an acre covered with white shells. See Photo 15. We first thought that it must have been an ancient Indian midden. But when we dug down in one spot, we found that the shells were only on the surface, which demolished that explanation. Perhaps it is a spot favored by the birds for eating the mollusks?



We hiked the rest of the way to the top of the ridge, where we got a fresh look at Morro Bay. See Photo 16. We then went south along the crest of the dunes - a fairly rough hike, since the dunes go up and down - until we came to a wire fence. A sign at the fence said that it surrounded a revegetation area. Tied to the top wire we found four pairs of shoes - new enough so that we were sure they had been tied there that day. Hmm.

We followed the fence back to the beach, and turned to follow it south. Along the side of the fence, we found a prize! - a tee shirt from the 1984 triathlon. But we left it there. It was somewhat the worse for wear.

Going south along that fence, we saw four boys start up into the fenced-off area. Clearly they were the owners of the shoes we had seen tied to the fence at the crest of the dunes.

As if that weren't enough visitors for the closed area, we then saw a young woman coming down the middle of the area, with two dogs on leashes. So much for fences and signs!

We hiked back to the cars, and then bid farewell to Bob and Marge Hoskins, Lorie Scott, and Tom and Jeanne Buckingham, all of whom had to take off for their respective homes. They had not been fortunate enough to get a three or four day weekend, as Phyllis and I did.

### **Montaña de Oro State Park**

The rest of us went back to camp, where we ate lunch. After lunch, we talked about what we could do to while away the afternoon, and decided to drive back to the south, and this time go all the way to Montaña de Oro State Park, which is only about 3 miles south of Morro Bay. The land from the town of Los Osos south to Montaña de Oro consists of fairly substantial hills which rise abruptly from the ocean to heights of one or two thousand feet above sea level. They are part of the coastal range, and indeed are the primary geological features of the area. Morro Bay and the valley behind it is a recent intruder in this range of mountains - at least in geological time.

The road south from Los Osos (Pecho Valley Road) runs along the edge of these hills and generally stays a few hundred feet above sea level. The last part of the road follows a small canyon that parallels the shore; this canyon is filled with a grove of eucalyptus trees.

As the road enters Montaña de Oro State Park, it winds down almost to the shore. It crosses a tiny stream (Islay Creek) at that point, and then comes back inland for a while. At that crossing is a little cove with a rock which is connected to the shore in low tide, but is a small island in high tide. Also there, on the other side of the road, is the entrance to the park headquarters, and behind it the main camping area of the park. There are campsites for perhaps a hundred vehicles, strung out for half a mile up the canyon cut by Islay Creek.



Photo 13. On sand spit, looking north along beach across sand dunes. Looking northwest over the sand dunes, out to the Pacific Ocean, and beyond it the coast to the north of Morro Bay. Note the iceplant growing on the sand.



Photo 14. Dunes; looking east from beach on sand spit. This shot was taken from near the ocean looking eastward at the sand dunes. Note the contrast between the dirty-looking sand near the beach and the whiter sand in the dunes. A small amount of vegetation grows on the dunes.





Photo 15. The group at the white midden. Mike, Irma, Bob, Paul (in his "over the hill" hat), Tom, Neil, and shadows cast by other members of the group. This shot shows almost the whole of the shell-covered area.



Photo 16. Morro Bay from top of dunes on sand spit. Across the bay in the middle of the picture is Cerro Cabrillo, and halfway from there to the left edge is Black Mountain. At the far right of the picture is another volcanic plug: Hollister Peak, which is 1409 feet above sea level.

I believe that Montaña de Oro was named by Cabrillo, who sailed up the California coast in the fall of 1542, and came back that way in 1543. It must have been on the return journey in the springtime that he named the area, because what he saw was a hill covered with yellow flowers; hence the name Mountain of Gold. In spring, the area is covered with wildflowers.

The most interesting features of the park today, however, are the coves along the Pacific shore. There one finds tidal pools, shells, algae, and various forms of marine life. I have seen sea lions cavorting in the surf off the shore there, and once I came across a dead sea lion on the shore - filled with maggots. Not the usual sort of thing, and one which we did not see this trip!

Just past Islay Creek is a parking area at the head of a trail to the beach. It was full when we arrived, so we drove south a bit farther to park. We then walked out on the plateau that is next to the ocean. This plateau is about 40 feet above the ocean, and forms a sort of shelf that extends about 4 miles from there to the south, and varies from a quarter to a half a mile in width. At the eastern edge of this plateau, the mountains rise swiftly, and at the western edge, there is a cliff which drops down to the ocean.

At the base of this cliff are numerous small beaches, as well as many tiny coves and a few tidal caves. The ocean is very rough here, and so bathing is not advisable - even if the water temperature were much warmer than it is!

We walked along the top rim of the plateau out to the cliff, and followed it south for a ways. We came to a side trail that led down a little canyon to the beach, and took that trail. The trail led to a larger canyon (see Photo 17), which then opened out on a semicircular beach. The beach had a fair number of people - perhaps 40 or 50, spread out over a hundred yards or so. Although most were fully dressed, many had bathing suits on, but I don't remember seeing any of them in the water, which was quite cool.

The beach is semicircular because it is between two walls of rock that extend out into the ocean. It is typical of that area that parallel rock walls enclose little secluded beaches. Most of them are only 15 or 20 feet wide (see Photo 19); this first one is an exception. We looked at this first beach a short while, and then climbed over the 10 foot high rock wall on the south edge to get to the next little cove (see Photo 18). There we sat and rested for half an hour or more. (The next rock wall was passable, but led to a cove that was entirely under water, so we went no further.)

The area behind where I stood to take Photo 18 was well-covered by sand, and made a nice place to rest. Down near the ocean, on the other hand, the beach consisted largely of rocks an inch or two across. You might think that the narrowness of the channel would cause the waves to rush way up it, but such is not the case. There seems to be a submerged reef just outside the entrance which slows the waves down, for once they get inside, they were very tame.



While there, we explored some tidal pools (see Photo 20), saw some sea anemones, and examined the sandstone rock that bordered the cove. I climbed up the wall at one place, and had my foothold break off under my weight. I slipped down a foot or so, scraping a knuckle and some skin above my left knee; but none of it was any more than a temporary nuisance.

After a while, we left that area and returned to the trail along the upper edge of the plateau. We followed it south for another mile or so, then walked up the slope to the road. On the way, we saw some large black birds; vultures, perhaps. Their wingspread was several feet, I believe.

We walked back up the road to our cars, then drove into the campground. We liked the looks of it, and decided that it might be a nice place for our next reunion.

Well, that was about all the excitement that our geriatric set could handle, so we drove back to Morro Bay. Some of the group decided that they would like to go out for dinner that night; we all agreed to go along. Meanwhile, there was some time to kill, and the wind was up again. So I got in the car and started to write in my trip journal. I ended up falling asleep, and slept for about an hour. But in view of the strenuous (mostly level) 2 mile hike of the afternoon, I guess I needed it. Phyllis also slept for an hour.

Late in the afternoon, our now small group drove into town. We wandered down the street next to the bay, and finally settled on dining at the Whale's Tail. The food there was good, but not exceptional. The only one in the group that didn't care for it was Phyllis. Something in her meal caused her some discomfort. And to our great disappointment, they had no ice cream.

So after dinner, I persuaded the group to walk out in search of ice cream. We had looked up an interesting-sounding place - the Bravery-Sweetery - that had fancy ice creams, among other things. But when we arrived, we found that it was closed. We then backtracked to a small Dreyer's shop, but it too had closed. Knowing that the evening would be incomplete without ice cream, we got into our cars and started covering the town. We finally stopped at a supermarket about two miles north of town, where we bought half a gallon of Dreyer's ice cream and a tray of Bavarian Creme Coffee Cake. The ice cream was a mixture of three flavors of chocolate; it was called Double Chocolate Fudge, and was very good. I have looked for this delicious blend since then, but have not found it in our local stores, although they do carry Dreyer's ice cream.

We then headed back to our camp, where we gathered in Paul and Ellie's trailer for one last evening of conversation, and pigged out on ice cream and coffee cake. We talked clear up until 9:30 p.m., when we all decided to call it a day.



Photo 17. Gully east of large beach. This is the gully that empties out into the semicircular beach. It is rather pretty. A trail goes a short way up the gully, but is soon overgrown with bushes, including poison oak.

Photo 18. Irma on the narrow beach between two rock walls where we rested. Our resting place was behind where I stood to take this picture.





Photo 19. This picture shows how the rock walls run out into the ocean, and gives you an idea of what we had to clamber over to get to the next little beach.



Photo 20. Sea anemone in tidal pool. The area covered by the picture below is entirely under an inch of seawater. There are two sea anemones in the picture, one in the center, and one on the upper edge. The olive-colored stuff is kelp, and the dark reddish stuff is a different variety of kelp.



***Monday, May 2***

The day started in the usual fashion: I was up at 6, took a shower and shaved, fixed the usual breakfast. And then we broke camp. We visited with others, and said goodbye to the Applemans and Neil Houlding and daughter Carol and grandson Austin, who were going to take off early. We waited while the others packed up (except for the Sorensens, who were going to stay another couple of days), and then we all went on another hike to the top of Black Mountain. This time, we drove to the parking lot, and just hiked to the top from there.

When we got to the peak, we found a teacher and several students from a nearby Community College, who were taking a field trip. We listened a while to the discussion. Finally, we headed back down to the cars, and drove back into camp. We ate lunch there, pooling some of our food supplies in the process. Ellie insisted that we finish off the ice cream from the night before, although she is one of our worst chocoholics (I think she and I tie for that honor). After lunch, Phyllis and I said goodbye to the last remaining members of the group - the Sorensens and the Petscheks - and started for home.

The drive was long but not too bad. Phyllis slept most of the time, so I drove the whole way. I played my new recording of Rachmaninoff's Second Symphony in E Minor on the way home - a very relaxing piece of music. We arrived in Los Angeles by 5 p.m., and thus ended a delightful weekend.