



## Wandering & Wondering

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### DISINCORPORATE PACIFICA

Sixty years ago, during the era of suburban sprawl, highway building, and bland homogenization, creating a new city out of a hodgepodge of disparate districts gave birth to Pacifica. It seemed like a good idea at the time. But now that experiment has run its course and proven a failure. The cement that once bound this gaggle of beaches and valleys together has dried out and crumbled. Governance of this municipal mess is lax and ineffective. The city constantly puts off important decisions, postpones hearings, wastes money on useless consultants to tell us things we already know, and generally fails to act decisively. So let's admit that we bit off more than we can chew. Our various neighborhoods are incompatible. We have no true center or core. Our demographics skew all over the map. We have no common cause or "language." The business and environmental communities are inexorably divided. Our shopping centers gouge tenants and settle for empty storefronts. Our small businesses wither and die on the vine. Our infrastructure is crumbling: Have you tried driving up and down Linda Mar Boulevard lately? The only solution I can see is for the city to turn in the keys and walk away. This town has four flat tires, a dead battery, a cracked block, no engine, no direction known, and an empty tank. And I am out of gas and metaphors.

### RAIL RIDER

I just went riding the rails around California. The occasion was Amtrak's March 13 detour of the southbound Coast Starlight train due to planned trackwork at San Jose. At Oakland, all passengers bound for points south (other than the final destination of Los Angeles) disembarked and took the bus (too bad for them). Then

we rabid railfans hopped onboard to join the LA-bound people, making for a small but lively nonstop "express." (Experienced riders will appreciate the ironic quotation marks; Amtrak is known to operate at an average speed well under 55 miles per hour.) So the doubledecker train creaked out of the East Bay, leaving the main line and snaking up scenic Niles Canyon to Sunol, then on to Pleasanton, Livermore, over green Altamont Pass (dotted with cows and windmills), and into the smoggy Central Valley. We traveled the old Southern Pacific route alongside Golden State Highway (99) via Modesto, Merced, Fresno, and Bakersfield. Fruit and nut orchards stocked with beehives were in pink-and-white bloom. The human landscape was a messy mix of truck stops, motels, gas stations, taco wagons, and junkyards. The real visual treats began as we climbed up the grade and around the Caliente horseshoe bend to the Tehachapi loop, where the tracks corkscrew 360 degrees. On a long freight train, the engineer can look down and see the tail end of his train disappearing into a tunnel that he is passing above. Photographers affectionately known in the railbuff community as "foamers" appeared at various spots along this line, taking pictures of our train negotiating these dramatic curves through the mountains. As the sunlight faded, we rolled past Mojave, with its high-desert boneyard airport full of parked jetliners, and passed Palmdale and Lancaster on our way into Soledad Canyon, and finally across the San Fernando Valley toward our final destination, grand old Union Station in Los Angeles. Our "train crew" stayed overnight at nearby Metro Plaza Hotel (next to Olvera Street), and in the morning returned to Union Station for the ride home on the beautiful coast route. Along the way, we saw miles and miles of fields planted with broccoli and strawberries. A huge, orange sunset greeted us as we passed Elkhorn Slough and Moss Landing. Arriving in the Bay Area, we left the train and gladly breathed the clean, cool air. If you are interested in Amtrak detours or regular runs or private trains, register at [amtrak.com](http://amtrak.com) and explore sites like [trainorders.com](http://trainorders.com) and publications like *Trains* magazine.

### MORI POINT MENACE

Message from a concerned citizen: "To all of you who enjoy this beautiful town's outdoor treasures by biking, hiking, walking the dog, surfing, or just strolling the beach: How many times have you been forced to go another way, or have your pet attacked by an off-leash aggressive dog, or been screamed at by some disrespectful people for commenting about the leash law? There was a severe example of this recently at Mori Point. A woman walking her dog on leash was accosted by four young men who screamed obscenities at her, threatened her small dog with their large off-leash pit bull, and laughed at this woman's terror. After I intervened, which caused them to turn their wrath away from the woman and onto me, she had a chance to escape down the stairs. These guys came after me, forcing me to back down the trail and run for safety. Rather than confront such bullies, call Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) and report these situations. The direct line to the park ranger dispatch line is 415-561-5505. The ranger in charge of our area is Officer Durham and his direct line is 415-561-5190. Instead of risking your life and your pet's life, call these numbers and report what is going on. Try safely to get good descriptions or pictures so we can help make our town safer for all of us."

### SPINNING WHEEL

Alan Wald writes: "Pacifica Riptide reader Dan Underhill informed me of Urban Fauna in San Francisco, which specializes in spinning wheels, and I received two local responses from your Pacifica Tribune column. So thanks to your help, I won't be 'spinning my wheels' about this machine anymore."

### SWAMI SEZ

"My choice early in life was either to be a piano player in a whorehouse or a politician. And to tell the truth, there's hardly any difference." (Harry S Truman, 33rd President of the United States)

### WASTING AWAY IN MAYBURRITOVILLE

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