

Laguna Beach, June, 2007

Sweltering

For some time I have wanted a southern California beach vacation in order to combine the trip with visiting Mother in Redlands. The best ocean front timeshare resort I could find was Laguna Surf, nearby the main beach in Laguna Beach. Their timeshare weeks are selling as low as \$6,000, but before taking such a big step, we arranged for a week, the first week in June.



In July of 1994 we stayed in Laguna Beach for a few days. It was a brief stay but a lot of family (Dad and Mother, Evan, Jack and Anne, and James and Anne) came to Laguna during that visit to share a little sun and surf.

Laguna Beach boasts a unique charm: steep cliffs, water-etched, crown-shaped coves, rolling hills, and deep canyons surrounding a small, flat beach area. It lacks a fishing pier,

although it had one in South Laguna until it was damaged beyond repair a few years ago.

Laguna Surf sits on a seaside cliff about three blocks south of the main beach and center of town. In the town we found a farmers market on Saturday, our first day. We bought a lot of great, fresh-looking vegetables and fruit. In fact, they lasted all week and we only went out for a meal twice. Plus Nancy cooked dinner three nights for friends and family.

Cars and people fill Laguna's streets and sidewalks so it takes longer than usual to get around. In the middle of a weekday morning, cars can be lined up for 2 or 3 blocks.

Tide pools (see right photo) have made Laguna Beach famous. As the tide dissipates, fish, shells, and



little tide pool creatures remain behind to enjoy a little quiet. The pools have been declared a protected area so people are not supposed to take anything out of the pools.

We enjoyed watching the pelicans soaring with the cliff-induced thermal and wind updrafts along the shore. These huge birds would often soar in a straight line of as many as fifteen to twenty-five lined up one behind the other.



The winding sidewalks along the beach are interspersed with artistic benches and beautiful flower gardens. One flowerbed (below) has been adopted by a bunny rabbit that dug a little hole to rest his body in while I snapped pictures of him.



Exactly two years ago 20 homes slide down the Bluebird Canyon hillside immediately behind the town center of Laguna Beach. The picture below of the basketball game shows the mudslide in the background.



Seven years earlier in 1998 major mudslides also damaged even more of Laguna's hillside homes. At that time even some oceanfront homes were damaged by a small-scale tsunami that created 10 foot high water levels. This picture shows the remains on a beachfront lot. The large cement blocks have been painted to liven up the mood and to pretend that it never happened.



Laguna was spawned by Hollywood celebrities like Betty Davis, Charlie Chaplin and John Steinbeck seeking cool summer breezes in a remote oceanside setting. Artists then discovered the beauty and moved down in droves as did the likes of Judy Garland and Ozzie and Harriet Nelson. Now Laguna Beach boasts that it houses Bette Middler and Diane Keaton and their families. The television show "Laguna

Beach” has given the town a negative, superficial image. But if you count the people that come in just for the day, the town has a very diverse cross-section of Southern California.

For a long time the wealthy folk of Laguna Beach have been buying up property so that nothing else could be built on it. Now the city of Laguna Beach is hemmed in by mountains and private property with no building rights. This means that Laguna Beach can not grow beyond its 23,000 households, unless people built on the side of cliffs. And so the town properties continue to go up in value but go down the hills. They call these houses cliff hangers, which would be funny if they could get insurance for them.

In Laguna Beach the average house is selling for 1.5 million, and that is 20% below last year’s inflated values. Also in nearby Newport Beach little ocean-front houses sell for 4.5 million on up, and that is for a 45 foot wide lot. Tiny houses on tiny lots several blocks from the ocean sometimes sell for 15 million. The streets of Newport Beach are dominated by luxury cars, bicycles, and Segways. Newport Beach harbor is the largest recreation port in California with 9,000 boats. Boats are a magnet for Newport Beach but it doesn’t hurt that John Wayne and Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall called it home.

For the first few days of our vacation it was cold and cloudy, so we drove five to ten miles inland to San Juan Capistrano, where it was sunny and very pleasant. The city is famous for San Juan Capistrano Mission, the oldest European building site in California.

The Mission is also famous for cliff swallows. At one time thousands of cliff swallows descended on the Mission area in March, raised their babies, and left in October for South America. Now with loss of wetlands and vegetation to construction, few swallows return to the town. In fact we only saw a couple of them in the distance. Ironically we have a lot more swallows at home trying to nest in the boat canopy.



The Mission buildings and grounds



are huge and decorated with beautiful trees, plants, and flowers, as you can see in the photo above. We enjoyed walking around taking pictures of the flowers. We also found that the koi liked their pictures taken (see left). The Mission has several ponds with large koi about 12 to 18 inches long. Koi are a variation on carp and have been imported from Japan where they are very popular and respected.

From there we drove another 10 miles inland to Casper Wilderness Park, the largest park in Orange County. The park's vegetation is a strange mixture of desert scrub bushes and small green bushes and trees. We saw lots of birds but no wild animals. Here is a picture of a California Thrasher, which we found there. It has a distinctive curved beak (see photo).



Pier.

We arranged to meet Paula (Ron's niece) and her boyfriend, Mark, at San Clemente's main beach for dinner one evening. They live in San Diego, so San Clemente was about half way for each of us. San Clemente is a lot like Laguna Beach with its cliffs, rolling hills, and expensive homes just behind the beach. But San Clemente has the Amtrak rail line following the coast through the town, as you can see in the photo from the San Clemente

The town is famous for being the "West Coast White House" during Nixon's term of office. We had a very pleasant dinner in Fisherman's Wharf at the base of the fishing pier. It was fun to meet Mark, and here is a photo of Paula and Mark.





On our last full day in Laguna we drove up the coast about 10 miles to Newport Beach for a Segway Tour on Balboa Peninsula. We were the only ones on the tour, so we didn't have to wait for anyone. It took about 15 minutes for us to feel quite comfortable with the machine. To accelerate, decelerate, and go left or right you just lean your body in that direction. It has four gyroscopes in it

to help stabilize you. The transport device can go up to 12 miles per hour. I was surprised how much fun it was to ride the Segway. I felt like it was skiing or water skiing because you can lean into fast turns, swing from side to side.

The Upper Newport Bay Nature Preserve, which sits on the border of Newport Beach with Irvine, is a very large remote area nestled between major suburbs. The marsh-like area attracts 35,000 birds in winter and provides a home to a bobcat family year round. We found a lot of cactus in addition to rabbits, squirrels and a great egret. The egret on the right was hunting in the grass until I got a few feet away, at which time it flew off.



Less than five miles away, the Sherman Library and Garden sits on a busy street in Newport Beach. It offers a lovely little garden with all kinds of flowers, cacti and tropical plants plus a library and restaurant. A private garden that only costs \$3 to get in, it is a great place for a quiet lunch. We took loads of pictures. Here is one with a happy bee. On the next page are three more flower-with-bee pictures but all of different types of cactus flowers.



The flower immediately above is a very large epithelium orchid cactus. All of the others are tiny or small cactus flowers, incidentally with a bee or two working hard to pollinate.

Before leaving we drove up to Colton to visit Mother, Rosalie, and Bob one more time. They all seem to be in good health despite Rosalie and Bob working very hard and Mother nearing her 95th birthday. Here is a picture of Bob, Rosalie, Mother, and me.

Laguna Beach waterfront seemed like a little piece of paradise before we spent an entire week there. Now in retrospect, it doesn't necessarily seem like the perfect place to settle



down forever. For one thing it lacks a fishing wharf and flat sidewalks to walk or ride segways. And there are many less crowded but nice waterfront towns in this world. So, for now we're not going to buy a timesharing week in Laguna Beach. But we will go back if only to sit on the beach or lunch at Hotel Laguna.

PS: Some of these photos were taken by Nancy.