

Back in Time California's Pacific Coast Highway-Highway One

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Back in Time

California's Pacific Coast Highway-Highway One

By Rickie Longfellow

Highway One follows the Pacific coastline from Baja to the top of the Olympic Peninsula. The most scenic is the 139 miles from Monterey to Morro Bay near San Luis Obispo.

John L.D. Roberts, M.D., from New York founded the town of Seaside in 1887 on land he had purchased from an uncle. Subsequently, he became postmaster, planner and county supervisor as well as a rural country doctor who visited patients on horseback. He dreamed of a road that would take him from his home in Monterey quickly to patients in need. One day a shipwreck required Dr. Roberts to ride to Point Sur, taking him nearly four hours to reach Point Sur to care for the injured. He recognized the need for a road and photographed the land between San Simeon and Carmel and has been credited with being the first surveyor of this rocky stretch of coast.

Construction on Highway One began in 1919. Initial estimates came in at \$1.5 million. Federal funds were appropriated and in 1921 voters approved additional state funds. San Quentin Prison set up three temporary prison camps to provide the labor for the road. One was set up by Little Sur River, one at Kirk Creek and later one was established at Anderson Creek. Inmates were paid 35 cents per day and their prison sentences reduced in return for their hard work. Locals like John Steinbeck also worked on the road.

Seventy thousand pounds of dynamite blasted through the granite, marble and sandstone of the rugged terrain and lime was smelted for making concrete. The heaviest construction was in the 65-mile section between Spruce Creek and the area north of San Simeon. More than 10 million cubic yards of rock was blown away. In 1945, work crews found some of the original dynamite sticks under a section of the road. Although the construction was essential, much devastation was caused by dynamiting and later bulldozing and scars and subsequent repairs are visible.

From the 33 bridges constructed with Highway One comes the famous Bixby Rainbow Bridge at Big Sur that we know from automobile commercials. Eight hundred twenty-five trucks brought in 6,600 cubic yards of concrete and 600,000 pounds of reinforcing steel. The rainbow arch was first formed with 300,000 board feet of Douglas fir.

Maintenance, like all roads, is ongoing. In the 80-year life span of the Pacific Coast Highway the most damage was from landslides. Winter storms cause erosion, resulting in the closing of the highway for extended periods. But when spring comes the road opens and once again tourists and natives alike enjoy the scenic drive.

The Pacific Coast Highway provides the opportunity to visit some of California's best tourist spots. British sailor, Jack Swain, built California's First Theatre in Monterey in 1847. It was intended as a boarding house and saloon, however the first play was performed there in early 1848. Today it remains a popular playhouse. Fisherman's Wharf and Steinbeck's Cannery Row are must-sees, although the canneries are selling souvenirs rather than sardines. Fort Ord, a former U.S. Army base now houses California State University at Monterey Bay. Founded as a cavalry post in 1917, it became a major training post during World War II. Most recently, Fort Ord was home to the 7th Infantry Division until 1993. The post's airfield was turned over to the city of Marina. At beautiful Carmel-by-the-Sea, Clint Eastwood's Hog's Breath Inn is a great break before touring San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo Mission or Carmel Mission. Here at the foot of the Main Altar of Basilica rest the remains of Padre Junipero Serra, known as the Apostle of California. The treasure hunter tourist who loves scuba diving can climb down into Jade Cove, where a cave is home to naturally polished jade. Pieces of small jade may be found throughout the cove. Point Lobos State Reserve offers nature trails

to China Cove, noisy Sea Lion Point and Cypress Grove. For a fee tourists can take the 17-mile drive to famous Pebble Beach.

Further south, surf and ocean views are breathtaking on one side with groves of the mysterious twisted and bent Cypress trees on the other. San Antonio de Padua Mission is located at Fort Hunter Liggett. Cayucos, between the Pacific Ocean and the rolling hillsides of open ranchland, is a quiet getaway. Morro Bay was discovered by Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in 1512. The town of Morro Bay was founded by Franklin Riley in 1870. It's a breeding area for Peregrine Falcons, often seen flying in the area. San Luis Obispo is called the start of the Big Sur coastline. SLO, as locals call it, has a delightful downtown with great dining, shops and nightlife, arts center; Mission Plaza, historical walking tours, Children's Museum, world-class performing arts center and wine country tours. At nearby San Simeon, the 115-room Hearst Castle, high in the Santa Lucia Mountains, overlooks the ocean. The lavish home of William Randolph Hearst became a state monument in 1958 and one of the most popular tourist attractions in California. Hearst owned a number of major newspapers and magazines, along with several radio stations and movie companies. Construction on the castle began in 1919, the same year that construction on Highway One began, and ironically the castle cost as much to build as the highway.

The construction of the Pacific Coast Highway provided the means for reaching these fine sights and many others despite some time delays due to coastal weather, landslides and engineering obstacles. The initial \$1.5 million estimate to build Highway One became \$10 million nineteen years later, but it remains a historian's and tourist's dream.
