

the reactor

By Paul Azevedo



San Pedro rock, that ship's prow that juts into the storm tide at the southern end of Shelter cove, thrills me every time I see it.

I've seen it thousands of times in the 12 years I've lived in Pacifica, and never have I looked at that proud sculpture without exulting just a bit.

IT'S JAGGED, it's rugged, it's moody, it's arrogant—if you can say those things about something inanimate.

But the rock does live. It responds to weather. It appears almost soft in a sunny haze. It's gray and somber in a wet, high fog. It shines proudly white in a bright sun. It changes every day and every hour.

It guards our southern bastion, as Mussel rock guards our northern gate. No city ever had two finer portals. The guardian has been called San Pedro Rock, Pedro Rock, Schumacher Rock. That last name came about in a light-hearted moment at a City Council meeting several years ago. I'm not sure whether they were honoring or kidding former mayor and councilman Gerry Schumacher.

It's an enemy to the ships that misjudge it or lose power near it, but it's a landmark to thousands of others who pass by.

PERHAPS even gray whales have it engraved on their memories to guide them as they glide by on their way to Scammon's Lagoon in Baja from their arctic feeding grounds.

Birds which never show their beaks inland put down on Pedro Rock (and streak it with their guano).

In the rolling waters around it, abalone cling to the rocks and grow large. Longtime skin divers tell me that 25 years ago the water was bright and clear, but civilization and sewer outfalls have turned it turbid.

Due north from Pedro rock, the next landfall is Marin. From San Francisco south, Pedro rock is the westernmost part of North America. As the crow flies, the next landfall south is the Antarctic continent.

PEDRO ROCK and its tough twin, Mussel rock, have changed little since they were seen by Portola. They are both the children of great faults, the Pilarcitos and the San Andreas — the result of thousands of earthquakes pushing, pushing, ever pushing them out to sea.

Long after the fishing pier has been beaten into the ocean, Pedro Rock will still be there. If we have done right by Pedro Rock and the rest of mother earth, perhaps we will be, too.