

the reactor

By Paul Azevedo



Pacifica has one of the longest shorelines for its population of any California city. That shore is very vulnerable to tampering.

Anything which is done along the shore can change wave patterns in ways very difficult to control. The devastating results can be seen any day. Take a 30 minute drive to just south of Princeton, where a section of the old Coast highway is no longer in use. Most of it has been washed away. The remainder resembles Mesas in Colorado, or perhaps

beached miniature aircraft carriers.

Most people who see these remnants think that they are caused by acts of God, which is what we call happenings beyond man's control.

NOT SO! This major erosion was manmade. In fact, if I wanted to take the time, I could do some research and name those responsible.

When I was a boy, my family lived in Half Moon Bay. It lasted four days. I spent one day at a Half Moon Bay grammar school, and then my Dad changed jobs, and I didn't live in San Mateo county again for 21 years. But in those four days, we drove over the old coast highway, and if I had been able to foretell the future, I would have paid more attention as we drove where the waves beat today.

FRANCIS SHEPARD,
a UC oceanographer,

says: "In 1959 and 1960, a jetty was constructed from Pillar Point, and another breakwater was extended from the shore at El Granada...to develop a small-boat harbor. This was followed by serious erosion of the coastal road and a bridge was destroyed. Waves from the west strike the shore directly south of the breakwater, and eroded sand is shifted southeastward, but now there is no replenishment because of the jetty and the breakwater. Waves reflected from the jetty add to the erosion."

The waves we watch breaking against Half Moon Bay, or the Pacifica fishing pier, were "powered" by storms blowing up in the gulf of Alaska or winds whirling out of the highlands of Antarctica. The swells which work their way across the ocean to die on our shore are energized by the same winds which cause breakers on Easter Island or Bora Bora.

Though their fetch stretches over thousands of miles, when men change the ocean's edge, it makes a lot of difference in the way these well-traveled swells affect our lives.