

the reactor

By Paul Azevedo



Some cities are as flat as a pan and as dull as dishwater. I think the two conditions are related.

It's a lot easier to lay out a city on the flat. (A mapmaker would say "flat on the flat.") It's easier and more direct to get around. Your blocks are square. Your streets are straight. Your views are mainly of sky and clouds.

San Francisco has a lot of straight streets in its hills. Some nutty surveyor!

PACIFICA, in its 12½ square miles, has a fascinating accumulation

of canyons and valleys, ridges and mountains. The highest mountain in sight, Montara mountain, is out of the city limits, 1900 feet high, rising from the edge of the sea.

Some of the valleys and canyons have names, present and past. What we now call Park Pacifica was called, 100 years ago, the Santa Clara valley. What we now call Sharp Park golf course, 100 years ago was called the Salt Lake valley. That's a translation of "Laguna Salada," and we have reverted to that

Spanish name for the lake and the school district.

AS YOU stand in the parking lot of Oceana high of a summer night, you see the sparkling street lights, (not so many as last year) of Carmel canyon below. The long depression points like a finger back toward Skyline.

Just north is the deep, earthquake created slash of Milagra canyon, and its mirror image, Milagra ridge. For every canyon must have its ridge, every hill its valley or plain.

SOUTH of Carmel canyon is Brighton canyon, and between the two of them and on the coastal terrace in front of them, the old town of Sharp Park spreads out to face the wind and the waves of the ocean front.

Calera canyon is drained by Calera creek, the name a reference to the limestone which was quarried there in 1776.

Valleamar, Pacifica's own arboretum, is in the Calera valley.

ROCKAWAY CANYON is the narrow valley east of Point Rockaway, the Point a name not much used these days but important to the Ocean Shore Railway.

These days when you say Rockaway, the word "restaurants" comes into the conversation at some point or other.

THE SPACIOUS San Pedro valley, defined on the south by the foothills of Montara mountain and on the north by the ridges whose western end is Point Rockaway, extends back a couple of miles and then loses itself in a maze of smaller canyons and chapparel covered draws and ravines in the hills.

Some of these meaning extensions are built up, and today we would say "Sun Valley," Terra Nova, Willowbrook estates, etc.

Pedro Point is a stubby finger pointing out to sea. Residential housing wanders over its north slope rather haphazardly, befitting its beginning as a place of summer homes, rather like an old European city that started as a village.

Driving our ridges and valleys can be a nuisance. Streets and highways are expensive. Delivering the Tribune to homes is an adventure.

Our streets eat clutches for breakfast and brakes for dinner, they are great for skateboards if you don't get killed, and the natural divisions which the hills create will never cease to affect the way we look at the world.

Sure beats Des Moines.

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