

The Reactor

by Paul Azevedo



Can one of you history buffs tell me whether San Pedro Bay was ever a dog hole? Was Point San Pedro used by dog-barking navigators?

Dog holes and dog-barking navigators are both extinct, done in by roads, radar, and radio. But for 50 or 60 years they were an important part of life in California.

Dog holes were places where no self-respecting rowboat had any business landing, but where skilled (and gutsy) crews brought their little cargo ships in close enough to put off and take on cargo from cables run out into the ocean. The traffic was two-way. The isolated families at places like Anchor Bay and Point Arena got their necessities and sold their produce. Cows, logs, flour, vegetables, all went up and down the slings and winches.

Some of those same little ships were skippered by dog-barking navigators, men who had traveled up and down the coast from Santa Cruz to Eureka for years.

They didn't have the training to navigate by the stars, they didn't have radar and radio beacons to guide them, so it was said that they sailed from headland to headland, keeping track of their location by the barking of dogs on the isolated ranches along the coast.

"That's the Tobin collie. We're off Point San Pedro."
"Sounds like the Comerford's big german shepherd. Must be getting near Mussel rock."

Peter B. Kyne was the writer who told me about dog-barking navigators. He was a California author who wrote in the period before and after the first world war.

Kyne could write humorously, as in the Cappy Ricks stories, where a lovable old curmudgeon got the best of handsome hero Matt Peasley. Then there was the memorable "Valley of the Giants," delineating a fight to save a small gem of redwood grove from the loggers who wanted to push a railroad through.

It was all naive by today's standards and the love story woven into it was mushy by any standards, today's or yesterday's.

But it was fun, and it gives background about a California that was already dying when Kyne wrote about it 60 years ago.

The little lumber schooners and coasters of that day are as obsolete and forgotten as the Manila Galleon that sighted land at Cape Mendocino, then followed our coast all the way to Acapulco.

The Farallones were much more real and important to the early navigators than the non-existent San Francisco Bay or the shadowy bay of Monterey. Only Drake landed, somewhere along the coast. Maybe he really landed at San Pedro beach. I saw a shiny yellow chunk of brass sticking out of the sand near the Wander Inn site the other day. Do you suppose...?

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