



Paul Azevedo

The Reactor

A Much Maligned Mountain

About 18 years ago, if my memory is right, a group of misguided persons who had banded together as the Pacifica Sportsmen's Club decided they needed a rifle range.

With a devil-may-care lack of concern for permits and such, they literally and figuratively bulldozed their way up the side of Montara Mountain to a plateau area which they had purchased. They scraped a large area bare preparing it for their range. Then people found out what they were doing.

The project came to a screeching halt, and the sportsmen were made to put things a bit back in order, restore the road as much as possible to its natural condition, and give up the idea of shooting on the mountain. The property is now in other hands.

About eight years ago, in 1976, I scrambled up the mountain with my kids and found the scar after 10 years still a raw gash on the mountain. The thin top soil had been scraped down to sterile shale on which almost nothing was growing.

I took pictures of my kids in the gullies and wrote a column for the Tribune about this desecration of the fragile mountain.

You can see signs of the scar yet from some parts of Linda Mar. From the valley it appears to be slowly healing, with trees and green cutting down on the ugliness. However, the part visible from the valley was only a small part of the damage, as I knew from my 1976 visit.

When I hiked up the mountain in '76, there were a few parts where I followed what I can only describe as deer trails, narrow paths arched with chaparral three or four feet off the ground, the kind of brush that has to be shoved aside.

On a recent Sunday my eldest son Mike and I decided on the spur of the moment to go see what's happened to the scar lately. Mike was 13 on our previous trip. Now he's 21. Since we had done it before, there seemed no reason why it couldn't be done again.

That was a mistake. In the past eight years the mountain has grown up. The brush is much thicker. The trails are overgrown. What used to be man trails are rabbit trails, and the rabbit trails are woodrat runs.

Scrub oak has blown down. Manzanita and poison oak have grown up and out to fill open spaces. The mountain has become almost impenetrable. Blackberries snake across the trails.

By the time we got to the scar, our hands were scratched and cut. A belt I was wearing disintegrated.

As for the scar, which on my previous visit I compared to the mountains of the moon, part of it has filled in with pampas grass, an otherwise unusual plant on most of the mountain. The visible scar, planted with trees is losing its barren look.

But a large part of the area, 18 years after its rape, shows little sign of recovery. A few scattered plants struggle to grow but for the most part it's still bare shale, a few acres of desolation, a message that the mountain is a delicate and fragile place not meant for abuse. As for the road, it is mostly gone. In some places I could find no trace, which was unfortunate, since it took us almost as long to get down as to climb up.

1-25-84