

# The Reactor

2-23  
94



Paul Azevedo

## Big or small, I love 'em all

I confess it. I love superlatives. All my life, I've wanted to see unique events, creatures, plants, manmade and natural phenomena, witness the largest, the smallest, the tallest, the *unusualest*.

When I had the chance I visited the Empire State Building. When I was in D.C., I walked up the Washington Monument, then walked down. I visited the tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington. I climbed the Bunker Hill Monument in Boston. I rode the unique endless moving chain of vertical coffins in Frankfurt's I.G. Farben building. They're known as "Pater Nosters," probably because people have been known to pray loudly while on board. I thoroughly enjoyed Munich's Oktoberfest, even though I didn't drink the beer.

I once slept inside the medieval wall of the old city of Nürnberg. (No problem, it's now a hotel.) I took advantage of the opportunity to visit

the Smithsonian in Washington and the American Museum of Natural History in New York. I have been to the Superga in Torino, heard the bells of St. Peter's at dusk, and circled on foot the border of an entire nation, the 108 acre Vatican City.

While I would recommend any of these things to you should they strike your fancy and you have the time and money to accomplish them, some things you can do much closer to home. The largest wild mammal to spend portions of his life on the North American continent is the Northern Elephant Seal, which currently breeds on the mainland only within the borders of San Mateo County and elsewhere on a few islands. Año Nuevo island a half mile offshore may be the erosional remnant of the place where Drake landed in 1579.

Within a day's drive of Pacifica are the tallest trees in the world, the largest trees in the world, and the oldest trees in the world. Of course

those are the coast Redwoods, the Sierra Redwoods, and the Bristlecone pine. Without leaving Pacifica you can see evidence of one of the world's longest and most active earthquake faults, see where San Francisco Bay was discovered, enjoy a spectacular view of thousands of square miles, the center of a circle more than 60 miles in diameter. Within 100 miles of Pacifica you can visit a Miwok Indian village, review the life work of the Plant Wizard Luther Burbank, and get involved with California history at the Bancroft library in Berkeley. Within 50 miles you can find the world center of an industry that has changed our lives beyond recall. As far as I know the only prophet who correctly predicted the miniaturization revolution that has brought us transistors, computers and the rest of the magnetic revolution was cartoon cop Dick Tracy and his wrist radio. If life seems dull, it's only because we ignore the spectacular and allow ourselves to be bored by the fantastic. Take a weekend off. Go find a superlative. They're all around us. Go north to find tallest trees. Go east to find biggest or oldest trees, or spectacular waterfalls, or granite cliffs. Go south to find Elephant Seals or man made miniatures. Wonders surround us.