

Geology

I also talked with Bob Andrews, an oceanographer specializing in geology who is with the Naval Post Graduate School in Monterey, and he sprang a fascinating aspect of the canyon on me — how it affected the great underground river and ultimately how it may affect coastal agriculture.

Rain water from the Paso Robles watershed soaks into an underground formation called "aquifer," layers of sand and gravel which is protected from above and below by rock layers. These layers are some 400 to 800 feet deep.

This underground river, or rivers, flows some 100 miles on a slope to the Salinas Valley and Santa Cruz County and out into the Monterey Bay, where it is interrupted by the walls of the canyon and thus exposed to seawater.

As deep wells suck up this water into the Salinas Valley, salt water is being drawn from the canyon to the surface. It may become a future problem.

I also talked with Brook Antrim, a graduate student at the Moss Landing Marine Lab, about strange creatures brought up from the terribly deep canyon.

There is the Dagger Tooth, a sail fish with super huge teeth.

There is the eelpout — long eel-like body surrounded by a continuous fin. It has a snake-like head with eyes that protrude on top and forward.

There is the ribbon fish, big and thin as a ribbon with fins around its length. A reproduction hangs in the Santa Cruz museum.

But the real Halloween prize goes to the "Blob." Antrim described it thusly: a fish with a great bulbous, toad-like head, very fleshy and flabby; a great wide mouth and then a skinny little body that trails out behind. It has very fleshy, flabby fins.

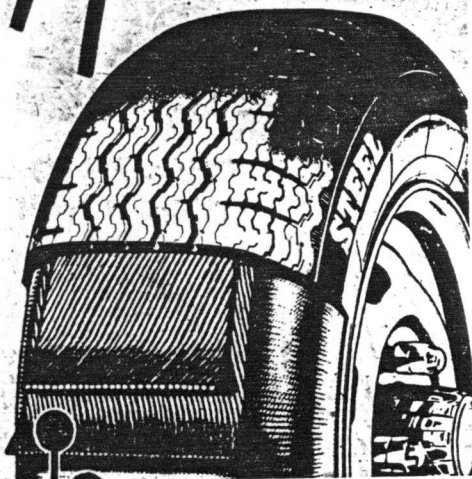
They live at around 3000 feet. So don't dive too deep!

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Out there, in that blue-green bay — see, you can spot the general area off Capitola, we have our own Grand Canyon.

Down, down and down; deep, deep and dark and mysterious and cold and so vast, is the Monterey Canyon.

It is as deep and as wide as the Grand Canyon and extends about 150 miles to sea.

At one point, it is etched deep into the earth right up to the end of the Moss Landing pier. In fact, says David Shonman, a marine biologist at Monterey Peninsula College, the former end of the pier fell off into the canyon a few years ago. I had heard that he was teaching a short course on the canyon for the U.C. Extension program and sought him out for a chat.

Because one kind of environment acts upon another to produce yet another, the canyon makes this a unique area.

Moss Landing is at the head, but there is a narrow branch that reaches out toward Carmel and another that ends within six miles of Capitola.

Quickly, the walls plunge steeply into giant canyons that fall to two miles in places below the surface of the bay and spreads out in a massive range of mountains that rise to 6000 feet above the ocean floor.

"If the Bay were to be drained, it surely would be designated a national park," said Shonman.

There is often a fog cloud over the canyon area of the bay, for millions of gallons of cold water well up from the dark deep and come in contact with the warm, moist air that sweeps in from the northwest in the summer and it makes fog. It is then blown toward Monterey, which is why it is foggiest there than in Santa Cruz.

Much of this, now, cold, moist air and fog is sucked into the Salinas Valley, making the climate there superb for agriculture.

Another thing. As the water pushes upward from the canyon floor, it brings up tons of delicious food which draw surface fish, which in turn draws the commercial fishermen.

Shonman, who holds a masters in his field and who works in the oyster hatchery at Moss Landing during the summer, said there is a controversy over the power that formed the canyon.

At one time the Golden Gate may have been located in Moss Landing.

"Most scientists favor the theory that the outlet for water drainage from the great central valley was through this area. The delta water drained into what is now San Francisco Bay, but the Golden Gate gap was not open, so the water drained southward through the Santa Clara Valley and along the base of the Santa Cruz Mountains to the Pajaro Gap and on out the Elkhorn Slough," he said.

What a gigantic river that must have been, if this is the case. When the water broke through the present Golden Gate, a new water route was established.

Shonman surmises that when the first part of the canyon was cut, the bay floor was solid ground, a part of the land system.