

## The Mystery Spot

*By Sharon Yamanaka*

The Mystery Spot has been a local Santa Cruz tourist attraction since 1940. During its heyday the Mystery Spot was in *Life Magazine* (Nov. 15, 1948). It was also featured on Art Baker's television show, *You Asked For It*. According to the official version it was discovered in 1939 when George Prather bought the land to build a summer cabin. In surveying the parcel, he found the measurements off by as much as 30 degrees and the compass refused to point in the correct direction. He went ahead with his plans and a year and a half later, the cabin slid downhill into a stand of redwoods.

There have been various explanations for the phenomenon. In 1943, H. G. Hubbard stated in the 39th Report of the State Mineralogist that the phenomenon is "a marked refraction of light rays within a small area," caused by the density of differential between air and carbon dioxide gas and the normal atmosphere of the region. He also disclosed that the carbon dioxide seeped up through fissures attributed to an earthquake or landslide.

Donald Buchanan, a guide at the Mystery Spot, explained it as caused by "a meteor which fell in ancient days and left a magic circle." He further informed that "there is an electromagnetic flux coming down this hill" and "birds and animals won't live here because they're afraid of the force."

The Oregon Vortex, a similar site to the Mystery Spot, has been said to be caused by a deposit of gravity field affecting rock. Some effects are: compasses refuse to work, light is distorted, electricity is influenced, objects are pulled toward the center of the area and paper scraps thrown up into the air tend to spiral as they fall. Other similar sites include: Beulah, Colorado at Camp Burch; Lake Wales, Florida at Spook Hill; Piercy, California on Confusion Hill; and on Snowdon Mountain in North Wales, United Kingdom.

UC Berkeley psychology professor Arthur Shimamura and associate psychology professor William Prinzmetal reported at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in 1998 that Mystery Spot is "a perceptual illusion", where gravity doesn't change, "what changes is your visual environment. Everything is tilted." In their research they found that when peoples' bodies are tilted, the illusion created by being in a tilted room is magnified as much as threefold. Prinzmetal added, "Saying it's a visual illusion doesn't detract from the amazing experience of going there...it's still very strange."

## Sources

- *Life*, 11/15/48, pp. 22,23 and 25.
- *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, 8/8, 1985.
- *Mid County Post* 5/16-5/29/95.
- *San Jose Mercury*, 3/25/84, 8/15/98.
- Leaflet from Oregon Vertical File, stamped 3/6/69, *Gravity Control - Secret of the Saucers*, supplied by So California Answering Network (SCAN)

*The content of this article is the responsibility of the individual author. It is the Library's intent to provide accurate local history information. However, it is not possible for the Library to completely verify the accuracy of individual articles obtained from a variety of sources. If you believe that factual statements in a local history article are incorrect and can provide documentation, please contact the Webmaster.*