

The harbor that turns itself into a lake

By BILL AKERS

Over the past several years, boat owners at Santa Cruz harbor have become resigned to the fact that sailing is not a year-round sport.

And the fishermen berthed there have learned that when the salmon season opens, they may be able to go fishing, and then again, they may not.

The problem in Santa Cruz is that for about nine months out of the year the tenants have a harbor, and for the other three they have a lake. When winter comes, you can be sure that stories about Santa Cruz harbor sanding up are not far behind. It happens with a regularity matched only by the swallows' return to Capistrano.

This year has been an exception only in the severity of the problem. Instead of three months, the boats have been harbor-bound for nearly 4½ months, since Dec. 19 when a massive storm filled the channel as it had never been filled before. Only now have a few of the smaller boats been able to get out through a watery corridor that was six feet deep at zero tide on Monday of this week. And that was accomplished only after several weeks of dredging during which the dredger fought a losing battle against the flood of sand.

On top of this, the situation was complicated by the breakdown at Christmas time of the jet pump sand by-pass system, installed by the Corps of Engineers at great expense as an experiment and hoped-for "final solution" to the sanding problem.

Nor did the Corps improve its standing with fishermen by its selection of a dredging firm to clear the channel. The fishermen had nothing against the dredger — the R & D Watson Co. of Carmel — it's just that they thought his equipment was inadequate for the job. They wanted Shellmaker's big dredge back — the one that's been more or less of a fixture in the harbor channel during the early spring months for the past several years.

What the fishermen feared would happen, did happen. When salmon season opened on April 15, a bare half-dozen small boats were able to scoot out at high tide. The more circumspect skippers stayed in port.

And even today, anyone going out or coming in is advised to keep his eye over his shoulder and his hand on his St. Elmo's medal, for the chances of broaching are quite real. The deeper draft sailboats and larger fishing boats find the going even chancier.

When the situation will be resolved for this season is still a matter of conjecture. Work was to have started Tuesday on the repair of the jet pumps, and when the intake pipe is cleared of sand, it will be back in operation.

Santa Cruz has a harbor — nine months of the year. The rest of the time, boat owners must wait impatiently at their expensive berths while efforts are made to open the channel which gets choked up by sand. This year it was worse than ever before. Here's the story.

Between the jet pumps and the dredger, it is hoped there will be an open harbor soon.

As for the long-range solution — they're still relying on the jet pumps for that. "It's worked in other places, and it can be adapted to work here," said Brian Foss, the acting port director. "It's the most cost effective system."

Since it was built in 1964, the Santa Cruz harbor has been the source of a lot of talk and no little controversy.

Carved out of the lower end of Woods Lagoon, the harbor has been called the playground of the rich by its opponents, and a harbor of refuge, base for the fishing industry and an amenity we can all enjoy by its supporters. There is some truth and some exaggeration in all of those claims.

For the first couple of years, things went well at the harbor. There was no shoaling in the channel. But some strange things began to happen.

Before the harbor was built, Seabright Beach, west of the west jetty, was almost non-existent. At high tide, bathers were driven from the beach.

With the construction of the jetty, sand began building on Seabright Beach, until today, it is a wide, beautiful stretch of sand.

And about the same time, Capitola's beach began disappearing, but there have been continued denials that the two events are connected. (Later, Capitola built a breakwater at one end of its beach to capture sand, and the city has a respectable beach of its own once again).

In 1966, the shoaling began, and the channel had to be dredged. It has been a regular occurrence every year since.

No one really knows where the sand is coming from, although there are a few theories. Some of it is coming through the west jetty, which is made of huge boulders and great concrete "jacks" piled on top of each other.

The armchair engineers say the way to solve that problem is to pour concrete in all the open spaces, blocking the flow of water through the jetty. The real engineers say, "Do that, and the waves will pound the jetty to pieces."

The sand is also coming around the end of the jetty, prompting the second-guessers to

say that the Engineers didn't build the jetty far enough out in the first place.

And, the Engineers haven't given up completely on the idea that the surge created by the winter sea storms is pushing the sand in through the front door.

Critics blame the Engineers for the whole mess, saying they should have anticipated the problem. The Engineers say they did, and that the original design included plans for a sand by-pass system, but the harbor district, trying to cut corners, asked it not be built.

Thus, every year since 1966, the harbor has choked up with sand in December or January, and remained closed until March or April. During those months, the boat owners went on paying their berth rental — which is not cheap — and sat on their boats waiting for the dredger to do his work.

In 1972, the Engineers and the district took another tack. They had a dredge built at a cost of \$600,000 which would be a permanent fixture in the channel, picking up the sand on one side and washing it out further down the beach. The district put up one third of the cost.

It was a good idea, only it didn't work, and the dredge was abandoned. The Engineers refunded the district's contribution.

A couple of years ago, the jet pump system was put in on an experimental basis to see if that would do the trick. The idea was to dredge out a crater in the channel, at the end of the pump intake. As the sand filled in the crater, the pumps would suck it up and dump it out further downstream. It seemed to be working fairly well until late December when the intake sanded over and the pumps were overwhelmed and broke down.

Since the dredging began in 1966, the Corps of Engineers has spent about \$2.3 million for dredging. This year, the contract was let for \$172,000, but they have spent \$400,000 and the channel isn't clear yet.

The Engineers say that they had figured on removing 63,000 cubic yards of sand from the channel, but have found the amount is more like 120,000 cubic yards nearly twice what they expected.

Although the real fishing fleet is based at Moss Landing, there are a lot of fishermen at Santa Cruz harbor — day fishermen, mostly — and they're fighting mad over not being able to get out of the harbor. The situation has resulted in some heated meetings between them, district officials and the Corps of Engineers.

Last weekend, Rep. Leon Panetta and Assemblyman Henry Mello met with the Engineers and district officials to try to work something out.

Pleasure boat owners are feeling hostile too, for they, like the fisherman, go on paying their \$1.70 per foot monthly berth rental (\$1.90 per foot for a two-side tie) even though they can't get out of the harbor.

Not only do the district officials have that to contend with, they have some political problems, also.

Because of its unique charter, the district

is governed by a 5-man board made up of appointed members. This is unusual for a tax-levying public agency.

Two members are named by the Santa Cruz city council, two by the county board of supervisors, and the chairman is appointed jointly by the councilmen and supervisors.

Until last year, the board was made up mostly of people with a direct interest in the harbor — boat owners and the like. Last year, after receiving complaints from taxpayers who had to pay the 10-cent ad valorem tax levied by the district, the councilmen and supervisors changed things. Each appointed one of their own to the board, the council selecting Sally DiGirolamo and the supervisors picking Phil Baldwin.

This caused a political storm that hasn't subsided yet. Both Mrs. DiGirolamo and Baldwin said they believed the harbor should be self-supporting, operating without the help of tax money.

Mrs. DiGirolamo also fought to have the facilities at the harbor — restrooms, parking, etc., — opened up to the public because tax money was used to build them. She was partially successful, get the restrooms opened during certain hours of the day.

But the storm created by the appointments resulted, at least in part, in the defeat at the polls of Mrs. DiGirolamo in her bid for re-election to the council. Her spot on the harbor board has not been filled as yet.

The political storm may have also cost the district its port director, for in March, Gerald Barney resigned to take a job at the harbor in Ventura. But he didn't leave before he angrily criticized the council and supervisors for their actions saying of his critics, "I have grown weary of the hip-shot attacks of these fools, buffoons and dilettantes on the 'mismanagement' of the harbor."

Foss took over the job on an acting basis, and has had to contend with the sanding problem since.

He's got another potential firecracker in his hand, for at a meeting of area park and law enforcement officials, studying what to about the expected invasion of tourists this summer, he learned something he hadn't known about before.

Jack Knight, chief of operations for the state Parks and Recreation Department, told Foss during a discussion on the lack of parking near the beaches, that the state had put \$300,000 in general fund money into harbor improvements, on the condition that one-half of the parking on the west side would be available to the public. It is now, and always has been, restricted to use by the boaters.

Foss said Tuesday he suspected that Knight was probably right, but that he hadn't been able to look into it because of the dredging problem.

"I don't know what we'll do if we find that he is correct," Foss said. The present parking is taken up by the boaters, and the Santa Cruz Yacht Club storage takes up a good portion of the open space next to the parking lot, he said, leaving little room to build more parking.

But that's the least of Foss's worries at the moment. He's concerned now about getting the channel cleared and the boaters and fishermen off his back and some steps taken toward a permanent solution of the shoaling problem.

After that he, or whoever is appointed port director, will worry about public parking.

Farmers market shapes

Farmers in the Pajaro Valley and throughout Santa Cruz county are joining forces to establish a farmers market.

The market will operate on Saturdays on the grounds of Live Oak School, 17th Ave. and Capitola St. from June 4 to Oct. 29.

The market will be restricted to farmers selling what they grow, according to Tony Scherer, a local bushberry grower and spokesman for the newly-formed Santa Cruz County Certified Farmers Market, organized in March. There will be no middlemen allowed, he said.

He said the Santa Cruz County Certified

Farmers Market is a non-profit corporation "composed of local farmers and consumers with the purpose of providing a direct marketing outlet for farmers and fresh, quality produce for shoppers."

He said through direct marketing, farmers gain an additional marketing source for their products as well as higher unit prices and cash sales.

On the other hand, he said, fresh, quality produce is made available to consumers at low retail prices.

Farmers interested in reaching Scherer can phone him at 724-2994.