

# Mystery or Not

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CAMERON • STAMPS

*"It's crazy—it's perplexing—it's nature's black magic. That's why it is called the Mystery Spot. The Doubting Thomas who heads for the spot finds himself among the puzzled when he staggers out to regain his sense of balance and perspective."*

**ONE** of the benefits of writing for a visitors publication is that I get to see places and do things that most of the locals miss, forget about or write off as tourist traps. The Mystery Spot is such a place. So when asked to write a piece about it, I was game. I confess that all I knew about the Spot was hearsay or what I'd read on the few billboards you see around town, those signs that read "stranger than fiction—believe it or not."

In order to do the assignment justice, I contacted my crony, Patrick Aloysius Murphy, who has a penchant for the unusual and a knack for simplifying those things that we common folk refer to as bizarre. Murphy unhesitatingly agreed to accompany me: "Let's. Go. For. It."

We approached our subject on a sunny afternoon, following the signs and arrows that lead the mystery seeker out Branciforte Drive and into the Santa Cruz Mountains.

The air was still and the traffic sparse as we followed a narrow road off Branciforte through a forest of redwood and madrone. We pulled our vehicle into a clearing covered with a sheet of asphalt. There before our eyes was the sign, "Entrance to the Mystery Spot." Murphy looked at the sign, then caught my eyes; his voice bellowed with a resounding laugh as he climbed out of the car. Thus our arrival was announced.

The Mystery Spot is located on the lee side of a hill in the Santa Cruz Mountains, less than five miles from town. The dated signs and adjacent gift shop have undoubtedly hosted thousands of visitors since 1940, when the Spot was first opened (discovered?). It is a nostalgic attraction in this day of slick amusement parks.

Managers of the Mystery Spot, the day we went, were William and Louise Hopkins. They met us at the ticket booth out front which had a copy of a 1945 *Life* magazine cover story about the Spot displayed on one wall. We also learned that Art Baker, the original host of television's

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*You Asked For It*, had once featured the Spot. It definitely had had its heyday. William, a pleasant enough gent and ex-geologist from Billings, Montana, would serve as our guide. Louise, on the other hand, prefers to stay put at the ticket window, as she confided to us later: "I don't go near the place; it bugs me."

Our tour began with Hopkins leading us up a trail. As we progressed, he pointed out curious phenomena about the place—such as the way many of the trees lean southward in this peculiar "field of force."

We came to a small cabin which rested against a giant redwood. Apparently the cabin had slid down the hill, coming to a halt at its present location at the foot of the tree. Murphy and I stood

straight but our bodies leaned south as we listened to the spiel. Hopkins showed us a level ramp which jutted out a window from inside the cabin. He placed a golf ball on the ramp and we watched the ball roll off the edge, northward. He explained it like this: "It's as if the force were saying go, go, go." I asked if the level was on the level.

The level was indeed on the level; Murphy and I checked it out carefully. Hopkins offered a theory. He said a meteor had possibly impacted in the hillside centuries ago, but then added, "there's more to it than that."

At this, three visitors from Japan who were also taking the tour giggled, noticeably amused.

Before entering the cockeyed cabin, we were given instructions on how to deal with any dizziness we might experience inside: "Close your eyes, take a deep breath and look away." I looked at Murphy and he answered my glance with one word: "spacy."

What went on inside that dark cabin on the hillside is not altogether explainable. It's as if time, gravity and sound were all turned backward, or forward. When I emerged, to my astonishment, I felt dizzy and light-headed, as if something had been pulling me from the middle of my stomach. I asked Murphy if he felt anything and he said that he felt the same way he does when he's about to "astral project." Hopkins just smiled.

He then demonstrated how eye level drops 15-16 inches here when two people face each other, then exchange positions. He showed us spiralling tree trunks on the hillside. He also noted that birds do not fly in the immediate vicinity. He said, "I wish I knew the answer, but in a way I don't, because if I could figure it out so could others—and then it wouldn't be a mystery anymore."

On normal ground again, Murphy and I repaired to the gift shop, hoping to glean some clues to the Mystery. The shop was full of coon-skin caps, the likes of which I hadn't seen since television's Davy Crockett, another throwback to the past. It appeared that even the gift shop had been unaffected by time. I asked about the caps and the elderly clerk replied: "The Japanese love them; they come in here and buy seven-eight at a time." He said the Spot had been recently featured on the *11 PM Show*, a popular television program in Japan similar to *That's Incredible*.

We walked by the ticket booth on our way out to say goodbye to Louise. Hopkins was off on another tour; they run every half hour. The Spot is open year-round.

"Well, what do you think?" she asked us.

"I can see why you keep it a mystery," I answered, then looked at Murphy. His face was as red as his hair.

I waited until we were leaving the premises before I addressed Murphy, but he was speechless. Finally, he mumbled something about seeds. He said he had an urge to plant some of his wacky weed near the force. He said he wanted to see that Japanese TV program. He said an apple was not equal to the sum of its parts. He drew a coon-skin cap from his backpack and placed it upon his head. I directed our vehicle south, toward the beach.

