

Only the rugged survive along Davenport's coast

First of two articles

THE NORTH COAST. Santa Cruz County's frontier. The last place where you can still get a feeling for how things might have been a century ago. Our local "away" as in getting "away from it all." The land where clothing and building permits are considered optional. Scofflaw country.

I first fell in love with the coast between Santa Cruz and Half Moon Bay in the 1940s while traveling to my grandmother's summer cabin up behind Pescadero, and I try to get back up that way as often as possible. A day spent on the North Coast is a breath of menthol for the spirits. I decided to walk from Davenport to the county line north of Waddell Creek by following, as much as possible, the old coast highway. Nine miles and decades of history.

IT'S A wonderfully drizzly Sunday morning and by the time I reach Mission Street, I have to turn on my windshield wipers. Beyond Western Drive, fog and traffic start to thin. The cars seem to be equally divided between sightseers and road racers headed for San Francisco the "back way." Every other car has a driver with head straining to the left, eager to pass, eager to get going, desperate to prove that yes, Highway 1 is faster. Oblivious of the double yellow line, they leap-frog north, turbo-chargers roaring, weaving in and out, obviously frustrated by the two-lane highway. They think *this* is a bad road? They should have seen it before 1945.

Frustration with travel on this coast began with Portola in 1769. Sweating, growling, cursing, the Spaniards dragged themselves and their mules up and down this endless corduroy of ravines and arroyos. Except for one later expedition, the Spaniards never came back up the coast, preferring the route through the inland valleys to the east. The grumbling continued in 1875 when Nate Ingalls' stage coach pitched and yawed along the coast three days a week, his passengers bumping and swaying in the stage beneath him.

My Dad claims that driving from Santa Cruz to Davenport for Farm Center Meetings (he was one of the county's farm advisors) at night, without headlights, during the blackouts in early 1942 convinced him to join the Navy. He felt safer going to war than driving the coast road at night.

The road up the coast has always

Hindsight



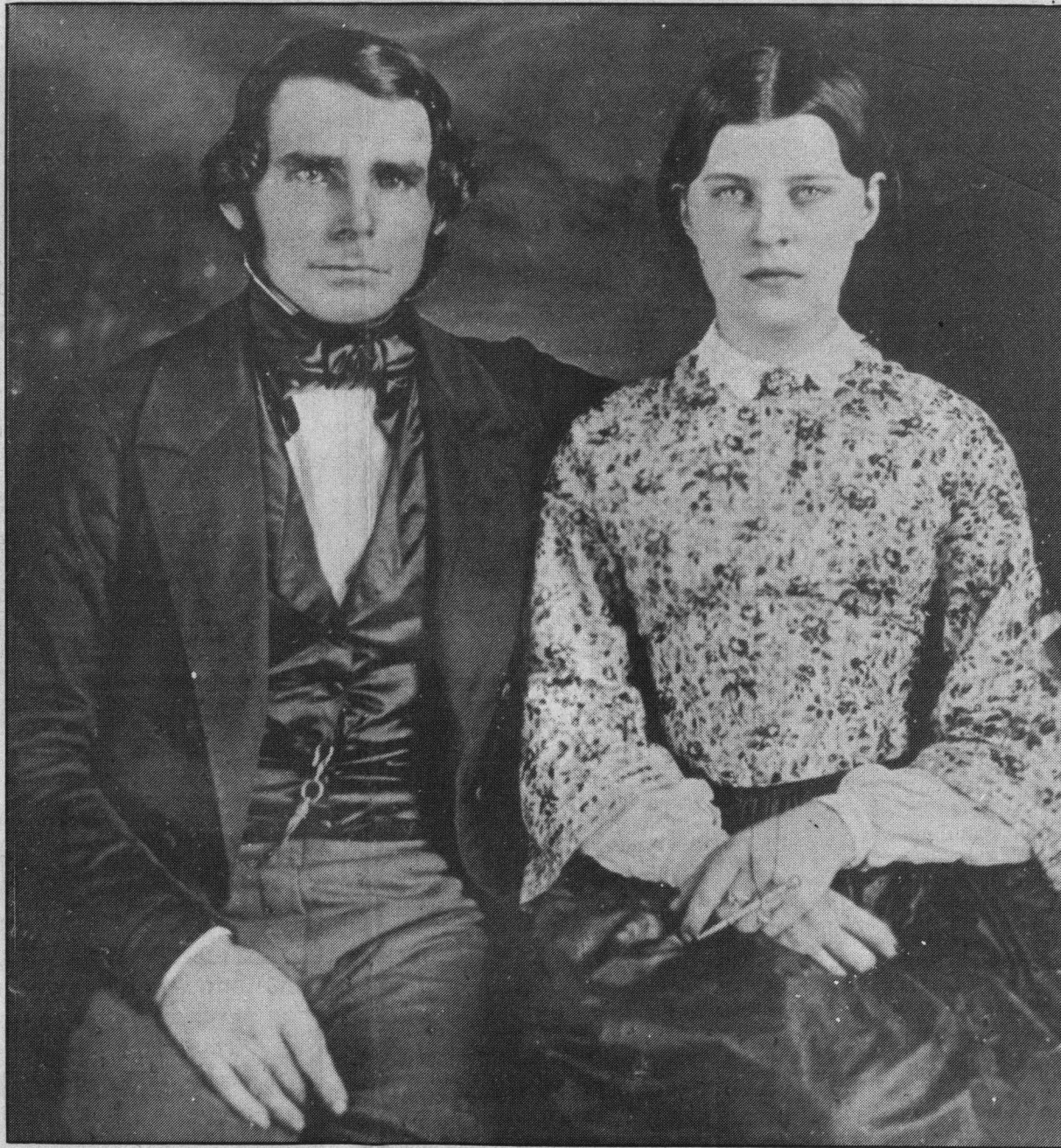
Sandy Lydon

bility and its daunting roads helped protect the place, keeping out all but the most determined, tough, gnarly, independent folks.

I park at Davenport in front of the sign, "WARNING. Unstable Cliffs Exist And Are Dangerous. The Fall Can Be Fatal." If the road doesn't get you, the cliffs will. Or the thrill killers with baseball bats. Or the sharks. Or the rattlesnakes. Or the poison oak. Welcome to the frontier.

DAVENPORT. Davenport is our last company town. The workers lived in the older, funkier part of town south of the cement plant, in the neighborhood anchored by the concrete (what else?) Catholic church. Downwind from the plant. Management lived on the other side of the plant, in the three block neighborhood *upwind* from the factory. The town used to be covered with cement dust. The dust covered the bushes and hills for miles around. Davenport residents could never go anywhere anonymously because their gray cars gave them away. They had to wash their cars with hydrochloric acid to get the cement dust off.

Davenport's premier historian, Alverda Orlando, first pointed out to me that there are no rain gutters on the older houses in Davenport. Long ago the gutters filled up with dust, the dust turned to concrete, and the weight of the concrete brought the gutters crashing down. ("What was that noise, Harry? Oh nothing. Just our gutters falling off.") They finally put scrubbers on the huge stacks to clean up the dust, but most Davenport residents have not put their gutters back up. The elaborate (and expensive) technology of cleaning up the dust has transformed the long, slender stacks which used to punctuate the town into a multi-storied maze of pipes



Inside a corral of cypress trees directly across Highway 1 from the plant is a lovely little concrete building which used to be the plant's infirmary. Injured workers would die before they could get medical attention in Santa Cruz, so the company built its own hospital. Thick concrete walls.

Across the road, in front of the company offices is a huge, blocky monument topped with the phrase, "Safety Follows Wisdom." The company earned this heroic-workers-with-bulging-muscles style monument (it looks like something you might see in the Soviet Union) for its perfect safety record during 1931. I wonder what happened in

a row of commorants all facing into the wind. A check with my handy-dandy wind gauge confirms that the wind is blowing 15 miles per hour from the northwest. Typical.

In the beginning, the cement plant ran on Coalinga oil piped cross-country to Monterey, loaded into tankers and brought up the coast. Today I see several coal-filled railroad cars sitting on a siding in front of the plant, representing the company's efforts to wean the factory off oil following the price rises during the 1970s.

Both the factory and infirmary are outlined by screens of cypress and eucalyptus trees, a moderately

1 and becomes Davenport Landing Road, looping down to brush the Davenport Landing beach. This is where the town of Davenport actually began. John Pope Davenport was an ex blue-water whaler from New England who converted into a shore whaler in Monterey in 1854. (Alverda Orlando, Davenport's biographer, says that John's wife, Ellen, mandated the change. The story goes that John was having too much fun in Lahaina and Ellen wanted him to stay closer to home, where she could keep an eye on him. Looking at his photograph it is easy to see why.) After whaling in and around Monterey for a decade or so, he came to the land-

John Pope Davenport, a blue-water whaler from New England, converted into a shore whaler in Monterey in 1854. Alverda Orlando, Davenport's biographer, says that John's wife, Ellen, mandated the change. It seems that John was having too much fun in Lahaina and Ellen wanted him to stay closer to home, where she could keep an eye on him.

cle following the curve of the road, and included stores and hotels. Later fires destroyed most of the buildings, and Davenport's name moved south to the town which grew up next to the cement plant. Davenport never lived in the place now named for him.

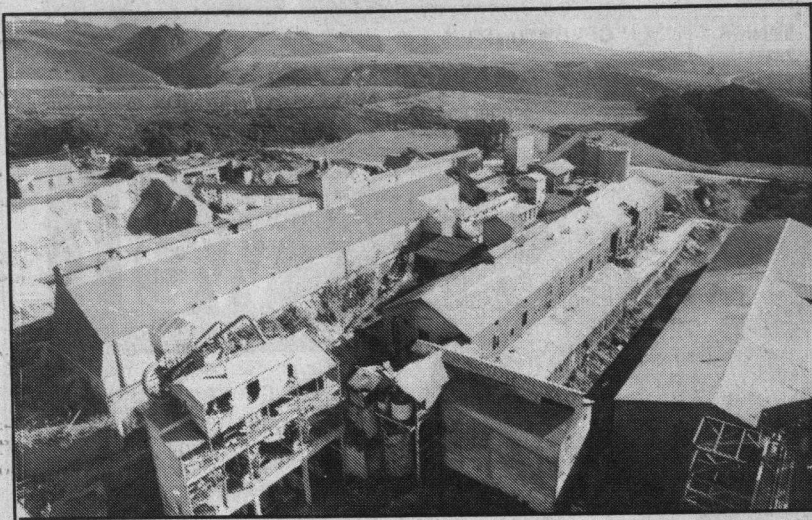
I walked south down the beach to look at the concrete fish ladder which was built several years ago to support a salmon-ranching project. The idea was to raise baby salmon, release them down this chute and let them go out and graze in the ocean for three years or so. Then, they would return "home" up this concrete ladder and be turned into

coast three days a week, his passengers bumping and swaying in the stage beneath him.

My Dad claims that driving from Santa Cruz to Davenport for Farm Center Meetings (he was one of the county's farm advisors) at night, without headlights, during the blackouts in early 1942 convinced him to join the Navy. He felt safer going to war than driving the coast road at night.

The road up the coast has always been cursed by folks passing through, but the region's inaccessi-

crete brought the gutters crashing down. ("What was that noise, Harry? Oh nothing. Just our gutters falling off.") They finally put scrubbers on the huge stacks to clean up the dust, but most Davenport residents have not put their gutters back up. The elaborate (and expensive) technology of cleaning up the dust has transformed the long, slender stacks which used to punctuate the town into a multi-storied maze of pipes which looks like an amusement-park ride.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel file

The cement plant dominates the rugged, north-of-Santa Cruz landscape in today's Davenport.

the company built its own hospital. Thick concrete walls. Across the road, in front of the company offices is a huge, blocky monument topped with the phrase, "Safety Follows Wisdom." The company earned this heroic-workers-with-bulging-muscles style monument (it looks like something you might see in the Soviet Union) for its perfect safety record during 1931. I wonder what happened in 1932? 1933? I guess that's why they had their own hospital.

This cement plant is the last vestige of the county's pioneer lime industry. Ben Lomond mountain, the ridge rising behind Davenport, is filled with limestone. Davis & Jordan (Henry Cowell bought in later) began nibbling at the limestone in the 1850s just above Santa Cruz, while others gnawed away up the San Lorenzo River canyon and out here on the coast. The mountain is pock-marked with old quarries and kilns.

Their biggest problem was getting the cement out of here. (That road again.) For a while they shipped the cement by rail to Santa Cruz and off the old railroad wharf, but eventually they built an iron wharf opposite the plant and pumped the cement (dry, of course) through pipes into their own ship.

I stand atop the cliff (but not too close) and can still see what's left of the wharf, lined on this day with

plant ran on Coalinga oil piped cross-country to Monterey, loaded into tankers and brought up the coast. Today I see several coal-filled railroad cars sitting on a siding in front of the plant, representing the company's efforts to wean the factory off oil following the price rises during the 1970s.

Both the factory and infirmary are outlined by screens of cypress and eucalyptus trees, a moderately successful effort to block the wind which pumps steadily off the ocean. When the plant was built in 1905, however, this entire terrace was barren. It was nude all the way from here to Waddell — in part because of the wind, and in part because the Indians burned over the grassland each fall to guarantee a better crop the following year. The Indians ate the grass seeds and also got down on their hands and knees and grazed on the new, tender grass shoots each spring. The Indians were replaced by herds of Santa Cruz Mission livestock which were in turn replaced by herds of dairy cattle. All resulting in a wide open, treeless terrace.

If you see a clump of trees around here, they were probably planted after 1906.

I cross Highway 1 and catch the old highway (here called Cement Plant Road) and walk north.

About a half mile from Davenport the old road crosses Highway

(Alverda Orlando, Davenport's biographer, says that John's wife, Ellen, mandated the change. The story goes that John was having too much fun in Lahaina and Ellen wanted him to stay closer to home, where she could keep an eye on him. Looking at his photograph it is easy to see why.) After whaling in and around Monterey for a decade or so, he came to the landing at Soquel. He and his Azorean whalemen killed no whales while at Soquel, blaming their misfortune on the huge earthquake of October, 1865, which, Davenport claimed, scared the whales out to sea. Davenport eventually settled on the coast south of another whaling station at Pigeon Point, but he soon found that a regular daytime job as shipper, farmer and wharfinger was better than the less dependable and dangerous shore whaling.

DAVENPORT SET UP a landing here in this cove and built a wharf which was forever being knocked out by winter storms. Schooners could not get in very close to land, so the lime, tanbark, potatoes and firewood had to be loaded into small boats and winched out to the schooner where the cargo was loaded, finally, into the schooner. One of the bolts used to hold those lines still sticks up out of the rock on the north end of the beach.

The town grew up in a semi-cir-

I walked south down the beach to look at the concrete fish ladder which was built several years ago to support a salmon-ranching project. The idea was to raise baby salmon, release them down this chute and let them go out and graze in the ocean for three years or so. Then, they would return "home" up this concrete ladder and be turned into restaurant steaks. I seem to remember that the break-even rate was somewhere around 3 percent — if 3 out of every 100 fish released made it back, the business would show a profit. However, like most other up-coast projects — wharves, landings, wave motors — one thing or another did not work out and the business didn't work. But the concrete ditch remains, a monument to the North Coast dreamers.

Next: How Santa Cruz got electricity out of Big Creek and William Waddell's tragic encounter with the North Coast's fiercest early resident — the grizzly bear.

Sandy Lydon is an author and lecturer on matters historical. He is a member of the history faculty at Cabrillo College.

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