

# Walking through time

## The best traffic moves on foot through Capitola's back streets

First in a series

6-17-90  
**S**TRANGE AS IT seems, the places we know least are those closest to us. Usually we're so busy racing about, dancing to the tune of our tyrannical calendars that we never take time to walk around and enjoy our own home town. We assume that since we drive through all the time, we know the place.

I don't think so.

I believe that the best way to get a feel for a place's history and character is to walk around in it. This series of walks is designed to get you out and walking through our local history. These walks should help you begin to see and understand the rich historical texture that surrounds us here in the Monterey Bay Region. You don't have to go to Boston or Williamsburg to walk back in time. We've got plenty of inter-

### Hindsight



Sandy Lydon

esting stuff right here.

The walks are not planned for head-down power walking or butt-in-the-air bicycling. Get your aerobic exercise

elsewhere. This is heads-up strolling for the mind. These walks are best taken slowly. Set aside three or four hours and pamper yourself. Stop frequently. Sit down often. Drift off into reveries. Listen and watch. Sniff the air. The clues to a place's history are often all around; we just don't take the time to notice them.

**W**E BEGIN with Capitola because no place in Monterey Bay Region has retained its pre-automobile flavor better. Capitola is one of the few places where a pedestrian feels comfortable.

It is OK to walk in Capitola. Cars seem ungainly. Out of place. Unwanted. And if the narrow streets don't convince you, the don't-park-here-without-a-permit signs, the voracious parking meters (parking time is twice as expensive in Capitola as Santa Cruz) and vigilant parking patrol will help you learn

the unwritten Capitola motto: "Abandon Your Autos All Ye Who Enter."

**No. 1: City parking lot** — The walk begins behind the Capitola City Hall. Warning! If you drove a car here, heed Capitola's other unwritten motto — "A Fistful of Quarters." Feed the meter. This area was once Beulah Park, a popular picnic ground for summer visitors, but most of us remember it as the Blue Pacific Mobile Home Park before Capitola purchased it for a parking lot. As with much of the terrain in Capitola, the landscape here has been altered extensively since the 1860s. The steep bank on the south side of the lot (I'll be using compass directions a lot — south is toward the bay, north toward the mountains, etc.) is railroad right-of-way. Originally, the railroad trestle spanned all the way across the canyon, but over time, the railroad company filled in this part. Somewhere in that ivy-covered bank are the timbers of the original trestle.

Before we begin, does anyone have to go to the bathroom? You may be pleased to know that Capitola has more public restrooms per capita than any other municipality in the Monterey Bay Region. Maybe even in California. I am at a loss to explain why this is, but Capitola is an enlightened city which recognizes that its residents and visitors have bladders.

There is a public restroom located downstairs in City Hall building, which is open seven days a week between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. (through the door labeled Council Chambers).

Return to the parking lot and proceed east (away from City Hall) following the parking lot up to Monterey Avenue.

**No. 2: Optional walk to the top of the trestle:** If you have plenty of time and are not afraid of heights, turn right on the railroad right-of-way and follow the tracks west to the trestle. Originally completed in 1876, the trestle has been rebuilt several times over the years. The fill ends abruptly as the tracks leap out over Capitola Avenue. The best view is from the wooden trestle above Soquel Creek. (If you are here on a weekday morning or late afternoon, keep an eye and ear peeled for the train.)

Take in the view of the village, looking particularly to your left. Imagine Depot Hill in 1870, a flat, grassy plateau. No houses. No trees. Return to the Monterey Avenue intersection.

**Please see CAPITOLA — B3**



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Renovated unit of Capitola's 'Six Sisters' defies quick identification.





Patricia Matthews Collection

Summer 1875: Camp Capitola. Early photograph shows railroad trestle in the distance. Pathway on the right is now Capitola Avenue. Building in the foreground is the first Capitola Hotel.

## Capitola at your feet

*Continued from Page B1*

Note the fancy new, non-skid rubber railroad grade crossing. Cross Monterey Avenue.

**No. 3: The depot:** Capitola has had several railroad depots over the years and the one before you was the town's last. Built in the early 1900s, the depot saw thousands of summer visitors pass through. More recently, the building was picked up and turned 90 degrees away from the tracks. After being a private residence for several decades, it was recently remodeled into the Inn at Depot Hill, a bed and breakfast inn. We history-types have been holding our breath to see how this remodel would turn out, and after a recent tour of the building, I exhaled. Happily.

The remodeling and renovation is a stunning example of how to upgrade and make a historic structure economically viable and still preserve the spirit and feel of the place. The inn is having a public open house at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday. Make a point to see the Railroad Baron Room and imagine Charles Crocker plopped on that bed. Imagine being there when the train

view, I'll slip you a history capsule.

### Capitola Capsule History

Once the Indians who lived on the knolls beside Soquel Creek were assembled at Mission Santa Cruz to receive their fatal dose of civilization, the river mouth became a major shipping point for products manufactured and grown further up the Soquel. The wharf is more representative of the shipping era than the commercial fishing which came after the railroad was completed in 1876.

In 1869, F.A. Hihn laid out a campground on the flat between Soquel Creek and the bluff we are sitting on, forever marrying Capitola to the seasonal rhythms of tourism. The completion of the railroad in 1876 ensured a steady flow of visitors, and by the 1880s Hihn was selling narrow lots for the modest summer homes of folks fleeing the heat of Hollister, Modesto, Fresno and Stockton.

Those early visitors came for the cooling marine climate provided by the summertime fog. Nineteenth-century Fresnans knew that sitting in the sun could cause death. They came to Capitola to cool off. (When Coco Chanel dis-

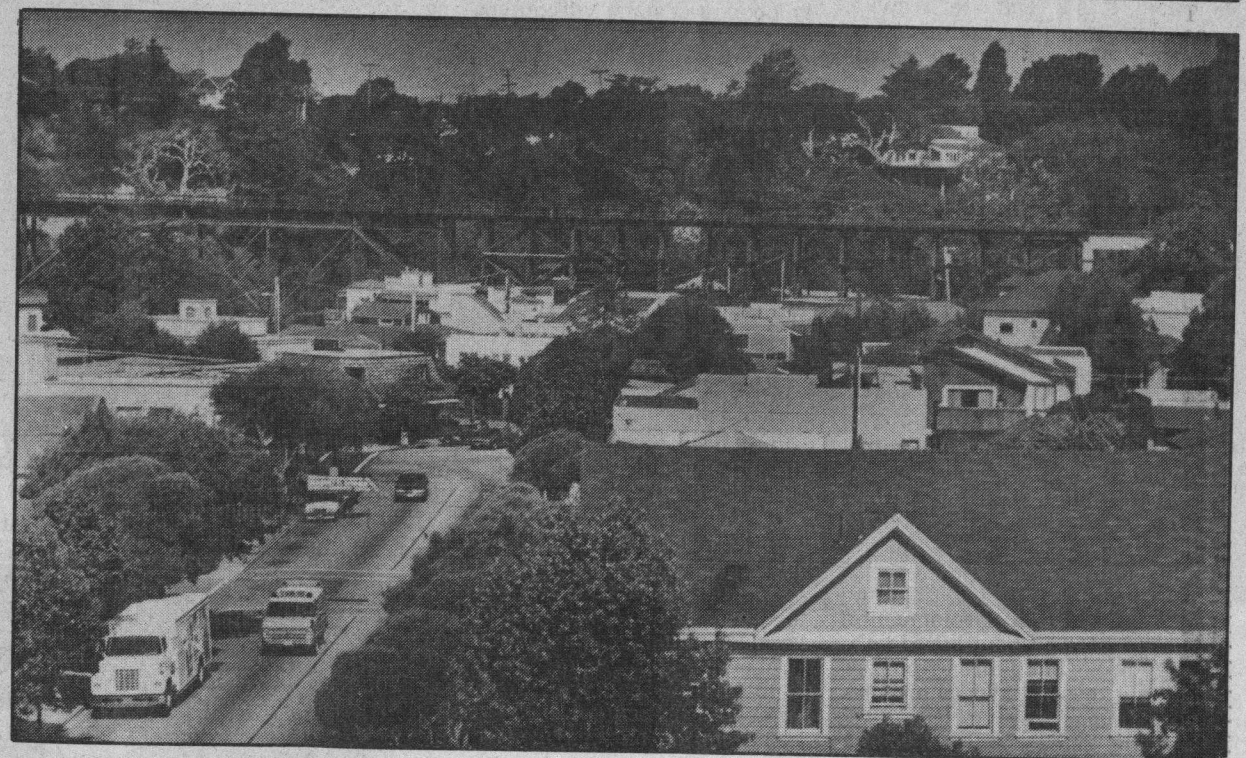
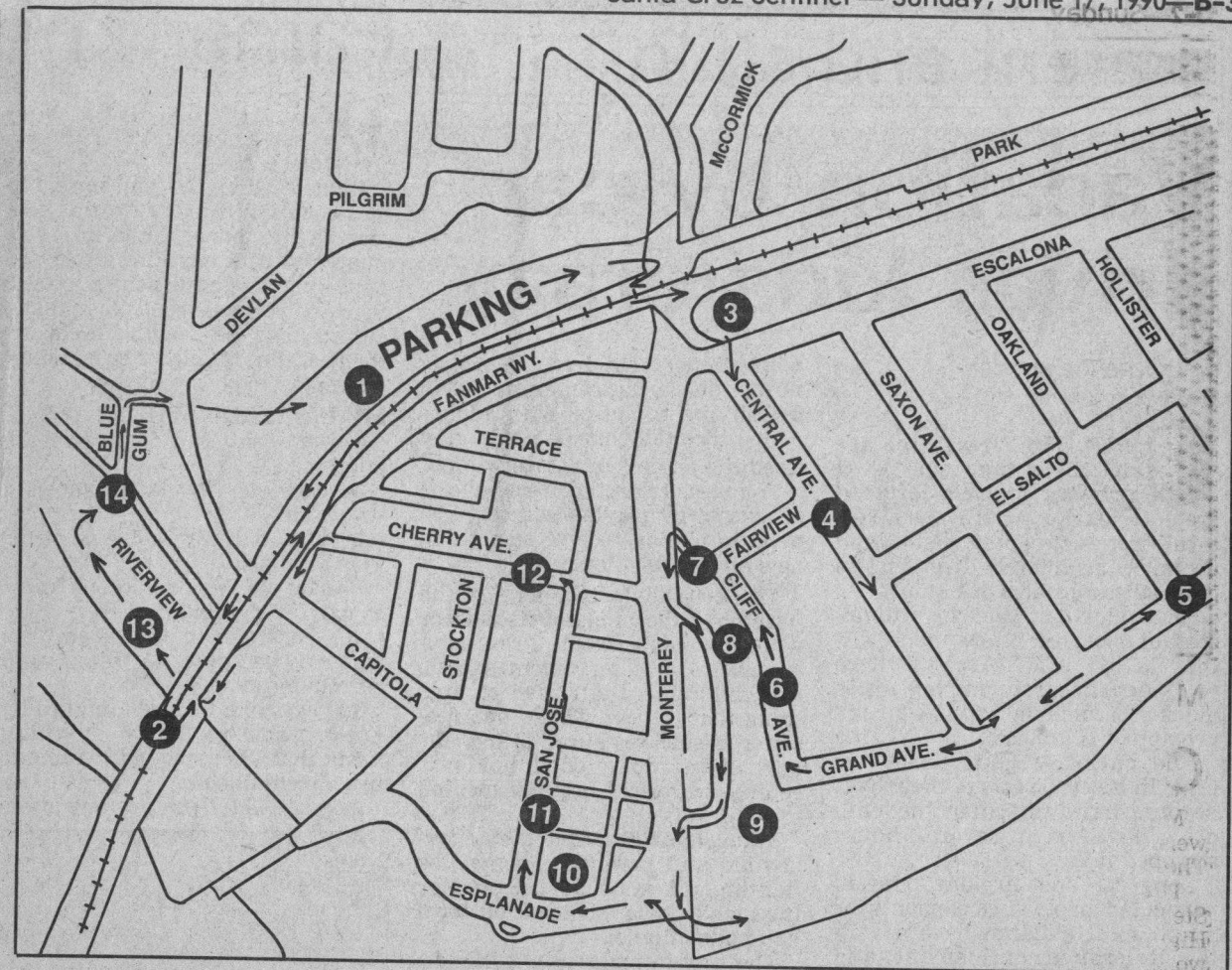
Continue out to the beach, and turn left. Restrooms. Just in time. Then continue east along the bluff and you'll see more rock work dating from the hotel's heyday. There is a nifty little park here which I call Humming Park. The park is actually the top of a sewage pumping plant, humming happily as it pushes Aptos sewage on to Santa Cruz. Clever Capitola. Sewage moving west and dollars moving east.

Look up at the underside of the Crest Apartments and you'll see why geologists don't live up there. Or down here.

Proceed back to the Esplanade, cross over and pat the palm tree and then walk east along the street until you come to the wrought iron and wood fences in front of the landmark Six Sisters.

**No. 10: The Six Sisters:** We still do not know exactly when these landmark buildings were built, but we have it narrowed to around 1905. Termites and dry rot have been working hard on the buildings, so a couple of years ago one of the buildings was taken completely down and rebuilt.

Can you tell which sister has the



Today, 'Camp Capitola' boasts trees and shops along Capitola Avenue.

a dense, urban, yet human-scaled neighborhood which was originally subdivided by Hihn in the early 1880s. The house on the northwest corner of Cherry and San Jose (202) may have been one of the first buildings constructed on the flat

of construction. Cross (carefully) Capitola Avenue and follow the path to the left of the trestle to Soquel Creek.

**No. 13: Riverview Terrace:** The neighborhood along Soquel Creek dates from the 1880s when H

MacDonald, one of the founders of an incorporated Capitola in 1949, the city's second mayor and the co-founder of the Shadowbrook restaurant. Cross Riverview Avenue and continue up Bluegum, turning right onto Riverview Drive. E



Baron Room and imagine Charles Crocker plopped on that bed. Imagine being there when the train rolls by ...

Cross Escalona and proceed toward the ocean on Central Avenue.

**No. 4: Depot Hill:** The many historic houses along this street attest to the true summer homes of Capitola. Capitola was not a high-class summer destination, like the Del Monte Hotel in Monterey, or even Rio del Mar. It was designed as a summer resort for working-class families. The typical Capitola home was single-wall construction and small. The perpendicular batten is similar to the design which was popular in Pacific Grove. Note 202 Central on your left, for example, or 108 further down the block. Very functional and unpretentious. When Depot Hill originally was subdivided in the 1880s, lots sold for \$100. (The real estate agent I called said the asking price on 202 was reduced to \$300,000.)

Continue south on Central until you reach its end at Grand Avenue.

**No. 5: Grand Avenue:** Walk through the new barricades (see, you couldn't bring your car even if you wanted to) and up to the fence. "Stay Behind Fence," admonishes the sign, hoping that we'll stay over here and the cliff will stay over there. The pipes hanging in the air and the cracked earth are evidence that the cliff cannot read.

Turn left and follow the foot path which used to be a grand avenue. Though there are no street signs at the next four streets, they are Saxon, Oakland, Hollister and Sacramento. F.A. Hihn, the original developer of Capitola, used street names as a marketing device. Since most of the summer visitors to Santa Cruz County in the 19th century came from the warmer interior valleys, the street names were selected with those towns in mind. What Sacramento resident wouldn't be delighted to have a summer home on Sacramento Street? Thus, Hollister Avenue. San Jose.

Stop for a while and rest on the bench at Oakland Avenue. The row of Monterey pines you see along the coast to your left used to be the row which was on the *inland* side of Grand Avenue. Both the avenue and the outside row fell into the bay long ago. Beyond was Lover's Lane, a favorite spot for strolling and "sparking."

Let your eye follow the curve of the bay and you can make out the houses at Pot Belly Beach and Las Olas Drive. What looks like a row of boxes on the beach is the recreational vehicles lined up like feeding dairy cows at Seaciff Beach. Just beyond, you can see the battered but still proud cement ship, Palo Alto.

Return back down Grand, past the ever-diminishing Crest Apartments on the left (geologists don't live there) and the classic little board and batten summer home (108, behind the trees on the right) and turn right on Cliff Avenue.

**No. 6: The view from the cliff:** This is your reward. Find an empty bench and while you absorb the

sitting in the sun could cause death. They came to Capitola to cool off. (When Coco Chanel discovered The Tan in the 1920s, she forgot to do something about The Fog. It's OK because pallid is In these days, melanoma is Out.)

The multi-colored Venetian Courts at the foot of the wharf represent a more permanent type of summer dwelling (the ones fronting the beach are condominiums) which was ushered in by Henry Allen Rispin in the 1920s. The name "Venetian" hearkens back to the Italian fishing colony which once was located there.

Capitola's off-balance calendar did not smooth out until the 1960s, when countywide housing pressures saw the single-walled, board-and-batten houses converted to year-round housing. Visionary city officials corralled the commercial development along 41st Avenue in the 1970s, and the tax dollars flowing from the various shopping centers in west Capitola allowed the city to subsidize the amenities which make the village so pleasant. Like mini-parks. And restrooms.

Enough history.

Stand, stretch and amble north along Cliff. Note the stairway descending almost vertically, but save it for another time. Proceed north on Cliff Avenue to the little park at the intersection of Cliff Avenue and Fairview.

**No. 7: Hihn Park:** This little park is one of the only things in Capitola still bearing the name of the man who guided the town's future for over a half-century. It is not owned by the city. Resourceful neighbors purchased the property to preserve their view and created a lovely little park with a nautical theme. If you look closely, you'll find that one of the benches is dedicated to local resident Oliver Lewis, who died in 1983. Walk down the path behind the park and through a tunnel of greenery leading down a set of steps to Monterey Avenue. Car shock. Turn left, continue down Monterey and turn left on El Medio.

**No. 8: Nob Hill:** This little bump below Depot Hill was once called Nob Hill, but it never had the pretensions of its namesake. Number 212 on the left is an amazing example of Capitola Eclectic architecture, mixing many styles in a small space. Fanciful. Funky. Follow El Medio down into the parking lot.

**No. 9: Capitola Theater:** Where else but Capitola can you see two almost-current movies for \$2.50? Historic prices in an historic World War II quonset-style building erected in 1948. And the \$2.50 often includes wonderful editorial commentary from the assembled crowd. It is like watching a movie in the living room of a very large, relaxed vocal family.

Peek behind the theater and you'll see the rock walls which are all that remain of the Capitola Hotel, originally built in the 1880s, expanded and upgraded over the years until it burned in 1929. The heat from the fire scorched the palm tree which still stands in the center of the Esplanade.

of the buildings was taken completely down and rebuilt.

Can you tell which sister has the rebuild? (Clue: skylight.) A closer look at the buildings will show that the other five are in need of repair. Renovation recently began on the two on the left.

Take the grassy walkway to the right of the Six Sisters and follow it to the intersection of a wider, grassy area.

**No. 11: Lawn Way:** If you look at the row of buildings along Lawn Way on your left you can easily distinguish the older ones from the recently built. The older ones sag.

Follow Lawn Way west to San Jose, turn right on San Jose, past the Craft Gallery on the right and Aries Arts on the left. These two businesses represent long-term efforts to anchor the revitalization of Capitola Village and both are, in their own way, historical. Browse. Cross Capitola Avenue and continue north on San Jose to Cherry Avenue.

**No. 12: Cherry Avenue:** This is

corner of Cherry and San Jose (202) may have been one of the first buildings constructed on the flat, and it has evolved into a whimsical Winchester-House kind of building over the years. Turn left and continue west on Cherry. Perhaps the oldest down-on-the-flats buildings are at 317 and 325 Cherry. Note the second-story door on 317 which leads nowhere, the plumbing on the west wall of 325 Cherry, added after plumbing went indoors. Continue to the end of Cherry, turn left on Fanmar and follow down to Capitola Avenue. Look up at the trestle and note the several kinds

**No. 13: Riverview Terrace:** The neighborhood along Soquel Creek dates from the 1920s when Henry Allen Rispin owned Capitola and subdivided the remaining open areas. To your left is the arch of the Stockton Avenue bridge (WPA, 1934) framing the beach. Turn right and follow the path as it passes beneath the trestle and winds along between houses and yards. The three-story tower beside the trestle is a perfect example of architecture meets summer fantasy. An adult tree house from the 1920s.

**No. 14: MacDonald Lane:** This public lane is dedicated to Brad

taurant. Cross Riverview Avenue and continue up Bluegum, turning right onto Riverview Drive. Follow Riverview Drive back to the intersection of Capitola Avenue. You began this walk hours ago, in the city parking lot directly across Capitola Avenue from where you are standing.

The second walk in the series will be Santa Cruz's West Cliff.

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