

Standing up and staring out over the crashing waves as if the Pacific Ocean was their front lawn, the regulars rule. ...

Bonny Doon Beach

By TOM LONG
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BONNY DOON — It's 11 in the morning on a February day and there are people walking around naked on Bonny Doon Beach.

Not many, true, but 10 or so. And considering how the wind is blowing and how cold it is even without the wind, 10 people walking around naked seems like a lot.

But it's not.

"There's a crew of regular people who go to the beach even throughout the winter," says Brian, a 29-year-old Santa Cruz resident who counts himself among those 25 or so regulars. He has been getting naked on Bonny Doon Beach for eight years.

Come summer weekends, the number of people on the beach is closer to 1,000 at times. They come from a variety of places and their cars line Highway 1 near the Bonny Doon turnoff.

Bonny Doon is not the easiest beach to reach. First a visitor has to walk up one of a dozen short, steep trails that lead to railroad tracks. After crossing the tracks, one must choose a path of descent to the cove-and-a-half of secluded beach below.

Descent can be by way of either some even steeper jagged trails or down the hill of sand that borders the beach's south end. That hill of sand is so peppered with broken glass that it glistens from afar.

Standing up and staring out over the crashing waves as if the Pacific Ocean was their front lawn, the regulars rule the beach no matter what time of year. They get there early and go home late.

"There's a strong community spirit at the beach and the people who use it regularly have a deep respect for the environment," says John Font, 31, Palo Alto. Font has been going to Bonny Doon Beach for eight years and says the regulars are intent on keeping the beach safe, clean and a nice place for folks to come and get naked.

"There are several elements that are attracted to the beach," says Font. And several of those elements are definitely unwelcome to the regulars.

Recreational vehicle owners often drive down onto the beach and terrorize both the environment and the nudists. When they do, the regulars call the Sheriff's Department. Some visitors bring monster radios onto the sand; but when they begin to blast away, the regulars ask them to turn the sounds off. They'd rather listen to the waves.

AND THEN there are the perverts. "We've got the voyeurs..." says Font. Especially since a San Jose porno magazine began informing its readers about the beach's whereabouts a few years back.

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Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The high, rugged cliffs provide the protection that makes Bonny Doon Beach the perfect spot for sunbathing.

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— Brian, Bonny Doon Beach regular

beach after a summer weekend is astronomical," Brian says. "There's a couple of guys who clean it up anytime they're there. We had 40 people working there on North Coast Cleanup Day on it."

Why do the regulars care so much

"The sun feels good on your skin," he says. And even though "it's not so much the fact you're getting darker, it's just that it feels good," Brian is still serious about his tan.

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During the summer, most folks who manage the descent then make their way over to the half-cove which recedes far back and is surrounded by sheer cliffs more than 100 feet high.

There, all but the most shy strip to the buff and glory in the sun. A volleyball net is often set up, a few people generally frolic near the water with paddle boards. Most simply lie on blankets and beach towels, sporting sunglasses, sipping on refreshments toted down in coolers.

ON THE beach, the regulars are always obvious. They are the hardcore contingency who line the back of the beach's north half-cove, where most of the nudists congregate.

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"For the most part they're harmless," says Font. "They're there for all the wrong reasons. They don't see the natural environment, they come strictly because of sexual drive."

The influx of such gawkers concerns the regulars; they're afraid that families and particularly women who would visit the beach now steer clear.

"There are regular people that go there that make it safe," says Brian. He wants to assure potential visitors that Bonny Doon Beach is a safe place to sunbathe because of the regulars. "The regulars will not allow anyone to bother anyone," he says.

Many of those regulars have taken responsibility for the beach, which is privately owned but open to all. "The amount of trash that's left on the

beach after a summer weekend is astronomical," Brian says. "There's a couple of guys who clean it up anytime they're there. We had 40 people working there on North Coast Cleanup Day on it."

Why do the regulars care so much about the beach?

"We go there because it's such a gorgeous place," says Brian. "I've had so many neat experiences there. I've seen whales only 15-20 feet off the the beach. With the cliffs and everything, it's really a spectacular place."

The cliffs are important for more than their natural beauty, of course. They are the wall that shuts the beach off from the public-at-large. Nudity is not illegal on the Santa Cruz County beaches north of Santa Cruz city limits as long as its practiced in private areas. And getting naked is important to the regulars.

"To us, nudity is normal; to some people it's abnormal," says Brian. "For 12 years now I've been getting naked."

"The sun feels good on your skin," he says. And even though "it's not so much the fact you're getting darker, it's just that it feels good," Brian is still serious about his tan.

"Once you start hanging out naked you lose your tan stripe. A good tan needs to be a full tan," says Brian. "Being in a swimsuit hurts your overall tan."

"The tan lines and all that stuff, that's simply a symbol of being completely nude," explains Font. "And to have a full tan all over your body is a symbolic thing."

"It's healthy being naked," says Font. "Public nudity is a human-rights issue. It's a basic body freedom and it should be unquestioned."

And so the waves crash, the gawkers gather, the regulars regularly appear. In the heat of summer, in the cold of winter. Protecting their beach, soaking in the rays, cultivating their tans as symbols of freedom. And walking around naked.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

A solitary sunbather shows there's no tan lines here.