

Local Traveler Finds Triton Raft--Afloat, Undamaged

By Ron Reeves

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That 34-foot steel raft, "Triton," whose crew said was smashed and sunk last December, is sitting placidly afloat in Turtle bay off the Baja California coast.

Not only that, it shows no signs of ever being damaged, said Bert Snyder Jr., a Santa Cruz attorney who spotted it on a cruise to the tip of Baja California.

"The raft is in absolutely perfect condition, as good as new. It is rusty, but there isn't a dent in it," Snyder stated.

"We went over the thing, climbed all over it, and inquired locally. We talked to an American writer who is living in the area and his version was that it did go on the beach, somewhere near Cedrus Island, but it wasn't hurt. A Mexican fisherman pulled it off, towed it to Turtle bay and the fellows left it there. They were unhappy with themselves, apparently," Snyder declared.

To give proof to his find, he brought back pictures of the craft, showing the "Triton" name still boldly painted on the home-made structure.

Nearly a year of hoopla preceded the raft's start last October. The six crewmen, Larry White, Doug Otis, Mel Higley, Al Parvin, Dan McGee and Fred Hametner, worked on the craft at Freedom until the steel base was completed. There was constant publicity through newspapers, radio and television on the progress of the craft and the appeals of the crew members for everything from food to fishing rods.

It was towed by house movers to the Santa Cruz small craft harbor on September 17, where it was launched and passed its first water test in being towed to Capitola. The crewmen were exuberant about how the craft handled and were confident that it would carry them on a year-long 7400-mile drifting trip to the Society Islands of the South Pacific, and possibly even to Australia.

At the Capitola harbor, the raft venture continued to cause excitement. The public toured it and it was officially christened by Janice Rothfuss, queen of the Capitola Begonia festival. Donations of money and equipment continued. The

Capitola City council donated over \$500 though the city's chamber of commerce.

There was a false start on October 16 when the raft was towed out, leaving a sea of tears from wives and girl friends on the shore. Within hours the raft was towed back because of high seas, a condition which had been pointed out by seasoned sailors.

At that time Malio Stagnaro stated: "I wasn't surprised. If they want to lose themselves and their lives, that's up to them."

Stagnaro, however, came to their rescue two days later and had one of his boats tow the raft out into the ocean where the drifting trip began.

Radio operators picked up scattered radio reports of the raft's progress to Baja California. Then in early December word was received that White, Higley and Parvin had left the raft. White and Higley said they had come back to Santa Cruz to get additional gear necessary for the trip to continue. Parvin went to join his pregnant wife in Colorado.

On December 12 White re-

leased a story declaring the raft had gone onto the rocks and sunk, with Hametner, McGee and Otis barely able to get off with their lives. He indicated the craft went down near Cedros island, which is near where Snyder says it now floats deserted.

The raft and the equipment it carried were valued at some \$10,000.

"If anything was taken off, it was done peacefully and quietly, as the doors are locked," Snyder said. He said they looked through the windows and "There is nothing in it; it is completely stripped. But other than that it is perfectly intact."

The raft is now considered to be the property of the residents of Port Bartolome, a fishing village of about 1000 people. The village is about 650 miles from Santa Cruz, Snyder said.

Snyder, his wife, Marilyn, and Robert Ferguson left April 13 aboard his 36-foot sailboat, "Cortship." Sailing along with them were Worth Brown and Don Case on their 40-footer "Else," and their passengers, Dan Wright, Robert Kinzie and Dick Kennedy.



The bold sign "Triton," still glows from the yellow steel raft which left Capitola last October carrying six men hoping to drift to the South Pacific. The crewmen declared the raft was smashed against

the rocks and sunk. The building and launching of the raft received extensive publicity for a year before the venture began. On the raft are Marilyn Snyder and Robert Ferguson of Santa Cruz.