

April 1987



This is the journal of my trip to Monterey in the spring of 1987 for a software engineering conference. I was there, I think, to soak up as much information on the subject that I could and then give a class or presentation to management on how we could use it to improve the development of our software.

For decades there had been a desire for more efficient and reliable techniques for converting a set of requirements into a set of instructions that could be executed by a computer system. Programming was more of an art than a science and there were plenty of examples of systems that were delivered years late, or were unreliable, or were never finished at all.

Some programmers would draw flow charts on paper to get a feeling for how the system should be structured, but there was no easy way to maintain the charts over time. With the advent of “graphical” workstations, which could display boxes and arrows there was a possibility of tying the system’s requirements to its functions and its code. There were new tools like Software through Pictures that held the promise of generating

the code automatically. That’s what the conference was all about and it’s probably more than you want to know. The conference schedule was relaxed enough to allow time for exploring the area.

Usually my trip journals are organized by time but I don’t remember when I went where, so I’ve ordered this journal by place, beginning on Monterey Bay and traveling south to Big Sur and Jules Pfeiffer state park.



The conference was held in Monterey, a city on California’s Pacific coast, about a hundred miles south of San Francisco. The city was built by Spain, subsequently became part of Mexico, and finally part of the United States. It’s considered to have a Mediterranean climate and to be a very pleasant (but expensive) place to live.

Monterey Bay is located at the end of the large and deep underwater Monterey Canyon and it benefits from the upwelling of cool, nutrient-rich water. For a few decades Monterey prospered from fishing for sardines but the sardine population collapsed in the 1950s due to overfishing.

The conference was held in one of the city's hotels but I was staying at a hotel in Seaside, a little town a few miles north around the bay. I could have walked to the conference with no problem but it was far enough for the company to spring for a car. The hotel was nothing special but it was located on a sandy beach with a nice view across the bay to Monterey

Monterey

About the only thing I knew about Monterey before researching for this trip was that it was the location of John Steinbeck's novel "Cannery Row". The characters in the novel live in the area of the sardine canning factories back in the 1940s before the industry



collapsed. There was some kind of museum there at the time of my trip but I think I noted it as a place I'd go on a rainy day but then I didn't have one. I think my pictures show some of the area before it was gentrified into what now (2024) looks more like a theme park. There are now guided tours and the buildings have much more colourful paint than I remember.

I knew nothing about the Monterey Bay aquarium but the organizers of the conference had included an evening reception there for the attendees. Its most famous feature is its kelp forest tank which is around 30 feet high, the tallest I'd ever seen. Our reception was located at the bottom of the tank, with dozens of software engineers munching on seafood treats and gazing at the sardines and rays



and sharks circulating above us through the kelp. It occurred to me that all it would take was a twitch in the nearby San Andreas Fault for the tank to fracture and cause our positions in the food chain to be reversed.

The tank picture is from Wikipedia.





Monterey's harbour is said to be teeming

with fish but more obvious were the seals and sealions that were draped over buoys and piers. I don't know what the guy in the water was up to but the seals didn't seem to care.

Monterey Harbour was bordered by parks and trails and flowers particularly mass plantings of what I now know to be Australian "pig faces", much prettier than they sound.



The rest of the peninsula is largely forested and populated with mansions, cemeteries, and golf courses such as the famous Pebble Beach. Some of the roads, like 17-Mile Drive are private or only open if you pay a

toll, but for me the most memorable parts were the beaches and headlands. I was lucky enough to be walking along one of the beach trails when this sunset arrived.





On the other side of the peninsula is the little town of Carmel by the Sea, home of many notable residents, such as Doris Day, Phyllis Diller, and Clint Eastwood. At the time I was visiting Clint was the town mayor.

The residents define Carmel as a “village in a forest overlooking a white sand beach”. And they want to keep it that way.

The town has many odd byelaws, intending to maintain its ecology and its quirky character. It has no street lighting or parking meters, no sidewalks in residential areas, and doesn't allow chain restaurants or any billboards. The houses do not have numbers and there is no home delivery. Mail has to be



picked up at the Post Office. Couriers such as Fedex have to be given a “geographic address” such as “3rd house south from X/Y junction”.

There were a couple of tiny lots for sale, both of them costing many times the value of our house. The only picture I found of Carmel was this one of the town's Presbyterian church.



They've managed to keep the beach pristine. I was there on one day when the surf was up. On another I joined the crowd sitting on the sand watching the sun go down. We were all disappointed as the sun plopped below the horizon with no colour at all.



A few miles down the road is Point Lobos state reserve. It is an absolutely gorgeous mixture of forest and cliffs and surf. It looked untouched by humans so I was



surprised to discover that it had a history of whaling, coal mining, and abalone canning. It had been cleaned up nicely!



The Point Lobos area was named by the Spanish after the noisy “sea wolves” or sea lions that lived on its beaches. They still live in the area, favouring beaches at the foot of steep cliffs, inaccessible to humans on foot

I was pleased to see my first sea otter in the waters off Point Lobos. Sea otters used to be found all around the North Pacific’s coast, from Russia to Mexico. They were hunted for their dense fur and became extinct in California and many other places.

They were reintroduced from more remote areas and protected from hunting, but were still not common at the time of my visit. The animal I saw was smaller than a seal with a light-coloured face, floating on its back. They balance their food and babies on their bellies. The distant pictures I took weren’t worth printing, so I’ve included this one of a raft of sea otters, taken by me in Prince William Sound, Alaska, about 20 years later.



Most of the wildlife was in the ocean but I found ground squirrels and chipmunks that were obviously used to visitors with snacks to share.

The rest of these pictures were taken somewhere along the Big Sur Highway between Point Lobos and Jules Pfeiffer state park.





These pictures show the highly variable scenery of the Big Sur Highway.



Even the road and its bridges are scenic. This is the Bixby Bridge at Big Sur.

I turned around about 20 miles south of there I believe, at Julia Pfeiffer state park, where McWay Falls drops from the cliffs onto the beach.



What surprises me is that I have no close-up pictures of the waterfall from the beach. Nor do I remember actually going down to the beach. Perhaps the path down was gated.

I found this Internet picture of one of the washouts that plague the Big Sur Highway. The soil is sandy and the road has been the victim of flood, fire, and earthquakes, and is sometimes closed for over a year.



Back in 1984 I tried to drive over the mountains from Pinnacles national monument to Big Sur, not realizing that the road had been severed in three places.

I haven't been back to the Big Sur area since this trip to Monterey. One of the surprising features of my trip had been the light traffic, unusual for California. Now (in 2024) there is much discussion of solving the parking problems at the scenic overlooks and "selfie" spots. There was even talk of introducing a

reservation system for people wanting to walk the trails of Point Lobos. Perhaps I'd rather not visit the area again unless there's an off-season without the crowds.

