

# ***My State Park Career***

**By  
Charles Mehlert**

*Excerpted from **Memoirs of Charles Mehlert***





## **The “Obata Tree”**

**Tomales Bay State Park – 1953**

Once upon a time, when I was Ranger in Charge of Tomales Bay State Park, I was faced with the necessity of removing this rugged pine in order to build a new entrance road. Rather than destroy this majestic work of Nature, I determined to accept the inconvenience and route the road around the tree. At the time, we all had been inspired by the nature art of Chiura Obata, art professor at the University of California, Berkeley, since 1932. Thus, it came to me to christen this pine the “Obata Tree”. Obata and his wife lived through the shame of incarceration at the “relocation center” in Topaz, Utah, during the Second World War. He returned to Berkeley after the War, teaching there until his retirement in 1954. He died in 1975 at age 90. Yosemite National Park will be hosting an Obata Exhibit from June through October 2007 featuring many of Obata’s 1927-1930 Yosemite works. Charles Mehlert

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**CHARLES (CHARLIE) MEHLERT**  
January 4, 1917 ~ March 10, 2011

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© 2017 - ISBN: 978-0-9992980-1-5

Produced by the California State Park Rangers Association (CSPRA)

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Printed in the United States of America

## Chapter H

### *My Res`sd O`qj Career*

***One friend led to another and eventually to a position with the State Division of Beaches and Parks and to a career for which I was well suited by education and temperament. I started with assignments as Ranger to Mt. Diablo State Park and Big Basin Redwoods State Park.***

\* \* \* \*

The big question was - where to start. I thought Sacramento was the best place. Lots of Government Agencies there. I left Oakland early one morning and arrived in Sacramento around nine. It was still a little early to visit my old pal, Howard Hansen, so I stopped by the Soil Conservation Service first. They had lots of openings. All seemed to be field positions in rather odd and out of the way places. Since I had been away from Jean for some time, I put these offers in my back pocket just in case nothing better turned up.

I then went to the home of my childhood buddy, Howard Hansen. His Aunt greeted me at the door. I asked her if "Howdy" was in. She said Howard was killed on Bataan. I was speechless, frozen in my tracks. She invited me in and filled me in on the details. I was still in shock and bewildered. She asked me what was I doing in Sacramento. I was able to answer a brief "Job hunting." I told her I had a B.S. degree in Forestry and thought I could get something in that line. "Well, I can give you the name of a good friend of mine in the Division of Forestry. If anyone can help you he can. His name is Jack Dennison, I have known him and his wife for years."

I lost no time in seeing Jack. He was very pleasant. He explained they were waiting for their people to come back from the war before they hired additional people. He said, "Go see Ernie Camper in State Parks, they have new positions to fill." So, off to see Ernie Camper. He was just as pleasant as Jack and greeted me with a big smile. I think Jack Dennison had called Ernie because he seemed to know exactly what I was looking for. He said he had just the thing for me. It was a new class called Forestry Engineer. It was perfect. I had graduated from Cal. with a degree in Forestry and a minor in Engineering. As Ernie and I talked he said he too was a Cal. Grad, Class of '17 and a coxswain on the Cal. Crew. The old "College Tie" had just taken on a new meaning to me.

A lot was done in Sacramento that day. I hurried back to Oakland, excited with the good news. I arrived about dinner time, still excited, I told Jean I had a job with the State Division of Parks in Sacramento as a Forestry Engineer. I would start work January 2, 1946. Jean was not impressed with living in Sacramento, but; the idea of working for State Parks really appealed to her. The only Park we visited was Mt. Diablo State Park, about seven years ago, when we were in college. Jean suggested we take a look at one before I went to work. We chose Point Lobos State Reserve. Yes, on January 2nd, 1946, I started my first job as a civilian. Now, I had finally settled down. What a great feeling that was!

There were certain formalities to be attended to, like taking a civil service examination for my position of Forestry Engineer. Here again I had help. Ernie Camper told me to see a person in the Dep't. of Forestry. He would give me an idea the subjects to study for the Examination. He did. I passed. I was a Forestry Engineer. All this as a result of a friendship. These friendships lasted for a long time. Friendships are important in this world of ours!!

My Boss was Colonel Edwin C. Kelton. He was an Officer in the Army Corps of Engineers and was responsible for the successful building of the Pan American Highway. He told me many interesting tales how he accomplished that undertaking. His title was, Beach Erosion Control Engineer, I was his assistant. My first job was to coordinate, with the coastal counties, a statewide "Master Plan For Beach Erosion Control For The State of California." It was a great job. The people I worked with became valuable contacts throughout my work with State Parks. Most were young, just out of the Service, and we seemed to promote up our respective ladders at about the same rate. Come to think about it, we all retired within a few years of each other.

### We Build A House

We rented a new house in a new subdivision, located in an old olive grove. We liked it there and bought a lot. It had a number of nice olive trees on it. Now to build a house; but, what kind. I was working on a plan to restore Fort Ross. We decided to duplicate its construction techniques used by the Russians in the early 1800s. Basically it was redwood timbers, caulked with ships oakum, shaped for stacking and held in place by hard wood dowels.

About this time, little Laura was about to burst upon the scene. I had a tip where we could get some new, hewn, redwood railroad ties. They were located just outside the town of Branscomb. Since we wanted to look at them, we jumped in the car and took off one weekend. Branscomb was in Northern California, in the Redwood Country. I think it was the bumpiest ride we had ever taken. Jean thought Laura would come at any time. The trip was not in vain. Those ties were just what we wanted. We bought them and had them hauled to our lot. All this time, plans for the house were progressing. It was decided to build the garage first. We would move in while the rest was being built. To save rent money was one of the considerations.

First was the concrete slab. Calvin was on hand to help. Thank goodness! We graded the ground, put up forms and were ready for the transit-mix truck to pour the concrete. The day dawned clear and bright. The concrete was supposed to be delivered early. We waited and waited. (so what else is new). We had a lot of concrete to finish and wanted to do it in daylight. Finally it came, in the middle of the afternoon. The driver dumped the load and left. Now the work began. We raked, pushed, pulled, shoveled, leveled and pushed concrete around until our backs were sore. During all this time the concrete was setting up and getting harder to work. It was finally leveled to our satisfaction. Now came the "finishing" work, like making it smooth. Afternoon became dusk and dusk turned into night. We rigged up some lights and finished up late that night. In spite of the obstacles, the finished product looked pretty good.

Soon thereafter, Cal and I got wind of a toilet looking for a home. After the war, toilets and other plumbing fixtures were not in adequate supply. This opportunity had the ring of authenticity as well as a modicum of adventure. Off we rode to the appointed place. Night overtook us, yet we found our target with unerring accuracy. The fastenings were unfastened quickly and our captive was set free, carried to the car with reverence and tenderness then transported to its new home.

For all we know, there it is today, standing tall, patient, awaiting yet another chance to serve humanity.

Somewhere in this time period, little Laura Jean, cutest thing I had ever seen, blessed our household. Now we were three, and Freckles. Our lives changed; but, the building went on. We put Laura in a basket and brought her to the building site. I'd like to think she enjoyed the activity.

Weekend work on the house was slow, exceptionally slow. Everyone in the family worked. On weekdays Jean used the slick, an oversized chisel, to shape the ties according to the Fort Ross pattern. On weekends we worked together putting the ties up or any one of the many other tasks needing to be done. Laura, when she was able, contributed mightily. She would go around to the neighbors that had gathered, either to work or to talk, and ask them, "Wanna beer?" She was always the gracious hostess.

After the Garage was finished, our plans changed. It became the Dining Room, Kitchen, Laundry, Bed Room, Bath and storage closet. We then started on a large Living Room. In one of the openings for a garage door there was a beautiful, raised hearth, used brick fireplace. The bricks came from Old Town in Sacramento. The original brick, made locally and said to contain a small amount of gold in each brick, was the feature of our fireplace. This fireplace served the Dining Room. The other opening was the entrance to the Living Room. This room also had a large fireplace with a sunken hearth. In front there was a large lawn with sprinkler system. An asphalt drive went from the house to the street. At the rear of the house was a large patio. It was off the Living Room. Now we could begin to enjoy life.

Meanwhile, back at the office, I was knee deep in the Park Post War Construction Program which included writing contracts, land investigation for new parks and Historic Building Restoration. I was still taking State Examinations, mostly for practice. When the Ranger I Exam. was announced, I applied to take it. I wanted to be a Ranger, it seemed to be an ideal job. The State Personnel Board rejected my application. I went to see why I had been rejected. The Board said no one is allowed to "go back", (meaning no one was allowed to file for a position of lower salary than the one you are now holding). My present position paid more than the Ranger I. I told the Board I wasn't "going back", "I am going ahead, I am pursuing a career. My Forest Engineering experience was part of my plan. It was background for my career as a Ranger." They still couldn't see that I was "going ahead"; nevertheless, I convinced them of my sincerity and they let me take the Exam. I passed number I, thanks to my taking all those practice examinations. I was quite familiar with the system by now.

#### Now I Am A Ranger

My appointment as a Ranger I was to Mt. Diablo State Park. Our housing was in an old C.C.C. building. (During the Depression the Civilian Conservation Corps was created to supply work and training to young men out of work. Part of the program was to improve State and National Parks. Mt. Diablo was one of the parks selected to get a contingent of the Corps to develop facilities.) Our building was built to serve as Officer Quarters. Crew members lived in barracks. We had a Living Room/Dining Room combination, Kitchen, Bedroom, Closet and two Baths with shower. It was by no means deluxe. Rent : \$12.50 a month including utilities.

My duties were somewhat mundane. Collect garbage and clean toilets. That was my daily routine. (For this I received a College education?) On Sunday I rose early to pick up Saturday's garbage, went home, took a shower, put on my dress uniform and headed for the top of the Mountain. The Summit Building was my duty station. It was built of stone, quarried from the Park and built by skilled stone masons who were on relief. I became an Interpreter and public contact person. I did this all year, even in winter when it was snowing. Winter was my busiest time when there was snow. On those days it was always one big traffic jam. But, it was fun, better than collecting garbage. During this time I took the Exam for Ranger II. On this one I also came out on top.

#### Promotion To Assistant Ranger

As soon as the results were known, I was offered the Ranger II spot at Big Basin State Park. I'll have to admit, Earl Hanson, our Deputy Director and a friend of mine, asked me where I wanted to go. I had picked a great park with a good Chief Ranger. We lived in the South Gate House also built by the 3Cs. It was a big improvement over our place on Mt. Diablo. Even though it was single wall construction, we still loved it. We enjoyed the extra room the house afforded. Here, Laura had some friends her own age to play with.

Since there were plenty of the Ranger category, to haul garbage etc., I did office work. There were always plenty of letters to answer, public contact at the Information Window, and Park patrol.

And speaking of Patrol, early one Sunday morning I noticed a lone motorcycle rider going through the park. Every so often he would stop at a tree to tack something on it. I watched him for a few minutes then went to investigate. He had been placing cardboard signs, about 6"x6" with an arrow, on selected trees. He was marking a trail for others to follow. I back tracked to the point where he entered the Park, carefully taking down the signs as I went. I then followed his trail until it left the Park, taking signs as before. The route he chose went through the heart of the Park. Some Motorcycle Club had picked our Park to hold a time and distance competition ride. I went back to the office and told the Rangers there that I was going to reroute their trail where it wouldn't bother us. I decided to reroute it up an unused road (an old logging road) that went nowhere, just out of the Park. The point where the signs ended was an old logged off area with lots of tractor trails to follow, all going nowhere. Sundays were very busy this time of year. I certainly didn't want a bunch of motorcycles adding to the confusion. Motorcycles were not welcome anyway.



I knew the motorcyclists would eventually work their way back into the Park. I told my Rangers to ask them for their Day Use ticket. The Rangers told them the road they came in on was not a Park entrance road. they had the option of paying for a Day Use ticket or go back the way they came in. Most paid the fee and left on the road leading to Boulder Creek.

I'll tell you for sure, these were a bunch of frustrated and angry bike riders. Of course their anger was focused on the club member who laid out the course in the first place. I wonder how he explained the situation to his buddies. I understand these people take their rides seriously. They are timed at various check points, the winners are those having the best times based on a prefigured standard mile per hour speed. There were no winners that day. I stayed out of the office until all had gone.

Strange how one remembers trivial incidents. This one I thought quite humorous. I came home one evening after a busy day. Jean was getting dinner and Laura was helping. I distinctly remember we were having baked potatoes. Jean asked me a question, as I was passing through the kitchen, which I only partially heard. I answered her with a remark I believed to be appropriate. Jean picked up a potato and threw it at me. I ducked, it exploded against the wall beside me. Then, Laura, in a small voice, full of surprise, burst out with, "She did it!" It struck Jean and me so funny we both started laughing. Upon reviewing the preceding conversation, it seems we were talking about two different things. Needless to say my reply was inappropriate to her question. To this day, "She did it!" still elicits a good laugh from the both of us.

While at Big Basin State Park we took trips to Inverness to look at property. Inverness had a special attraction for Jean. She had spent vacations there since she was a little girl. She had hiked the area around the Town and was familiar with it. She had spent many hours swimming from the sandy beaches. The first time she took me to see the area, I was impressed with it's beauty. We spent many hours target shooting at Shell Beach. We finally found what we wanted in the Seahaven Subdivision on Tomales Bay on the way to Shell Beach. After some negotiation we bought the house for 10,000 dollars by using my G.I.Loan. We were extremely happy with our purchase and had all kinds of plans for it. We went there every chance we could, to plan and dream about how to suit the house to our needs.

Just about this time the Rangers began to tear down some old CCC buildings. The Chief Ranger decided the fastest way to get rid of the lumber was to burn it. Since I wanted to build a work shop onto the Inverness house I saw this as a good opportunity to get some good lumber for my project. Lloyd Lively, Chief Ranger, said I could take all I wanted; but, take it on my own time. No problem. Since I was one of those working on the project, I threw the stuff I wanted off to the side to pick up later. I had enough lumber to build my work shop and some left over for other little projects. It has become a storage shed and the work shop, complete with cast iron stove.

*I Revisit Big Basin, my Second Post as Ranger  
July 29, 2007*



*This handsome sign at the entrance to Big Basin Redwoods State Park was the handiwork of Civilian Conservation Corps craftsman. During the Depression of the Thirties, CCC workers built much of the infrastructure of both National and State Parks. (Our residence is at the left, across the highway leading to Park Headquarters).*



The "South Gate House", was the Big Basin home for my wife Jean, baby daughter Laura and I in 1949 and 1950. It was a cozy, comfortable place which we all appreciated. In summer, after a hot day, we would put chairs outside to enjoy the cool of the evening. Our idyll was interrupted by the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 and my recall to active duty with the rank of major with duty status of Engineering (Civil), as described in the next chapter.

## ***Chapter HH***

### ***Active Duty Again – the Korean War 1950–1953***

I had kept my Reserve status with the United States Air Force (formerly Army Air Corps). My home station was McClellan Field, Sacramento. I was a "week end warrior" and a Major at the time. The Korean War had just started, some referred to it as a "police action". At any rate I was recalled to active duty at McClellan Field as an Installations Officer. The Army called them Engineering Officers. Both did identical work.

#### ***Off To Alaska***

There were about 20 of us Installations Officers recalled at McClellan. In a few weeks we began to be shipped out, one by one. When my turn came up, my destination was to the Alaskan Air Command in Anchorage, Alaska to Elmendorf Field. Jean and Laura were to stay in Sacramento until I found a house to rent, then I would send for them.

I lucked out. I found a brand new house and was quite proud of myself. A phone call started them on their journey North. So Laura and Jean, she being heavy with child, took off for Alaska. Jean's description of the ride to Anchorage with cabbages, in bumpy air, is hers to tell. Freckles arrived first. She was surely glad to see me. That baggage compartment was cold and cramped. She jumped all over me when I took her off the plane and took her to our new home.

The next day I met Jean and Laura at the airport. As I said before, I was really proud of my efforts to get this house. I couldn't wait for Jean to see it. As I drove up to the place I exclaimed, "Well, how do you like it?" Jean was not nearly as enthusiastic as I. She mumbled something that sounded something very close to "shack", but I wasn't sure. It had a combination Living-Room/Dining Room/Kitchen with a trap door in the floor to a well and a water pump located in what one might call a basement, that is if one had not seen a basement before. There was a separate Bed Room and a Large Closet. Laura had to make do in the Closet. Sorry, Laura, Daddy really goofed on this one. Yes, things were cramped. I realized, real fast, this place would not do at all! I had already put in for Base Housing. I wasn't counting on anything there for quite awhile.

Then things started to happen. One night, at this time of the year it seemed to be night all the time, Jean said, "Let's get to the Hospital - Now!" The trip to the Base Hospital was a bit scary. It was Winter, the road was icy, and the Hospital was a fair distance into the "boondocks". The Hospital itself was a seemingly endless series of Quonset Huts put end to end. Robert Charles came in due time. Now there were four of us. The house seemed even smaller. Now the weather turned even colder, it was extremely cold. It was hard to heat the house. With a new baby, and all that entailed, we had to get out of this place, in a hurry!!

I hounded Base Housing to get me something we could live in and be somewhat comfortable,

even if it were "sub standard housing". I had heard there were some settlers cabins that might be available. Luckily, (for me) there was one we could have. It was a log cabin and located by a lake, Hillberg Lake. It was a cozy place, in a rugged sort of way. I do believe Jean liked it. It had a Kitchen with breakfast nook, a Bath with a tub, Living Room with a large oil fired heater, Bed Room and a Sleeping Porch. Now we had room to stretch out.

We had two great neighbors, a beautiful lake, and a tree covered hill behind us. From this hill, in Summer, we could see the Sun drop down, travel along the horizon and start back up to begin it's daily journey again without disappearing from sight. In the Winter, we had an excellent view of the Northern Lights.

My official title was, Chief, New Construction Branch, Alaskan Air Command. Contracts had been let to build a series of Early Warning Radar Stations along Alaska's West Coast. The object was to warn the U.S. of Russian aircraft attempting to fly over U.S. airspace. I believe it was called the DEW line, the acronym for Detection, Early Warning.

In this position I had to check the construction, quality of work, adherence to the plans and specifications and make sure the time schedule was being maintained. It was my privilege to travel with and talk to the top level of management of the largest construction companies in the United States. The projects were so big and so important, two Corporations joined together in a joint venture to complete the contract within the allotted time, 18 months. At the end of that time, each facility was fully equipped, staffed and operational. Work was done on a 24 hour basis. The workers could work as long as they wanted.. All construction was completed on schedule.

This was a most satisfying assignment. I met true Captains of Industry. Their philosophy of work and dedication had a profound influence on me.

My tour of duty was up. The Base Commander told me he appreciated my work and wanted me to stay on. There would be an immediate promotion to Lt. Colonel. The lack of sunshine was affecting the teeth of Laura and Robert, and, for all I know their growth as well. I declined the promotion.

When I received my Orders to return home, I was also named Troop Commander for the Ship. The Captain didn't go the Inside Passage route, as any sane person would have done, he went for the open sea. It was indeed rough. There were no Troop inspections that trip. I lived on crackers and Gerbers custard pudding. I recommend it. Once we passed under the Golden Gate Bridge I came to life, signed the papers I had to, made an appearance to the Ship's Officers, whom I hadn't seen since the first day of the cruise, helped to pack the bags (mine were unopened during the whole trip) and prepared to debark. I was feeling fit as a fiddle and ready to go. And, why not? I was in bed the whole trip. Yes, I was ready for a real meal too.



*Major Charles Mehlert  
United States Air Force 1951*

My wife Jean and I had studio portraits taken when I was reactivated for service in the Korean War. We seldom went to the trouble to take formal photographs and this is a good point in the narrative to include this and the one of Jean on the following page.



Mrs. Jean L. Mehlert 1951

## Chapter III

### Back to State Parks 1953-1960

*Leaving Alaska and the Air Force behind, I returned to State Parks, serving first as ranger in charge of the newly-created Tomales Bay State Park (1953-1955), then in Sacramento with the Planning Section (1956-1960). During this last assignment, I was instrumental in rescuing Año Nuevo Island from private developers and seeing it transformed into a Marine Reserve. But now Alaska beckoned again.*

\* \* \* \*

My military leave was over. I went back to work for State Parks again. A new Park had been created and it's first budget contained a position for a Ranger II. It also had money for seasonal help. Tomales Bay State Park was to be my new assignment. This Park was practically in the backyard of our Inverness House. What an opportunity, a brand new Park in which to do planning and development.

A house was authorized in the second budget. Since there was no item for water development, I decided to do it myself. I selected a likely spring above the house and developed it. The redwood tank and other material I obtained from Leo Crawford, Chief Ranger, Samuel P. Taylor State Park. The manpower I needed was also obtained from that Park. They helped erect the tank, virtually a lost skill now since steel tanks have taken over, and dig the line from the spring to the tank. During this time I hooked up a 1" plastic line to supply the tank from the spring. The spring supplied a good flow of excellent water and filled the tank in a little over three days. The tank was 2500 gallons. It has since been named, Mehlert Springs. The Second Budget also contained a position for a Ranger I and an Entrance Road.

Things were going great. Laura was in school and making friends. Robert, by this time was called "Iggy" (Igpoock), a fictional Alaskan Eskimo of some repute. My new Ranger I was Jim Davis. He had quite a lot of experience with the US Forest Service. We were quite a team. I had been given the responsibility to lay out and construct the new Entrance Road, mainly because of my engineering experience in the Sacramento Engineering Office. We surveyed the road with a 50' cloth tape, a hand level, an abney level and a discarded Philadelphia Rod. We used plenty of cross section paper in plotting our route and balancing cut and fill. I hired a Tractor/Grader Operator for the actual construction. Jim and I rigged up a water wagon to compact the decomposed granite base. The grader made a couple of passes to insure the surface was "pool table smooth". A shot of hot, rapid penetrating road oil finished the job. A thing of beauty is a joy forever! It gives me great pleasure to travel the road now and enjoy the fruits of our labor. It hasn't been changed since it was built in 1954.

During the Road construction, Jim and I ran into a wee bit of a problem. There was a rocky outcrop that needed to be lowered so the road could maintain it's proper grade. It had to be blasted. I asked Jim if he had any experience with handling dynamite. He said "No". I said "Me too". "Let's get some and see how it works."

Off to Grandi's in Point Reyes Station. I got a case of dynamite and all the stuff to make it go off. That, and a set of instructions which came in the box, was all we needed. Armed with all this material and our own imagination, we did fine. After another 4 or 5 cases we finished the job.

### The Free China

While all this was going on, out in the Pacific, a Chinese Junk was slowly making its way to San Francisco. What made this event so important, my Brother, Calvin, was on that Junk. He was one of the six crew members making the voyage from Taiwan to San Francisco.

Jean and I first heard of the junk's approach to San Francisco through the R.C.A. Wireless Receiving Station located on the Point Reyes Headland. The men handling the receivers were friends and neighbors of ours. When the Junk transmitted a message stating that Vice Consul Calvin Mehlert was aboard, we were notified right away.

When we were told the Junk was nearing the Farallon Islands, we got into our car and headed for San Francisco. While crossing the Golden Gate Bridge we noticed lots of yacht activity in the Bay, at the entrance to the Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge. There were all types of pleasure craft, with flags flying, to welcome the Free China.

We finally found out where the Junk was tied up. There was quite a crowd there; the crew, the press, TV cameramen, relatives, friends, well wishers and the curious.

During their stay in San Francisco, the crew: Marco Chung, Captain; Paul Chow, Navigator; Hu Lu, Rigger and Ships Doctor; Reno Chen, Purser; Benny Hsu, Engineer; and Calvin Mehlert, Able Bodied Seaman and US Vice Consul, made our Park House their Headquarters and Second Home. One by one they left. Marco, Calvin and Hu Lu went back to Taiwan. Paul and Reno went to school in San Francisco, and Benny stayed with us while pursuing an academic career in the United States. Now, years later, they have all found their niche in the Work-a-day-World.

### Meanwhile

Things were progressing at Tomales Bay State Park. After Jim and I put in the Entrance Road, a Rest Room was built (by contract) and a Water System was to be installed (by contract), which would put Mehlert Springs on standby reserve. But, there were problems. Where was the water coming from. I had asked a well known and successful local "water diviner" to locate a well drilling site for me. It cost me a good bottle of "booze". The experts from the State Dep't. of Water Resources decided they knew more than the local man. They drilled three holes of their choosing, all were dry. They never tried where my man said they would find water. Now, instead of a well, they decided to contain surface water from spring seepage and use that for the Park water supply.

The water they collected smelled foul, it was contaminated and was undrinkable. These so called "experts" went back to Sacramento to figure out what to do. Finally they decided to treat the water with chemicals and then design and install a sophisticated filtration and treatment plant. For a Park??? This far exceeded the original budgeted amount. Additional money was needed so this amount was added to next years Budget.



All this water mess evolved because two guys were too proud to take the advice of a local man, a person who knew local conditions and had a history of much success in the area. Mehlert Springs was still our main source of water, good water, and remained so until the same two experts finally produced semi-potable and expensive water. To this day the water quality is not what it should be. I keep saying, "If you want good water, use Mehlert Springs."

It was about this time I received a call from Earl Hanson in our Headquarters in Sacramento. He offered me a promotion to Ranger V (Assistant Superintendent). That was quite a jump so I took it. We did regret leaving Park life for the City; but, a promotion is a promotion. I became part of the State Park Planning Section. This position involved a lot of field investigation of proposed State Parks. I have had the satisfaction of seeing my recommendations become popular State Parks.

#### The Saga Of Año Nuevo Island

While working as a Park Planner, I was given the assignment to look for beach property which would consolidate the bits and pieces of beach properties we had accumulated, from various sources, over the years. Funds for the acquisition of these parcels were earmarked to increase the amount of State Beaches along the California Coast.

I was given a stretch of Coast from Monterey to San Francisco. During my study of potential lands that would meet the criteria in San Mateo County, I had passed the Old Coast Guard Lighthouse on Año Nuevo Island many times. Every time I passed by, I cast a longing glance at that historic and scenic property. I knew it was beyond our reach because it was Government property. It was a natural for us to acquire because we owned the adjacent land on shore.

Late one afternoon I bought a Call-Bulletin in San Francisco to read before dinner. I liked their sport page with it's Jimmy Hatlo cartoon. Buried in the Paper, in an obscure location, I read the lead in a news item. "Spenger's to buy Año Nuevo Island." This can't be. I immediately got into my car and headed to Sacramento.

Bright and early the next morning I showed my boss the clipping. He knew Año Nuevo was essential to complete our holdings in the area. But, how come a person in the private sector was able to buy government land when it had not even been declared surplus? We went to the Director. He, too, was amazed at the news. To sell Government property to a private individual without Public Notification was against established procedure. We next went to the Governor, who, in turn, convinced the Legislature to "Memorialize Congress" to give the State a chance to acquire the property according to established procedure. The Congress agreed.

When the "papers" finally arrived, we found there were "unusual" conditions to be met in order to process the paperwork. I was sure the Disposal Officer in San Francisco, who made the deal with Spenger, was responsible for adding those conditions. We considered it an almost impossible task to complete the transaction by the deadline date. We went ahead, determined to fight the odds.

The State Legislature cooperated to the fullest. They were aware the "deck was stacked" and helped our Department speed up the paperwork that went back and forth between Sacramento and Washington. The Department of Finance sold the State Park Bonds to make the money available and ordered the check to be cut. This all took time, and time was getting short.

I'll never forget the last day, the deadline day. The check and paperwork had to be at the Land Disposal Office in San Francisco no later than 4:30 PM, the time the Office closed. At about one o'clock that Friday the Dept. of Finance called me to say the documents were ready. I told them I would be right over. Time was getting shorter by the minute, and minutes counted now!

By the time I left Sacramento, the deadline was about three hours away. It would take about two hours to get to San Francisco. My concern now was the Friday afternoon traffic, finding the office building and getting a parking place. By restraining my urge to go faster, I stayed right at the speed limit. I arrived in San Francisco in good time, found a parking place by the Building, located the right office and, with a sigh of relief, placed the Documents on the Disposal Officer's desk. With time to spare!!

I suddenly realized it was not yet over. The moment of truth was at hand. Suppose there was a mistake. Maybe even an omission. What would I do. How do I get into things like this? He was reviewing the Documents, one by one, carefully (slowly). I'm sure he was doing this on purpose, just to give me a bad time. Finally, he took up the check, looked it over, again with much care, and said, "Well, everything seems to be in order." His manner was cold, aloof, he was on the verge of being hostile. I just know he had a sweetheart deal with Frank Spenger. Their plan fell through all because a little obscure news item, probably put in by some junior reporter, was placed in the afternoon edition of the San Francisco Call-Bulletin.

The Island was finally transferred to the State May 13, 1958. At a later date, I found out Spenger actually owned the Island during the time we were frantically processing the Documents and getting the money. It seems somebody was quite sure the State could not meet all the conditions for acquisition of the Island.

Now, some 47 years later, the State has a Marine Reserve of International Fame, The Crown Jewel of the State Park System. It's Great When A Plan All Comes Together.!!

I took an examination for Director of State Parks for Alaska. It was a nationwide examination, I came out in the top three. I was the last to be interviewed. The Interviewing Board consisting of George Collins of the National Park Service and the Recreational Consultant of the Rockefeller Foundation came to Sacramento to interview me. The interview lasted two hours and ended with lunch at the Senator Hotel. (They paid). We went back to my office, they conferred a few minutes and when they came back, announced I was the successful candidate. The Alaska job was mine! I was the first State Park Director for the State of Alaska. Wow. That surely had a nice ring to it!



*Charles Mehlert*

*Gary Strachan  
Supervising Ranger*

*Ano Nuevo State Reserve*

*July 16, 2007*

*It is the ambition of persons working in a field such as mine to be able to leave something tangible behind for the enjoyment of future generations. For me, Ano Nuevo Island, part of Ano Nuevo State Reserve, is such a legacy, as explained above (p.147-148). The Reserve has become an attraction for thousands of visitors annually but also a mecca for scores of University research teams in ecology, marine life and seaboard flora and fauna. Although the Reserve is an important breeding ground for elephant seals and Stellar sea lions, and as such the focus of much attention, it is also serves to protect a wide range of flora and fauna that would otherwise be threatened by the encroachment of "development".*

*Gary Strachan and I first became acquainted over 20 years ago when we were both working on State Park development. For the last 20 years care of Ano Nuevo State Reserve has been in his hands. We are fortunate to have someone with his dedication and knowledge as guardian of this treasure.*



**Ano Nuevo Island**

The Island is on the skyline; the mainland portion of the Reserve covers acreage located on both sides of Highway One some 25 miles north of Santa Cruz. (My sister-in-law, Dr. Guyet Mehlert, is on the left).



*These elephant seals are sunning themselves on a mainland beach. Mating season is a quite lively time featuring ferocious battles between jealous bulls. Ano Nuevo is the southernmost mating ground for Stellar sea lions, the northernmost being in northern Alaska along the Bering Sea.*

## ***The Ano Nuevo Scrapbook***

*The items reproduced on pages 151-160 below  
are contained in a scrapbook put together  
by Mrs. Elizabeth Russell.*

\* \* \*  
The offer by the U.S. General Services Administration of Ano Nuevo Island at "Public Action" was made in a brochure reproduced on the following four pages. It is simply not credible that the Federal property experts in GSA were unaware of the requirement that any Federal property to be disposed of must first be offered to the relevant State government.

\* \* \* \* \*

# **PUBLIC AUCTION SALE**

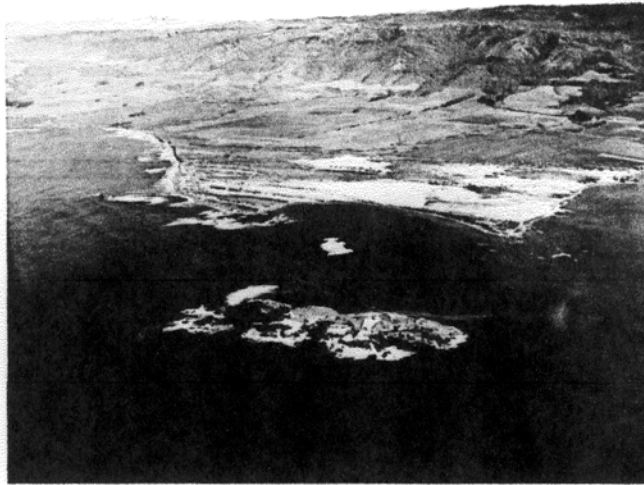
*Held by*

## **ROSS MERCANTILE COMPANY**

**744 MISSION STREET  
San Francisco 3, California**

*For*

**GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
PUBLIC BUILDING SERVICE  
49 FOURTH STREET  
San Francisco, California**



## **ANO NUEVO ISLAND FOR SALE**

**SALE**  
2 P. M., P. S. T.  
MARCH 19, 1958

**49 Fourth Street  
Fourth Floor  
SAN FRANCISCO**

**FISHERMAN'S PARADISE**  
for  
**PRIVATE FISHING CLUBS**  
**DEEP BLUE WATERS FOR IDEAL**  
**FISHING**

Season — February 1 to November 1

Abalone fishing is plentiful.  
Also Rock fish, Ling Cod, Rock Cod, Cabo-  
zone Cod including Clams.

Salmon fishing within 1½ miles of island.  
Immediate area is good area for sportsmen  
fishing.



**IMPROVEMENTS —**

Keepers House and Addition  
Keepers Coal & Store Room Bldg.  
Fog Signal Building  
Illuminating Oil Building  
Warehouse Building  
Carpenter Shop Building  
Three Miscellaneous Buildings



Ano Nuevo Island is about six miles in a southeasterly direction from Rancho Punta del Ano Nuevo situated in San Mateo County, California, 65 miles south of San Francisco and 20 miles north of Santa Cruz, containing 9 acres, more or less, with access to shoreline by a 40' wide easement through lands of Rancho Punta del Ano Nuevo to the county road. Davenport, the closest town, is located about 9 miles southeast of Ano Nuevo Island.

This unique opportunity to purchase an island is in a class by itself, for no comparable islands exist along the entire California coast line.



A bid to be acceptable must be accompanied by not less than 10% of the price bid which is to be in the form of cash, certified or cashier's check, or postal money order payable to the General Services Administration. In addition to terms and conditions set forth in the Offer to Purchase and Acceptance Form, the right is reserved as the interest of the Government may require, to waive any technical defect or informality in bids received.

The property may be inspected at any time. The right is reserved, as the interest of General Services Administration may require to reject any and all bids.

Apply for location plan, legal description and Invitation to Bid at the General Services Administration, 49 Fourth Street, San Francisco 3, California.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
49 FOURTH STREET  
SAN FRANCISCO 3, CALIFORNIA  
OFFICIAL BUSINESS

POSTAGE AND FEES PAID  
U. S.  
GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

#### OFFERING

This property is being offered by General Services Administration and is being auctioned by Ross Mercantile Company, 744 Mission Street, San Francisco, California.



#### ACCEPTABLE BIDS

All bids, to be acceptable, shall be on an "as is, where is" basis for cash, or for credit on the basis of not less than 20% of the purchase price at the time of closing, and the balance to be paid quarterly over a period not to exceed 10 years with interest at the rate of 5% per annum on the unpaid balance, subject to the right of the purchaser to elect at any time to prepay the unpaid balance without penalty.



# Santa Cruz Sentinel

Thursday, Sept. 17, 1992

Santa Cruz, Calif.

Copyright 19  
Santa Cruz Sentinel P

## Man who saved an island

### Año Nuevo could have been home to a restaurant

By JOHN BESSA  
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — It was 34 years ago that Año Nuevo Island, prized territory for elephant seals and sea lions on the North Coast, came within an hour and 20 minutes of becoming home to a restaurant.

"I was driving as fast as I could safely go without getting a ticket," said Chuck Mehlert, who as a state parks worker raced between



■ *Bay not always a placid sanctuary*  
— Page B5

■ *Lifeguards to make a long paddle*  
— Page A2

Sacramento and San Francisco with the papers to close the sale of the island to the state. "It seemed like an eternity. All the traffic and all the lights were against me."

Mehlert left his office in Sacramento at 1 p.m. Along with the papers, he had to deliver a check for \$51,095 to federal offices in San Francisco before they closed for the weekend to seal the deal with the federal government

to buy the island — a deal that was almost made with a San Francisco restaurateur.

He made it, of course, with 80 minutes to spare. Now the only meal you could get today on the island 25 miles north of Santa Cruz you'd have to pry from the jaws of an elephant seal.

Mehlert's role in the preservation of Año Nuevo Island will be recognized at dedication ceremonies for Franklin Point Dunes, the newest acquisition at Año Nuevo State Reserve, between noon and 2 p.m. today.

The tale of the island's future begins about 1957. Mehlert, now 75, retired and living in Monterey, was an investigator for the state

*Please see AÑO NUEVO — A2*



Robert Fish/Monterey County Herald

Chuck Mehlert will be honored in a ceremony today.

# Año Nuevo

Continued from Page A1

park's recreational planning unit in Sacramento. He was given the task of finding potential recreation property, and was employed in that job when he saw a story in a San Francisco newspaper about Spenger's Fish Grotto restaurant of Berkeley going ahead with plans to buy Año Nuevo Island from the U.S. Coast Guard, which had a lighthouse station there.

"I said, 'Gee, how could that be?' When an agency in the government doesn't want some property, they are supposed to ask other government agencies first."

No one had asked the state parks. Mehlert told his supervisor about the island.

"And this is where the whole thing gets a little tight," he said.

The state parks, according to Mehlert, got the state Legislature to "memorialize Congress," that is, tell the United States that they wanted the island.

"They said OK," Mehlert said. The race was on. They had 90 days to prepare the required documents, cut a check and deliver it all to federal offices in San Francisco.

Not as easy as it sounds, Mehlert said.

"They set several conditions to meet — with the intent of making it hard for us to comply with them," he said.

Some of the conditions were that "we had to have unlimited access to the island. How? They didn't say," Mehlert said.

Another was to keep a rusting, iron Coast Guard light tower on the island in repair.

'Father, he went to auctions. It was an auction. He came home celebrating, saying he paid \$50,000 for the island, with the option that the state could take it over.'

— Frank 'Bud' Spenger

Federal agents from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation inspected the island before the deed was drawn up.

"The outdoor rec people could see the tower deteriorating faster than we could do anything about it," Mehlert said.

After wheeling and dealing, "We eventually had these absurd conditions removed one by one," he said.

He suspects that the requirements were meant as deterrents, by someone in the federal government who didn't want the state to have it.

"Sometimes you have a hunch. The Spengers weren't too happy about us coming in (and breaking up their plans)," Mehlert said.

Unhappy indeed. The Spengers actually owned the island for 90 days, said Frank "Bud" Spenger, son of the restaurateur who bought the island and planned to develop it.

"Father, he went to auctions. It was an auction. He came home celebrating, saying he paid \$50,000 for the island," Spenger said, "with the option that the state could take it over."

The thrill and enthusiasm of owning an island disappeared for the Spengers on the 90th day after the auction, the last day the state could take the island — the day Mehlert almost didn't make it to San Francisco on time.

If he hadn't, Mehlert said the island would have reverted to the federal government, destined to become home to a restaurant.

On May 13, 1958, Año Nuevo Island officially passed into state hands, the second acquisition of property at the Año Nuevo reserve, according to Kenneth Mitchell, chief of acquisitions for the state Department of Parks and Recreation.

The first was 129 acres of Point Año Nuevo purchased from the Flora Steele Ranch earlier that year, Mitchell said.

He said the deed records in Sacramento show "quite a bit of correspondence" between the state and the federal General Services Administration, the agency with jurisdiction over the island. No one was cooperating, Mitchell said.

"It looks like the people in San Francisco weren't paying attention

to what was being said in Washington," Mitchell said.

Mitchell said the state paid for the market value of the island. The island was appraised at \$34,000 initially, but after federal officials set up a public auction and received a bid for \$100,000 for the property, they used that to determine the value of the island.

"The federal government was trying to get as much money as they could out of the state," Mitchell said. "I'm amazed. Usually when the federal government was having pretty good relations in the past few years. I guess it was always that way."

"It was just one of those political deals," Spenger said of the state taking the island. "In those days I was so damn busy with the restaurant we did have that I didn't care what happened to it. But we do think too much of the government."

Spenger said plans to build a restaurant and a tramway spanning the quarter-mile from shore attracted the interest of a lot of people. Now, as always, it attracts a lot of sea lions.

It's better off that way, Mehlert said, for the pinnipeds and the people.

"Point Lobos may be the best down here, but I think Año Nuevo is pretty close to being the crown jewel in that neck of the woods," Mehlert said. "This has been a thing watching Año Nuevo State Reserve grow in stature to be renowned almost worldwide."

For information about today's event, call (415) 879-0852.

# The Times

San Mateo County's Daily Newspaper

Vol. 92, No. 225 ★★ ★★

San Mateo, California, Friday, September 18, 1992

35¢ per copy 348-4

## How one man's vision saved island

### Tale of Ano Nuevo

By SANDRA BURNETT

Times Staff Writer

ANO NUEVO — The year was 1958 and a notice in one of the San Francisco papers had just caught the eye of Charles "Chuck" Mehlert.

The item said Spenger's restaurant in Berkeley was buying Ano Nuevo Island, recently declared surplus property by the Coast Guard.

"They wanted to build a causeway out there and have a large restaurant," recalled Mehlert. "It would have been spectacular, that's for sure."

But, thanks to Mehlert, the island was sold instead to the

See ANO NUEVO, Page A2



MIKE RUSSELL/The T

Charles "Chuck" Mehlert stands against the backdrop of Ano Nuevo Island.

# Ano Nuevo

Continued from Page One

California parks system and has been preserved as a major breeding ground for the once endangered California elephant seals, while the mainland part of Ano Nuevo State Reserve draws 210,000 visitors annually.

Thursday, Mehlert was honored by the state Parks Department and by Sen. Becky Morgan for his crucial role in preserving Ano Nuevo. The event at the park also celebrated the addition of the 120-acre Franklin Point Dunes area to the north, and the kickoff of several days of observances of the formation of the Monterey Bay Sanctuary, which stretches from Marin County through San Simeon to the south.

During Thursday's festivities, Peter Grenell of the California Coastal Conservancy officially turned over the Franklin Point Dunes, bought in July from the Campbell Soup Corp. for \$1.1 million, to the State Department of Parks and Recreation.

The property is one of several purchases on the San Mateo County coastline made with \$8 million from a state bond measure passed in 1988.

In addition to Franklin Point, the conservancy bought 1,270 acres for \$6 million on the Cowell Ranch south of Half

## Monterey Bay Sanctuary to be dedicated Sunday. A3

Moon Bay, and is spending \$450,000 toward buying the 300-acre San Pedro Point in Pacifica in cooperation with the city of Pacifica and the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST).

The Franklin Point opening was a homecoming of sorts for Gary Strachan, supervising ranger at Ano Nuevo. He recalled being chased off the property with a shotgun by a previous owner when he was a boy.

It was Strachan who brought out Mehlert's role in Ano Nuevo's existence.

"This would all be condos if it wasn't for that man," he said in an interview.

Back in 1958, there weren't the 70-odd conservancy and watchdog groups that now work with the Coastal Conservancy to preserve California's coastline. There was just Parks and Recreation, and Chuck Mehlert was one of their men in Sacramento, charged with recreation planning for the Central Coast.

The newspaper article about Ano Nuevo piqued his interest because the property would fit in perfectly with some of the parkland already planned for

the coast — yet the state hadn't been offered a chance to buy it.

Mehlert learned that Ano Nuevo had been a beacon station for the Coast Guard, but the Coast Guard had abandoned it because a buoy could do the job, and ferrying staff and their families out to the island was treacherous.

He also learned that federal law required surplus property to be offered to the state if no other federal agency wanted it. The state could buy it for half of its value.

The deadline for making the sale was March 19, and given the red tape involved in such a purchase, Mehlert said, it came down to the wire.

"Finally, time was getting short and on the last day, a Friday, the Department of Finance called about 1 o'clock and said the paperwork was all done and they'd cut the check," he said. "They asked 'Do you want to come get it, or shall we mail it?' My supervisor said 'I've got a man to pick it up and take it to San Francisco.'

"I drove it down to the agency. I had about an hour and a half before they closed. I tell you, going down there, I was going the speed limit but it seemed like an eternity. That's how close we came to losing that valuable piece of property."

The price: \$51,095.

Mehlert went on to complete a 40-year career with the state parks, retiring five years ago as Regional Resource Manager for the system. Along the way, he spent a year as Alaska's first parks director after it became a state.

Upon his retirement, Mehlert was appointed to the Advisory Board for Underwater Parks, of which he is currently chairman.

"It keeps me wet," he said. When he moved to Monterey 25 years ago, he took up SCUBA diving. At age 75, he still dives.

Twenty years ago, he did some research dives around Ano Nuevo Island.

"There weren't too many pinipeds (elephant seals, harbor seals, sea lions, and so forth) at that time," he recalled. Although the island itself is off-limits except to researchers, it has become such a favorite hatchery for sea lions that they've overflowed onto the mainland, where thousands of visitors can observe them.

As far as Mehlert is concerned, it's become a better attraction for more people than the proposed restaurant and fishing village. It's also attracted other wildlife.

"Now, the heavy population (of elephant seals) has drawn a lot of white sharks," said Mehlert. "I don't think I would do that dive now."



*"Elephant Seal"  
a lithograph by Artist Stern*

## **Chapter HU**

### ***Birth of the Alaska State Park System 1960***

As its first State Park Director I had a free hand in creating a Park Plan. This first year of Alaska's Statehood was also the "Transition Year" from Territory to Statehood. The Federal Government gave the State Transition Grants to "jump start" State Government until it created its own revenue through taxation. So, with my transition grant and lots of optimism, I was eager to get started. What an opportunity! My objective for the first year was to establish a series of camping areas along the highways to assist Alaskans and Tourists to get around this great State, inexpensively.

I had an excellent relationship with the Director of Highways. He agreed to designate, to the highway construction Contractors, sites I selected for their construction camps. Then, when the highway construction had been completed, the contractors would leave the camps intact. My crew would then convert the area for public use. Water supply, sanitary facilities, electricity and telephone communication would already be in place. Cost to my Department would be minimal. Here would be a ready made campground, along a newly completed highway, ready for public use.

For the future I withdrew large tracts of land having exceptional beauty and superb park potential. Things were going great. The future was bright. I made a modest budget to carry out my next year's plan. Things were fitting into place nicely and I was comfortable in what I was doing.

#### **Disaster Strikes**

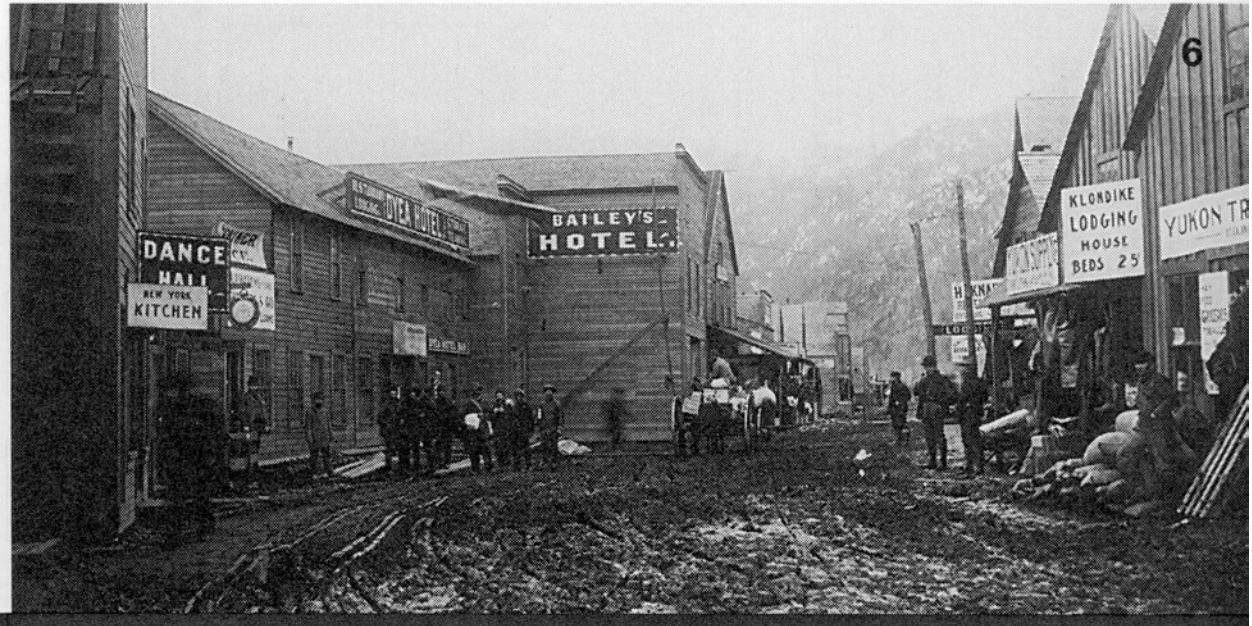
Yes, disaster struck! The fishing season had been disastrous. Anticipated taxes from the fishing income was counted on to fill the Alaskan Treasury. This in turn was to fund the State's programs for the next fiscal year. The plight of the fishermen was worse than thought at first. Now, the State was looking for money to give food and shelter to those in need. The Governor froze all State spending. All unspent State money was used to establish the dole. The Governor confiscated all Federal money allotted to Alaska's Government projects to help feed the hungry in this crisis. The money I had nurtured over the months had vanished, like overnight.

The Governor announced that the only State programs to continue the next fiscal year were those funded by Federal grants such as, Forestry, Highways, Social Services and the like. There would be no money for State Parks. Thus ended my dream of building one of the finest State Parks in the nation.

Since I had burned no bridges behind me, there was always the opportunity to return to the State of California and its Park System. This is what I decided to do.

### ***The Chilkoot Trail***

In my brief tenure as the First State Park Director of Alaska, I was already planning for the resurrection of the original "Chilkoot Trail", made famous by the thousands of "stampedeers" in the 1897-1898 Klondike Gold Rush. My initial survey of the Trail, its traces still discernible, was guided by an old "Sourdough". (The photographs below are from "A Hiker's Guide to the Chilkoot Trail", published by the Minister of the Environment, Government of Canada, 1991).



#### ***"Sheep Camp" – a stopover on the Chilkoot Trail***

*"Sheep Camp" in 1897 had 16 hotels, one of which belonged to a Bailey but research to date has failed to determine whether or not my family is related to this hardy entrepreneur. "Sheep Camp" also had three saloons, two "dance halls" and a bath house.*



#### ***Climbing the Pass***

After Sheep Camp, the Trail's gradient increased until at a place called "Scales" it reached 45 degrees causing many stampedeers to become so discouraged as to abandon their supplies and turn back.

## **Chapter U**

### **Back to California and State Parks 1961**

I wrote to Charlie De Turk, my former Director, to see if there were any openings in the Department and, if so, would he take me back. He said "yes" to both questions. I ended up in Monterey in the Regional Planning Office. This was a great break for me. I stayed in the Planning Office until the Assistant Superintendent in Monterey transferred out. The position was now vacant so I slipped into that spot with the help of Jess Chaffee, District Superintendent. I was still on the Asst. Supt. list so had no problem taking the position.

#### **Birth Of The Underwater Park System**

It was in this position I became involved in Scuba diving. One day at Point Lobos, on a State Park Commission field trip, I proposed to Director Mott that our Parks along the Coast should not end at the high tide line. (Acquisition of sea shore property traditionally extends to the mean high tide line.) I told him there are spectacular park values in the off-shore area as beautiful and exciting as anything that exists in our terrestrial Parks. We should develop a system of Underwater Parks like we have for those on dry land. He agreed!

I met Director Mott in Santa Cruz two weeks later. He told me he was hiring a Deputy Director, Bob Bates, to begin work on an Underwater Park Program. He asked me to assist in this endeavor. Our first task was to create a Board with expertise in the marine environment to help in the selection of the best examples of the various marine habitats along the California Coast. We also developed guidelines for the underwater park selection process. My dream was fast becoming a reality. The Board was created in 1968 and is still in existence to this very day in 2007. Most of the original members are still serving on the Board. This group of scientists, all experts in their field, has contributed a great service to the State in helping to create a Statewide System of Underwater Parks and Reserves. It has been an honor for me to be associated with these distinguished men.

Our Board is known in foreign lands also. In 1974 the Board was invited to Tahiti to make a survey of safe diving sites for public use. There were several private diving areas controlled by Hotels and Club Med but none for use by the general public. It was the Government's wish to increase Tourism by offering expanded scuba diving opportunities. We spent five days doing the surveys and came up with several good, safe public diving locations. The Tahiti Dept. of Tourism was pleased with the results. Hopefully, they are still in use.

It has been said that I am the father of the California Underwater Park System. Well, maybe so. I won't argue about that. However, I did have encouragement from Director Mott. Without him there would be no Underwater Park System. Also, there is an enthusiastic group that has helped to keep the Program alive and well. The Underwater Park System has been recognized as a vital program which further enhances the nationwide image and stature of the California State Park System.



### I Meet Philippe Cousteau

One day my Secretary came into my office and said, "Philippe Cousteau is on the phone." I was stunned. He said he was going to do a film on the Sea Otters of Monterey Bay. Would I be available to help? Naturally I said yes!

He invited Jean and me to have dinner with him on his boat. We discussed the details of the project and what type of support persons were available. We returned the favor with a squid dinner at our house. All the crew were there as well as Philippe. We had a great time. Jean had purchased a book Philippe and his father had written about Sharks. She brought it out for him to autograph. She said she was going to give to me for Christmas. Philippe signed it then said, "Why wait until Christmas, give it to him now." And she did.

The filming was fun. My job was to take 2 or 3 sea urchins out of a bag and stuff them into designated rock crevices. The cameramen, already in position, would get pre-focused shots of the otters taking out the sea urchins and heading for the surface. Topside cameras would then record the otters as they came to the surface, rolling over on their backs and enjoying that tasty morsel.

I had been down for some time and wanted to know how much air I had left in my tank. I put my hand behind me, feeling for my air gauge, when I felt two cold Sea Otter paws (they felt like little hands) take hold of my hand and gently put it in it's mouth. A cold chill ran through me. I was also startled. I realized that by now my hand must taste like a sea urchin after handling so many. But, Sea Otters are smart, it realized my hand was not a sea urchin in spite of the sea urchin taste. So, as gently as it went in, the Sea Otter took my hand out of it's mouth. I was really worried for a second or two. Those little critters have extremely powerful jaws. It could have bitten my hand severely.

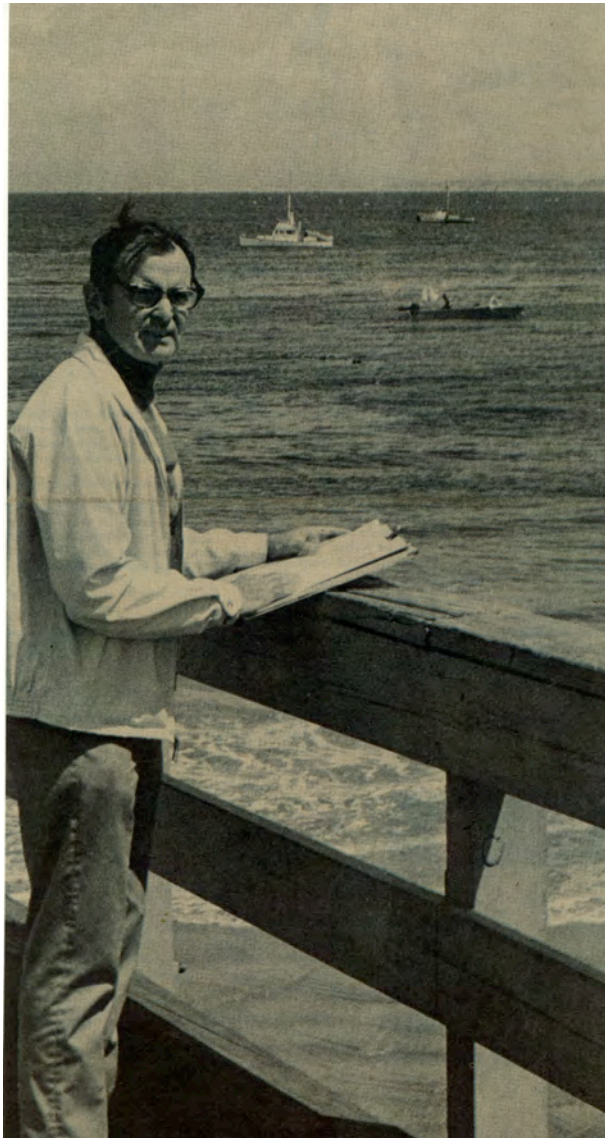
The filming took about two weeks. I was not involved in the topside portion of the work. I did get to know most of the crew. It was quite educational talking to them when they discussed their particular area of expertise. Actually all were versatile and could take up the slack wherever needed.

When the documentary came on the TV some months later, it was interesting to be able to relate to the underwater sequences. I could visualize where I was stationed off camera with each change of location.

I have been fortunate in my career to have been able to meet interesting and unusual and, yes, famous people. How can one person be so lucky.

*On this and the following pages are materials illustrating some aspects of my work related to the development of a system of coastal underwater parks (p.163 above), the maintenance of a clean Monterey Bay, and to collaboration with the French Government in evaluation of underwater parks sites on Tahiti.*

\* \* \* \*



Monterey Bay Clean-up Drive

Accumulation of debris on the floor of Monterey Bay had reached disastrous proportions by early 1971. In response, hundreds of skindivers collaborated in a two-day campaign, which I coordinated, to remove some of this litter.

*Activities such as this clean-up campaign have served to raise public awareness of the problem and to secure the cooperation all citizens in keeping the Bay and its waters pristine.*

\* \* \* \*

## Skindivers Collect Tons of Junk

Cans, bottles, tires, boots, pipes, bullets . . . even a water heater, toilet and bathtub were littering beautiful Monterey Bay.

Fish were dying from snapping at beer can "pop tops" and octopuses were succumbing to the temptation of swimming into a myriad of submerged pop bottles.

Concerned citizens — including many CSEA members — decided to act; organizing a massive cleanup campaign, an Ecology Dive.

As if to prove the adage — "if you want something done, ask a busy man" — Chuck Mehlert had things well in hand.

Mehlert, who was coordinator of the drive, is president of CSEA's Cypress Point Chapter 148 and president of the Monterey Sunfish Skindiving Club. He also is assistant superintendent of Beaches and Parks' district 4.

Under Mehlert's guidance, more than 100 skindivers worked beneath the placid Monterey Bay surface to clean up litter near Cannery Row, Lovers Point, Fisherman's Wharf, Pacific Grove and other landmarks.

"We collected 5 tons of junk in 2 days," Mehlert said. "It was quite a kickoff for Earth Week."

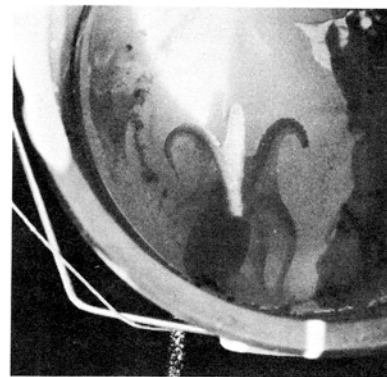
The park ranger had skindivers collecting material, kids scrutinizing it for living organisms and others helping haul it away. They even had a side benefit by using octopuses for study of pesticide pollution in the bay.

The future?

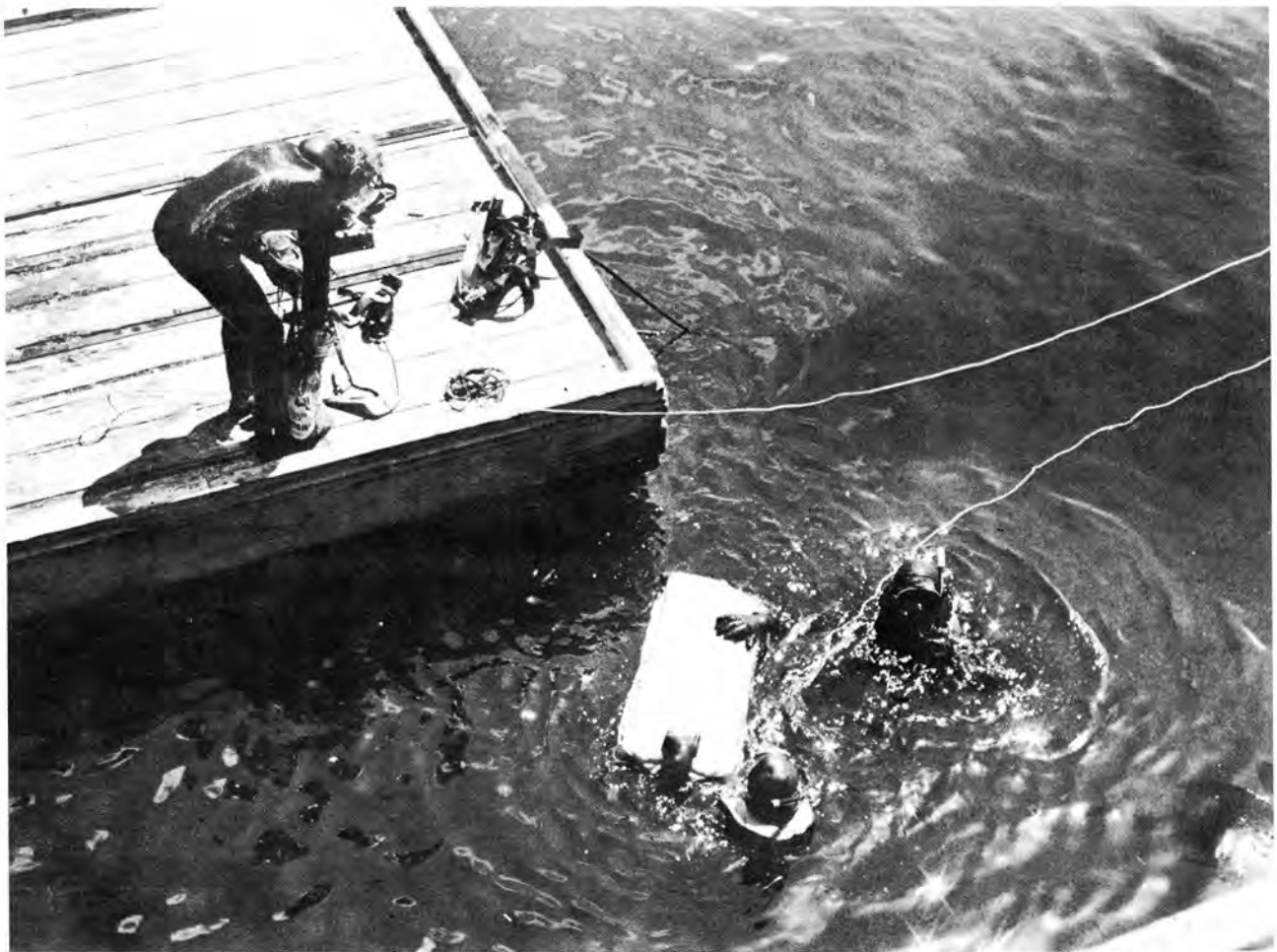
Art Lloyd, maintenance supervisor for Beaches and Parks district 4

and vice president of CSEA Chapter 148, said the weekend apparently was just a starter.

"All state employees seem to want to help next year," Lloyd said. "This thing ballooned so fast we couldn't coordinate it all this year. We've already heard from HRD, DMV, Fish and Game and Forestry for next year."



An octopus, barely visible in the Dr. Pepper bottle, swims freely when liberated in a bucket. It was on its way to scientists studying pesticide contamination of Monterey Bay.



Skindivers tie some of the 5 tons of debris to ropes so it can be brought from the depths of Monterey Bay (above). Art Lloyd, vice president of CSEA Chapter 148, checks gear of one of the more than 100 volunteer skindivers participating in the dive (top, left); Donna Fero, (center, left) member of Chapter 148, passes out literature and helps coordinate

efforts at dive headquarters; Bob McCurdy, state traffic officer and Chapter 148 member, inspects debris brought up by skindivers. The bottle contained an octopus. Monterey County school children study debris for living organisms which will be put back in the Pacific Ocean. Underwater photo shows litter, including a boot and bottle.



If I was to do an adequate job of designing a system of Underwater State Parks, it was almost obligatory that I take up scuba diving – which I did at age 50. Once under water I became as fascinated, as most divers do, by the incredible variety and color of underwater life. So I added underwater photography to my learning schedule, using a 16mm Bolex movie camera for which I designed a waterproof carrier, as well as an assortment of still cameras.

Charles



**Monterey Bay 1972**

*(After a session of underwater exploration, my friends and I are picked up by boat before being returned to shore).*

In order to establish an underwater park, a first step is to convince the Parks and Recreation Commission that a particular area should be designated as a park, a reserve or a recreation area. This group has been out gathering the basic data for a report to the Commission on the Carmel Bay area. In an interview for the The Herald Weekend Magazine, September 23, 1972, I was quoted as follows:

*"...the main object of putting this unequaled underwater treasure into the state park system is to protect it and interpret it for the public. By protecting we mean preventing the thoughtless and useless collecting of unique plant and animal life. Most of the marine life is fragile and you can't take it off the rocks without damaging it or killing it. We're trying to persuade people to curb their trophy-hunting instincts and to be happy with a photographic record."*

Today there are over 19 areas designated as either underwater parks or reserves, stretching from Mendocino County in the north to San Diego County in the south. Point Lobos State Reserve was the first underwater park in the world.

*Diving at Point Lobos  
1968*



My colleague and I are planning a dive to photograph marine life for display in public use areas. Point Lobos Marine Reserve has become internationally famous for the beauty of its coastline and the astonishing variety of its underwater life forms.



Picking our way over rocks to the dive entry point...



...then swim out to the chosen photo site.



Photography finished.. now for a beer.





*Cribrina Zanthogrammica*

An underwater world of fantastic shapes, infinite color combinations and astonishing life cycles.

12/18/73

# Area Divers to Spend Holiday In Tahiti—Mostly Underwater

By Lucida Simon  
Herald Staff Writer

Nine area residents will be among 46 Californians heading to Tahiti Thursday for a unique Christmas vacation — much of it underwater.

The group including 32 scuba divers, underwater photographers, and marine scientists will be investigating the possibility of underwater park sites at the Pacific Ocean vacation isle for the French government.

The trip was organized and is headed by Chuck Mehlert, assistant superintendent of the local district of the state Department of Parks and Recreation, and may pave the way for a larger event, a Pan-Pacific aquathletics symposium in 1974.

### Eight Days

With eight days of diving scheduled during the 13-day excursion, the trip is as much business as pleasure. Mehlert said that the group would be staying on Tahiti with dives planned off four smaller island nearby.

The divers, chosen because of special training in marine biology, photography, medicine or related marine fields, will work in three teams to

catalogue and inventory marine life and to investigate and evaluate underwater park sites, Mehlert said.

Local divers in Tahiti and the French government will assist the group, Mehlert noted.

### Invitation

The underwater park investigation was initiated by the French government which invited the California advisory board on underwater parks to assist them. Mehlert, liaison officer between the advisory board and state parks director William Penn Mott, was chosen to organize the effort.

The entire party will be housed at no charge in a school dormitory for the stay, Mehlert said, but each member will be contributing \$408 toward airfare.

While the divers won't be leaving until Thursday, two and one-half tons of diving equipment, tanks, and wet suits are already deposited on the South Pacific island, Mehlert noted.

Because of limited accommodations, many qualified divers, some from Monterey County, could not be included in the diving team, he added.

### Women

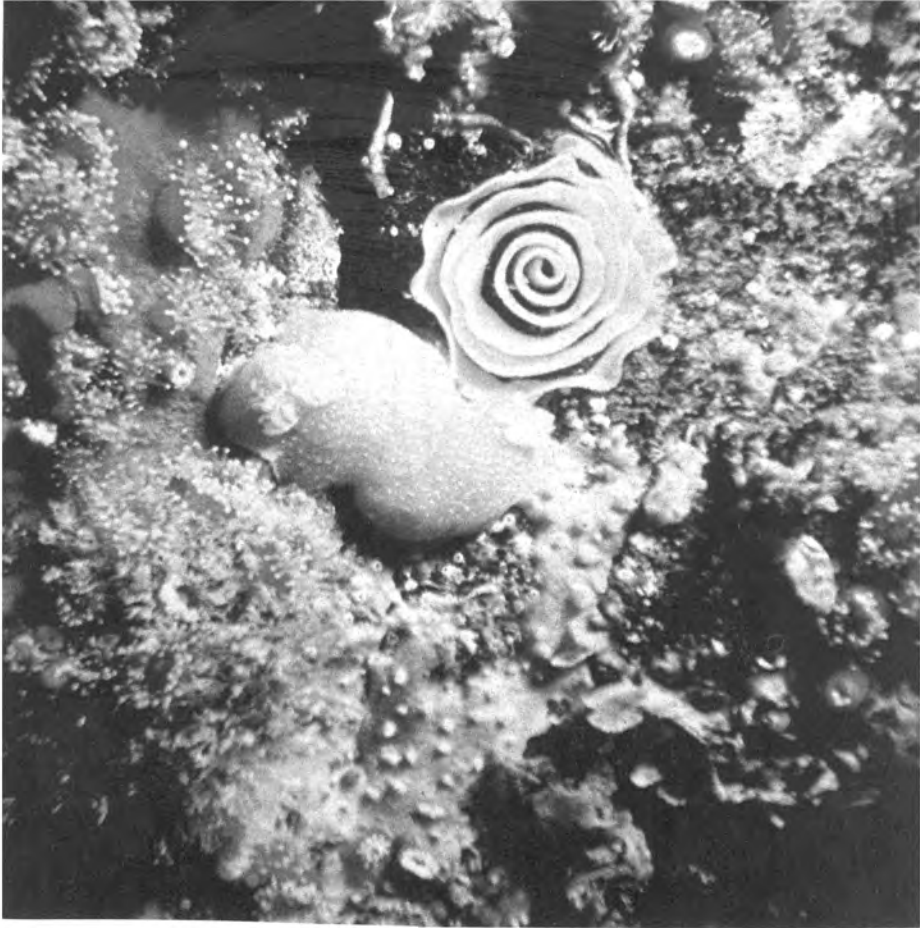
On the trip will be eight female divers including Vicki Hanan, a marine biologist and instructor at San Benito High School.

Other area residents along

as divers will be Bud Laurent, Dan Gotschall and Mike Johnson with the state Department of Fish and Game in Monterey; Howard Jones, Monterey dentist; and James Mattison, Salinas physician.

Acting as consultants but not diving during the trip will be Don Rich, visitor services ranger for Monterey historical monuments, and Art Lloyd, maintenance specialist with the local parks and recreation office.

*When the French government learned of our plan to establish a system of California underwater parks, it realized that some of its Pacific Island possessions might also be suitable sites. The result was an invitation from the French in 1972 to our Underwater Parks board to send a team of experts to Tahiti, a team which I headed (p.163 above). Twenty years later I went to Hainan, China, on a similar mission (following chapter).*



## Chapter UH

### *The China Odyssey 1984, 1987*

*I made two trips to China, in 1984 and 1987, both in connection with the development of an underwater park on Hainan Island in south China and both instigated by Paul Chow, Professor of Physics at U.C. Northridge and, in 1955, navigator of the junk Free China mentioned in Chapter Nine above.*

\* \* \* \*

#### Opportunity Knocks

Paul Chow called me early in May 1984 and asked me if I'd like to plan an underwater park in China. Paul always seems to speak so enthusiastically about things, that one's immediate response is automatically in the affirmative. True to form I jumped at the bait. An underwater park in China? That was wild.

When things cooled down a bit, it seems Paul saw an article in the Peoples Daily that the Chinese Government was thinking about developing Hainan Island in Southern China. It seems the development was broad in scope. He had written to the appropriate Government Office to get some more information. That first phone call really whetted my appetite to hear more. In due time he received the information he had asked for. A team of several people, having different disciplines, was needed to assess the potential for development of the area. I put together a team that was able to satisfy the requirements of the Chinese Government.

Now came the moment of truth. It was stated in the material Paul received, outside help had to pay their expenses to China. All expenses incurred inside China would be paid by the Chinese Government. The team I had formed gradually melted away. I was left alone. That was OK, I had friends that would finance my flight to China. My own organization, Creative Environmental Consultants, would kick in the major portion needed. Paul had visited the Island, years before, when he was a fishing boat Captain. His description of the area, in what is now the vicinity of Sanya, gave indication of an excellent underwater recreation area.

Letters, back and forth, were increasingly favorable, especially the letter of July 9, 1984 from the Committee for External Economics. But, that was the last letter. We heard nothing more from China.

Note: Some months later there was a news item in the Los Angeles Times of a big scandal involving the purchase and selling of vehicles by Hainan officials. Paul Chow told me the officials we had been corresponding with were the ones. They were in disgrace and out of the Government. No wonder we had not heard from them.

#### The Sanya Caper

I had all but forgotten about the proposal I had made to the Hainan Administrative Region. We received a notice of a diving trip to Hainan Island. The first of its kind to China. Jean and I decided to go. We asked my brother, Calvin to go too. He was fluent in Chinese, having been with Nixon as an interpreter when the President went to China. So, all three of us signed up to go.

We were to dive off Sanya. (That hit a responsive note in my mind. I took all the correspondence, relating to my proposal, with me on the chance Calvin and I could meet with officials in Haikow.)

---

All dives would be off a boat, with a hot meal being served after diving. This sounded great. The trip would last 16 days. Diving would be mixed with shopping and sightseeing including tours of the native villages in the area.

Since this was a first in China, we had a special guide. Her name was Yu Hong, Supervising Travel Agent in Hong Kong. When she realized Calvin was a former foreign service officer, spoke Chinese and knew the US Consul General in Hong Kong, nothing was too good for us! She wanted an introduction to the Consul General at all costs. Calvin parlayed this to the "Nth" degree. Eventually, she got what she wanted when we returned to Hong Kong on our return to the States.

Calvin and I made a trip to the Government Center in Haikow. We found the Offices of the Economic Bureau and wanted to meet with someone in that Department as a belated follow up. When they read the letters, they readily agreed to talk to us. They knew nothing of the person who signed the letters. (I found that strange.) Through Calvin, I talked to them about the potential for a marine tourist development in conjunction with an underwater recreation center in the vicinity of Sanya with the focus on Dragon Tooth Bay. They listened to us politely, made no commitments and agreed the area was exceptionally beautiful.

The Group we were talking to consisted of three persons from the Government in Beijing and three Hainanese. Each office had the same type of staffing, an equal number of Beijing types and Hainanese. The Central Gov't staff did the decision making and the Hainanese were there so it could be said there was representative government. It seems China has their own version of equal opportunity. The odd thing is, the Beijing contingent could not converse with their Hainan counterparts. There was an actual language barrier. The Hainanese had their own dialect, those from Beijing spoke Mandarin only, and not the Hainan dialect. In the week or so we were in Sanya Calvin picked up the Hainan dialect. He was able to talk to the Hainanese as easily as he could with the Beijing people. He ended up by acting as translator for both sides. This was certainly a weird situation. I thought it was quite funny. I think Calvin did too. Nothing was resolved by our meeting. My hope was, that the idea of an underwater recreational complex might take root somewhere in the Great Chinese Bureaucracy.

While we were in Sanya, our Forty Fifth Wedding Anniversary came around on May 9th. A chance remark alerted the Hotel Manager that this was our special day. When we came down to dinner Jean had noticed the big lobster, that had occupied a large tank, was missing. As we sat down to eat we noticed some wine bottles on the table. This was unusual since we were usually served beer. When Calvin toasted us on our 45th, we realized he had supplied the wine. It turned out we were treated to a banquet. The centerpiece was the missing lobster. At the end of the dinner we were honored with a special cake and outside a fireworks display completed the festivities.

It was a great trip. Everyone had a good time. Back in Hong Kong, Calvin, Jean and I had a nice dinner with the Consul General and his wife, Bert and Lily Levin, before flying back to the States. This trip has given us many happy memories.

### A New China Adventure

Sometime in mid-autumn 1987, Paul Chow, here he goes again, called and asked if I could meet with him and Mr. Xu (shu) in San Francisco to talk about an underwater park development. (Paul is great in working behind the scenes in these kinds of schemes.) Naturally I took the bait, again!

On the date set we met in the lobby of a Chinese Hotel. Mr. Xu was introduced as the Deputy General Manager of the China Travel Service. This man was actually in the top echelon of the Chinese Government. "But, remember, he puts his pants on one leg at a time, just like you or me. So don't be awed, Charlie."

Mr. Xu was a "regular guy". He said they (the Chinese Government) had some property at the South end of Hainan Island. I asked, "Near Sanya?" He looked a bit surprised and answered in the affirmative. He said it was East of Sanya and had beautiful white beaches. "Oh," I said, "that sounds like Dragon Tooth Bay." That really undid him. He didn't know I knew so much about the area he was talking about. Then I told him I dove the area around Sanya and walked along the beach at Dragon Tooth Bay. I also asked him if the old Japanese Naval Base at the far eastern end of the bay was still in use by the Chinese Government.

In view of the fact I knew the area well, he asked me if I would make a feasibility study of the property they owned and include in the study the small offshore island the Government was in the process of acquiring. I said I would be glad to do it. As to the question how long would I need to do the work, I pulled "two weeks" out of thin air. When asked how much would I charge, I replied, "Pay my expenses and we'll call it a deal." Mr. Xu readily agreed. He said he would call me when the arrangements had been made. I would pick up my plane tickets at the Office of the Chinese Consul in San Francisco.

In a couple of weeks I received a message on my answering machine to pick up my tickets. The China Airlines Plane would take off from San Francisco, November 9th, at 1400 hours.

### The Adventure Begins

On the appointed day and hour Jean saw me off, bag and baggage. This was for real, the Chinese Adventure had finally started. As the Point Reyes Peninsula faded from sight, I settled back to do some study of helpful Chinese words and phrases in a book I bought for the trip. It was supposed to help the tourist to get along in China by teaching some basic things all tourists need to know. A Chinese university student, returning home after studying in the US, recognized the book and offered to help me with my Chinese pronunciation. She was a great help. At least I spent my travel time in a productive endeavor. Little did I know I was to be provided with an interpreter when I arrived.

It was midnight, their time, when I arrived in Beijing. Not knowing where to go I followed the crowd. I was sure they knew where they were going. My student friend spotted me and showed me where

Tourists were to go. As I approached the "holding pen" where non Asians were gathered, I spied a man on the other side of the wire fence holding a sign reading, "Mr. Mehler". I went as far as the fence would allow, caught the man's eye and waved. He waved back, went to the Guard on the gate, who then escorted me to my "greeter". A Limo awaited us and took us to the Lido Beijing. (One of several luxury Holiday Inns in China. Mr. Xu, my host had his office here.) I checked in and went to my room. It had a big basket of flowers and an equally big basket of fruit. I was hungry so I helped myself generously to its contents, took a shower, set my travel alarm for 7am and went to bed. I needed all the sleep I could get because I was to meet Mr. Xu at 8 the next morning in the Dining Room.

When I entered the Dining Room two young men were waiting for me. They said we were taking off for Haikow (On Hainan Island) at 10 am. These were to be my companions during my trip to Hainan Island. They were Architects from the Architectural College. (a Government Institution in Beijing.) The Senior Architect was Zhuan Niansheng, I called him John. The other was Liu Cheng Shuan, my Interpreter, I called him Louie. By this time Mr. Xu arrived on the scene. He said these men would show me the property and pay the bills. Wherever I wanted to go, they would take me. Time was getting short, I picked up my bag and briefcase and we all left for the Airport.

#### Off To Hainan Island

These two were excellent companions. They had an excellent sense of humor. When we arrived in Haikow, friends of Mr. Xu were waiting for us. After a few introductions we picked up a car and were off to Sanya. We had a great lunch on a Patio overlooking a beautiful lake. They ordered a Banquet Style meal. It was great! And, why not? The Government was paying the bill. I am sure my companions realized that if I ate well they would too. Thus they ordered accordingly. That bit of philosophy lasted throughout the entire trip.

When we returned to the road again, we had to have a coffee break at the appropriate time. The place they selected was a former Summer Palace of some old rich man. The Communists took it over like they did to so many places in China. It was a beautiful place, off the road and secluded. The coffee was delicious. It was Hainan coffee. It was the best coffee I have ever tasted and I told them so. From that time on, we had coffee breaks at every opportunity. We checked into the hotel that afternoon late, had dinner and I hit the sack early.

The next day we went to Dragon Tooth Bay, saw the property and spent a considerable amount of time tramping over it. My guess is that we were looking at about 40 acres. The upland was sub tropical vegetation with a beautiful white sand beach. I looked closely at the composition of the sand. It seemed to be coarse. I remarked to my companions that it looked like it was of coral origin. They said when the Japanese occupied the Island, (WW II) they blasted the coral in the Bay to use in road construction. Over the years the coral debris, a by product of the blasting, washed up on the shore to form the pure white, spectacular beach we were now seeing.

# POINT REYES LIGHT

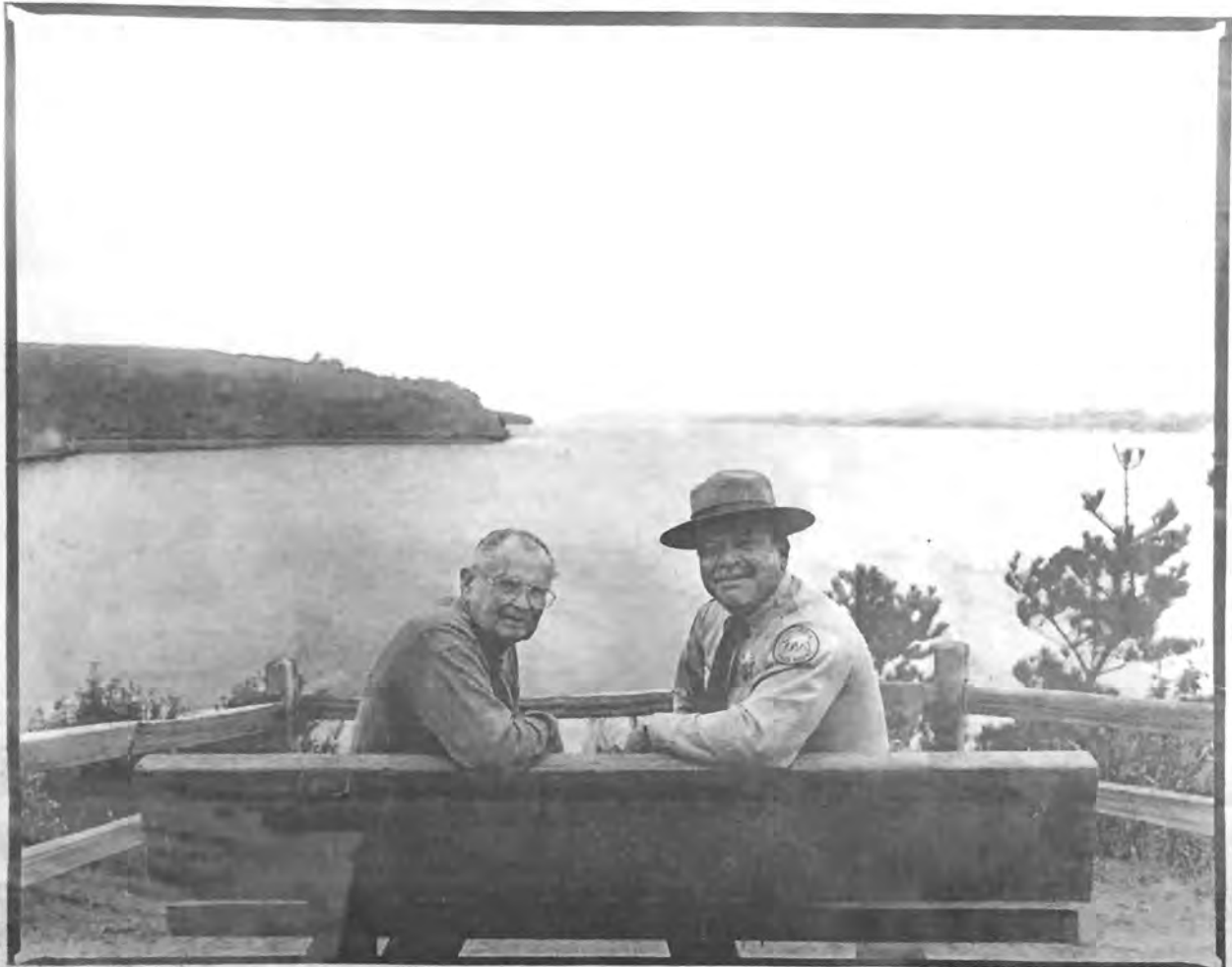
November 14, 2002

V No. 37 Point Reyes Station, California



West Marin's Pulitzer Prize-Winning News

## CELEBRATING 27 YEARS IN THE LIGHT THE POINT REYES FAMILY ALBUM *by Art Rogers*



CHUCK MEHLERT AND CARLOS PORRATA — RANGERS OF TOMALES BAY STATE PARK AT VISTA POINT

*On November 8th, Tomales Bay State Park turned 50 years old. Chuck Mehlert was the first ranger. He opened the park in 1952 after putting in an access road to Heart's Desire Beach, a water system and a picnic area. There have been a half a dozen rangers in this park until Carlos Porrata was transferred from Samuel P. Taylor Park in 1980. He has been there for over 22 years, longer than any other ranger. The park has doubled in size since it's beginning, from 1000 acres to over 2200 acres.*

The front page of the November 14, 2002 Point Reyes Light newsletter featured Chuck Mehlert and Carlos Porrata on the 50th anniversary of Tomales Bay State Park.



THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION

# CERTIFICATE OF SPECIAL COMMENDATION

*Be it known that a noteworthy  
and significant service to the people of the  
State of California and the State Park System  
has been rendered by*

**Charles Mehlert**  
*who served the people and the parks*

By stopping the sale of Año Nuevo Island to  
private interests and ensuring its preservation  
in perpetuity as part of the California State  
Park System.

*This contribution to the State Park System  
is hereby gratefully acknowledged for the people*



*Donald W. Murphy*  
Director

Department of Parks and Recreation September 17, 1992



***Donald Murphy, Director of the Department of Parks and  
Recreation, presents a Special Commendation on  
September 17, 1992, at Año Nuevo State Preserve.***



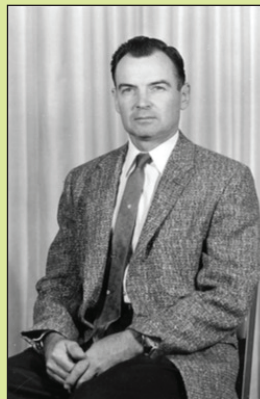
# My State Park Career

By

Charles Mehlert

Excerpted from *Memoirs of Charles Mehlert*

Charles "Charlie" Mehlert had an illustrious career in California State Parks. In this book, Chuck Mehlert details his work, efforts, and many accomplishments in the California State Park System. Some of these notable actions include opening and developing Tomales Bay State Park, almost singled-handily saving Ano Nuevo Island from private development, and being deeply involved in the development of underwater parks.



California State Parks  
Superintendents' Conference  
Sacramento, CA June 1986

ISBN 978-0-9992980-1-5



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**Tent with a View  
Environmental Campsite  
Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park**

There was a small Island in the bay Mr. Xu wanted me to take a look at. It was thought that acquiring it would enhance the whole project. The Island was called "Wild Pig Island". The pigs had long gone. The Island had some vegetation which afforded considerable shade, interesting rock formations and a white coral beach. The coral was much coarser than that found on the "main land". There was insufficient wave action to mechanically break down the coral chunks as was the case on the main Island shore. It did have excellent recreational values all its own. I recommended to Mr. Xu that it be made a part of the larger Project. That evening I wrote up my notes after another great dinner and slept like a baby.

The next morning I went to the Marine Station at Sanya and discussed with them the fishes of the area. It seemed there were many types of fish, but; I noticed a high percentage of juveniles. That indicated to me the area had been overfished. They reluctantly agreed. It was here I proposed a "Nursery Preserve" be established. In so doing, the gene pool now existing would be allowed to grow and reproduce. (juvenile fishes do not reproduce) Although they thought it was a good idea, they were afraid the Government would not endorse such a radical proposal. I stated that if such a measure was not adopted, present fishing practices would wipe out the fish that were left, leaving nothing for the future.

#### Back to Haikow - A Sub Adventure

After lunch we set out to go back to Haikow. After our traditional coffee break we reached the East Mountain Hotel. It sat atop a hill, an imposing structure, built entirely of huge quarried rock. The floors were quarried slabs held up by stone pillars. It was a remarkable structure. No wood was used in its construction except for windows and doors. I was truly impressed. It must have been extremely old. The Dining area was bare except for some tables and chairs. After dinner I went to my room to write up my notes and write a note to Jean. I opened the door and, when my eyes became accustomed to the dim light, the room was nearly bare. It had a table with a single light bulb hanging from a hook driven into the slab ceiling, a bed with a straw (hard) mattress, a padded, thick "cover" folded at the foot of the bed. This was the sole item to keep a person warm. There were no sheets and no pillows. Goodness knows how many people had used the "cover" since it was last washed, or was it ever washed? Things did not look promising for a good night sleep. I looked at the bathroom. It had a bathtub stained with rust and dirt. The toilet was filthy as was the wash basin. There were dirty towels too. I didn't even touch them. As the sun set, the Bathroom was almost in total darkness. I left it that way. That single light over the table was enough to write Jean a letter telling her about my quaint surroundings and the accommodations afforded at the Hotel. Before I finished, the light flickered and went out. I finished by the light of a candle thoughtfully provided by the management.

I hadn't unpacked a thing. The candle wasn't going to last long, so I decided to lie down, in my clothes. I became cold so I gingerly pulled up the "cover" about shoulder high and dropped off to a semi-conscious and fitful sleep. I was afraid to move, as a result I awoke in the same position I

assumed when I went to bed. At first light I gathered up my friends, they had a room similar to mine, and suggested we hit the road and find a good place to have breakfast.

On the way we found a nice place to eat. After a great breakfast I was in a more cheerful mood. When we reached Haikow we had lunch and I was even more cheerful by now. We had a Banquet that evening. After that I gave my perceptions of the property I inspected and my recommendations. I also presented my proposal for a Marine Recreational Complex and emphasized the necessity to establish a Marine Reserve to foster the natural propagation of the local fish population.

After a discussion about establishing a Marine Reserve, the group agreed this could be done and adopted my overall proposal. It was agreed, as planning progressed, I would be scheduled to come back to Hainan to assist in the development of the project. Things were looking great. Quite frankly I was pleased with the outcome of my study.

We had a day to spend sightseeing before the plane left for Beijing. My companions recommended seeing Monkey Island. We left before breakfast and arrived at a small fishing anchorage to make arrangements for transportation to the Island. With that completed we set out to get breakfast. I must remind you, gentle reader, that this village, catering solely to fishermen, did not have deluxe restaurants. In fact there were no restaurants at all. There were entrepreneurs, set up on the sidewalk in town, that had crude charcoal burning stoves. They served only one dish. It was precooked and brought to town in a 5 gallon can with the top cut out. The cook ladled out the mixture into a pan, heated it and put it in a bowl for the customer. It was a thick stew-like substance and, for an extra yuan or two, would add a raw egg to enhance it's nutritional qualities. It was actually very good in spite of it's dubious origin. Along with that was a Chinese steam bread, called "mantou". Most ate crouched on the sidewalk, we were lucky, there were crude chairs we used to eat our meal. It was a good hearty breakfast, we were well fortified for our trip to Monkey Island.

Our transportation to the island was by fishing boat. On our way we saw many buoys in the water. A fisherman on the boat said they marked the spot where prawns were being raised for export. They were a large variety and commanded a good price "overseas". He also said most Chinese could not afford such a delicacy.

When we landed on the Island it was but a short walk to where the monkeys were. There were thousands of them, or it seemed so. They roamed at large. However, there was a chain link fence about 200 feet long that kept the people from the monkeys, or the monkeys from the people. I don't know which. There was a little store where peanuts could be purchased. The visitors could feed the monkeys through the fence, or throw peanuts over the fence. After enjoying the antics of the monkeys, we returned to the little fishing village, got into our car and set out to find a place to eat lunch. They had a special place in mind because we passed several roadside restaurants that looked good, according to Chinese standards.

We finally stopped at a small restaurant and, from what I gathered, they were expecting us. There were four of us, the driver, John, Louie and me. The restaurant had prepared a banquet for us. First was the snake soup. When I was served they asked me how I liked it. I said it tasted very good. The meat (snake) was chopped into one inch pieces. Some of the meat separated from the small bones which became visible at the bottom of the bowl. My friends were laughing among themselves, hoping to cause me discomfort when they announced it to be snake soup. I said it was the best snake soup I had ever tasted. (that was true) I had only rattlesnake soup in California, (that was not true) Theirs was much better. Can I be punished for lying a little?

Next on the menu was Fox, then Shrimp, Crab in the shell, Hainan Chicken, Fish and greens. Beer was served throughout the meal. The Crab alone was \$57.80 (US) . I have no idea how much the whole meal cost. I know I surely enjoyed it. From the way they cleaned the platters, I'm sure they did too. I know very well they used me to justify the expense of that meal. After all, this was my last day on Hainan Island and what better way to honor a person than with a Banquet, an expensive one! The ride back to Haikow was a leisurely one. I felt a twinge of sadness knowing I would be leaving my friends when I returned to Beijing. I also wondered what I would do my last week in Beijing.

#### Back To Beijing

The next morning we boarded the plane for Beijing. It was crowded. All seats were taken and people were either sitting or standing in the aisle. Every one seemed to have a box or two, some even had animals. Where you sat is where you stayed, until the plane landed. I'm sure the plane was overloaded. No one objected, so I said a prayer or two and let it go at that. When we started to takeoff, I immediately and fervently said an additional prayer. The plane tookoff with no difficulty and in due time landed in Beijing. A car and driver was waiting. It was Mr. Xu's car and chauffeur.

When we arrived at the Beijing Lido, I bid my friends goodbye, thanked them for a wonderful time, the great food and the special Banquet that topped it all. They beamed all over, said their good byes and left. Mr. Xu left instructions with his assistant, the man who was at the Airport when I first arrived, that his car was at my disposal and Louie was to be my guide and interpreter. He was to take me to any place I wanted to go. Mr. Xu. suggested, The Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven, Summer Palace, The Great Wall, Emperors Tombs and the Underground Palace. This came as a welcome surprise. That seemed like a lot to do in the time I had left before flying back to the US.

I had done some exploring in the Lido Beijing. It was a huge place. It had every thing anyone needed without going outside. There were four or five different restaurants, a huge swimming pool, an exercise room, Post Office, food and snack store, Shops, a Disco and several other conveniences mentioned in their brochure. I would have liked to explore the Hotel, however; the opportunity to visit some of the most famous and unique historical structures in the world, as suggested by Mr. Xu, was something that some lucky persons are able to experience only once in a lifetime. And I was one very lucky person.

### The Forbidden City

The next morning Louie showed up at 8 and we set off. He was not only my interpreter (he spoke perfect English) but also my driver and paid all the bills. The first place we stopped was at the Tian'an Men (Gate of Heavenly Peace) Square. There were some museums in the vicinity, my main interest was the Forbidden City, the Residence of the Emperors. It had an imposing entry. I could imagine what this austere and regal entry had seen in the hey-day of its existence. The pomp and circumstance associated with the coming and going of the many dignitaries, both oriental and occidental, having audience with the Emperors. But, let's get inside.

The first impression is the enormity of the whole complex. The buildings are all large, ornate and classic Chinese Architecture was prevalent throughout. Actually, that came as no surprise; but their beauty was. Once inside the buildings, I was struck with the truly fabulous collection of treasures, most of it gold. There were miniature temples, bridges, statues, Chinese Gods and other artistic works, all made out of that precious golden metal.

The thought occurred to me, why did the Communists save all this wealth and artifacts which symbolized a regime they hated and overthrew by force. The entire collection must be worth in the tens of millions of dollars. This kind of money could have been used to set up the new Communist State, yet they kept it intact. Many of the furnishings were adorned with gold or were inlaid with gold. It was mind boggling to see all this wealth. Each item had its history. All were fascinating and added much to the enjoyment and education of the visitor. These items were either gifts to the Emperor, or the Emperor had commissioned them to be created by a famous artisan.

Outside, the gardens were well kept and the buildings were in excellent repair. The entire Palace Complex was a complete, self sufficient, miniature city, completely surrounded by a high wall with parapets for defense against an invader. I was truly impressed with the magnitude of this installation. I would have been nice to have spent another day just absorbing the history that surrounded and pervaded this antiquity. That being an impossibility, I satisfied my desire by buying post cards to remember this day by.

### The Temple Of Heaven

The next morning we started out bright and early and went to the Temple of Heaven. There is a lot of history to this place. It symbolizes the various stages one must achieve to get to Heaven. (That is according to Louie) Actually, it took me a matter of only a few minutes to get to Heaven. I understand mere mortals take much longer to get there. There was another strange feature to this place. There was an external wall in the form of a circle. There was a place at this wall where one could whisper and another person, a hundred or so feet away, could hear the first person. It was really weird.

### The Summer Palace

Outside of Beijing a short distance (by modern standards) was the Summer Palace of the Emperors. It was built around a lake, a small lake, not more than a couple of hundred acres. The buildings and gardens were all well kept. A beautiful vine covered colonnade led from the Palace to the mooring where the Boat of Pleasant Banquet rests and looks as if it were ready to sail. It is more widely known as the Marble Boat. It was built by the Empress Dowager Ci Xi. She levied taxes to create a Chinese Navy. Instead, she had this boat built with the tax money. It was extremely ornate, and built of marble slabs. After it was built, the Empress said this boat would protect China and there was no need for a Navy. There was considerable money left over. It was used for the expansion of the Summer Palace. I walked along the covered colonnade and then wandered about the Marble Boat. It actually looked like a flat bottomed scow, with a two story Chinese Summer House on it. Rumor has it that the boat did not actually sail on the Lake, just stayed by the shore; however, it does float!

When we finished looking around the Summer Palace it was late afternoon, we were hungry. Back in Beijing we couldn't find a restaurant that was open. Too late for lunch, too early for dinner. We settled for the only place we could find open, Kentucky Fried Chicken.

### The Great Wall Of China

Today was set aside to visit the Great Wall. It was something that had always interested me. Never did I ever think I would see it and actually walk on the wall. Anticipation heightens the experience. We started early, it was late November, the sun was out, the air was a bit chilly, there was a slight breeze. I wore the overcoat Calvin lent me. Leaving Beijing, we headed North up a winding road. We climbed steadily, past a few small villages to the top of a ridge. There, ahead of us, was the Wall. What a majestic sight! When we got out of the car, a cold wind was blowing. The weak sun was doing its best to warm up Mother Earth. Calvin's overcoat was a real help against the wind.

Here, I was at THE place of special historic significance. Once on the Wall, I walked along the wide walkway with its parapets on either side, I could imagine those early Chinese warriors that manned the wall, hurrying to the point an enemy was attempting to attack. To complete the illusion, the wind made a sound like the mixing of many voices, long since silenced. Looking up and out to the mountains, the Wall winds like a giant serpent along the mountain ridges and, from time to time, crosses a deep pass.

Every so often, at a high point on the mountain ridge, there would be a Beacon Tower. These were used as observation and signaling stations. There was shelter here in case of storm or cold. It's amazing how one's mind can carry you back on flights of fancy to those ancient times and how real your imagination becomes in your reverie.

This magnificent engineering feat is certainly one of the great wonders of the world. There has been considerable maintenance work on the Wall over the years. It is to the credit of the Chinese



Government that all work done on the Wall blends in and looks like the original construction.

#### Tombs Of The Emperors

The last day of sightseeing was spent in a valley North of Beijing in which the Tombs or Mausoleums of the Emperors were built. Some had artifacts still in place. Others had been stripped either by grave robbers or the Communists. Nevertheless, these buildings, in a somewhat run down condition, still had much of their original charm. There must have been 15 or 20 of them in all.

One did stand out. It was the Underground Palace of Ding Ling. It not only was his Palace but his Mausoleum as well. This was quite well preserved and well lighted by electricity. Prior to Thomas Edison, they must have used oil lamps. There were a few air and light wells. (all original) The air was surprisingly fresh. The furnishings in this Palace did not come up to the quality of others I had seen. The reason could be this was built in the year 1400.

#### The Odyssey Ends

There was a Banquet in my honor that evening at the Beijing Lido. It was a farewell and thank you affair. Mr. Xu had brought with him several top Governmental dignitaries. When introduced I could not catch their names, leave alone remember any of them. Everything was upbeat. At the end of the Banquet, after all the little speeches had come to an end, the ranking official thanked me for my work. He said I would be notified to return when construction on the project was about to begin.

What an ending to a memorable trip to China. The next day I flew back to San Francisco. Jean met me at the Airport and so did Reno. We all three had lunch together. I had returned to the real world.

Thus ended The Chinese Odyssey!

#### Note:

After the incident at Tian'an Men Square, the attitude toward foreigners seemed to have changed and so did the Government. The possibility of my returning to China and the Dragon Tooth Bay Project is slim. I am sure the Project has been dropped.

I have not heard from Mr. Xu since. Paul Chow has talked to him on several occasions. Mr. Xu has always asked Paul about the "Expert". However, I am still waiting. As someone once said, "Hope springs eternal."

## **Chapter UHH**

### **Odds and Ends Retirement**

*During my last years with State Parks, I was*

*Regional Resource Manager for Region Four  
(Monterey Area, State Parks);*

*Architect of the Statewide Underwater Parks Program;*

*Instrumental in the establishment of a system of  
"Environmental Campsites";*

*An active member of the Pacific Grove Marine Rescue  
Patrol;*

*After retirement I was elected Chairman of the  
Advisory Board on Underwater Parks and Reserves and continued  
working with the numerous organizations, both private and  
governmental, concerned with protecting our sea coast – and  
Monterey Bay in particular – from man-made pollution.*

\* \* \* \*

#### **Pacific Grove Rescue Patrol**

I was a member of the Pacific Grove Marine Rescue Patrol for over 20 years. It was a Volunteer organization kept alive by donations and fund raisers. We were attached to the Pacific Grove Fire Department. Our Rescue Truck and Equipment were parked at their facility. It also housed, in a special room, our Re-compression Chamber which was used if a diver suffered from the "bends". When called by the Fire Department Dispatcher, we would respond to an emergency. It could be for a diver in trouble, a fishing boat going into the surf line or some other ocean oriented emergency. Mostly they were day time call outs.

One night, about 10 PM, I received a call from the Dispatcher. A car had gone off the Moss Landing Bridge and into the Slough. Meet at the Bridge as soon as you can. I gathered my gear bag and my trusty Allen underwater light and took off. We all got there about the same time. We were briefed as we dressed. The Highway Patrol told us a group had been in a bar, were rowdy and asked to leave. They were drunk! We were told there may be as many as four in the car.

The car crashed through the Bridge railing and into the Slough. There was an incoming tide. We knew approximately where to look for the car, although it could be anywhere, depending how long the car floated. We divided into search teams of two and hit the water. My buddy was Gene Dobbs. We zigged and zagged, working our way into the Slough. Visibility was about five feet. By chance we found it. It was right side up. A body was sitting upright in the back seat. It was eerie. The doors were closed, we now knew there was only one person in the vehicle when it went in. Getting him out was fairly easy. He was almost buoyant. By the time we arrived at the shore with our body, a sizable crowd had gathered. At this point the Coroner took over. Our job was done!

The owner of the restaurant by the Bridge opened up the kitchen and had hot coffee and sweet rolls ready for us when we got out of the water. By now we were cold. This spread was surely a welcome sight. Not only did it warm us up, it boosted our morale and returned us to a good mood. Of all the rescues in which I participated, this was the most memorable.

\* \* \*



**Reorganization  
Regional Resource Manager  
Retirement 1986**

My District duties with Parks involved traveling throughout five Counties. With my Forestry background I was given Natural Resource oriented problems as well as continuing in charge of the Statewide Underwater Parks Program.

With yet another Departmental Reorganization, Districts were now out and larger geographical units, called Regions, in – but with the same faces, just different titles. The Regions were not only larger but involved greater responsibilities that with the Districts. I was made Regional Resource Manager and retained my responsibilities for management of the Statewide Underwater Parks Program.

Now I needed more staff. More staff required more room. This appeared in the form of three large office trailers, acquired at no cost from friends at the Department of Water Resources. These friends, hearing about my need, were happy to be in a position to return favors which I had done them in the past. The trailers were converted into comfortable, carpeted, heated offices for my Unit, all done under the supervision of my good friend, Art Lloyd. I, naturally, had one trailer all to myself!

Even the location of our Unit was special. We were located in an impressive grove of oaks, away from the main building. Redwood walkways linked our trailers. Many were the envious glances from other Park personnel, and from employees of the Departments of Forestry and Fish and Game, all of whom had offices in the crowded main building. We were happy in our surroundings. Morale was high and I was happy in the work. It was too good to last. Mandatory retirement comes to us all and I retired on 6 September 1986.

**Retirement and Reward**

My retirement party was held at the Monterey Elks Lodge and was a lively affair. I was delighted when, at the party, Parks Director Briner announced that he was appointing me to the Advisory Board on Underwater Parks and Reserves. I was now a member of the Board I had helped to create. It was satisfying to feel that all the years I had put into conservation and protection of our underwater natural resources had been recognized. The final reward came later when my peers elected me Chairman of the Board.

## Environmental Campsites

I had long felt that many of those who stay in our State Parks would appreciate individual campsites away from the usual grouping of campsites, places where families could have a feeling of the wilderness. Group campsites are useful in that clean toilets and showers are close by, there is running water at the campsite, the venue for evening programs is near and – important for many – parking is available next to the site. But I thought the State should make available remote camping to those that would value it.

I developed a model of such a campsite: first, to be remote it had to be away from the road but not so far as to discourage the carrying in of supplies, something in the neighborhood of a five minute walk; secondly, it would need a camp table, a fire pit, and safe storage for food; lastly it required a pit toilet.

The latter presented difficulties: the usual pit toilet would not meet State sanitary requirements because the effluents could possibly leak into ground water. This would restrict the use of such toilets to more than 50' from a stream. I knew that a self-composting toilet was feasible, one that was contained in a leak-proof structure. Also, it had to be constructed in pieces light enough to be carried to the campsite and assembled there. I drew up a design which was approved by the State health authorities concerned and then submitted the overall campsite plan to the Director who approved enthusiastically. In fact, we were not sure what kind of response the public would have but I am pleased that today the "environmental campsite", as they are known, have become a popular part of the State Park camping experience.

**The presentation to the public of the first 50 environmental campsites**, at twelve parks, was conducted with some fanfare at Mt. Diablo State Park on May 16, 1981, Huey Johnson, the Secretary of the State Resources Agency, and Peter Dangermond, the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation, presiding. This statement, issued at the time aptly characterizes the philosophy of the environmental campsite system:

*These campsites are intended to reintroduce an old idea – camping as means of getting away from it all, and back in touch with the world we live in. To achieve this, environmental campsites are separated from each other and from the regular campground, and campers carry in their supplies, including fuel and sometimes water, a short distance to their sites. Neither other park visitors nor vehicles intrude on these special sites – you and your family will feel that you are the only people for miles around. Each environmental campsite is in a setting hand-picked for its scenic and natural qualities.*

**Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park**





*The environmental campsite logo, which I designed,  
can be seen on the post at right.*



***Julia Pfeifer Burns State Park  
Environmental Campsite***

**Calaveras Big Trees State Park**



**"Lone Snag" environmental campsite**





Environmental campers park their cars here and then walk five minutes along the dirt road beyond the gate to the campsite.



The "self-composting" pit toilet at Lone Snag campsite

*(Historical Footnote: in 1946, when my brother Calvin was discharged from the Marine Corps, I obtained a summer job for him working on a State Parks survey crew. His last survey was in 1951 on a crew establishing the boundaries of the South Grove of Calaveras Big Trees State Park. Today his retirement home is adjacent to the Park).*

## Retirement – the Domestic Side

Our first project after retirement was to travel to Canada for the "Expo". We went in our van with our friends, Bill and Venita Heyl. The van was a bit tight but it was OK for a couple of small persons like us. After 19 days of this we were surely glad to get home.

I miss the many significant Park projects I was working on when I retired but Jean made sure that I kept busy with chores around our home in Inverness on Tomales Bay and the one in Monterey. I joined the Moose and Elks Lodges. Jean and I enjoyed going to the dinners, dances and other events which they sponsored. Jean passed away in 2004 at age 86.

Recently, my daughter, Laura, has organized trips for the two of us to England and Italy which I found immensely enjoyable. Our visit to Decimomannu Air Base in Sardinia, Italy, where I served during World War II, has been described above (p.105ff above).

\* \* \* \*

## A Word of Thanks

This Memoir began as a response to requests from my family for a description of my professional life which – I found – cannot be considered in isolation from my personal and family life. This in turn led me to an awareness of how much – all my life – I have benefited from the love and kindnesses bestowed on me by those close to me, both family and friends. I regret that in these pages too little attention has been given to this debt I owe them. When they receive a copy of this Memoir, I hope they will see in it my way of thanking them.

Charles

"Charlie" "Uncle Charlie" "Granddad"

# POINT REYES LIGHT

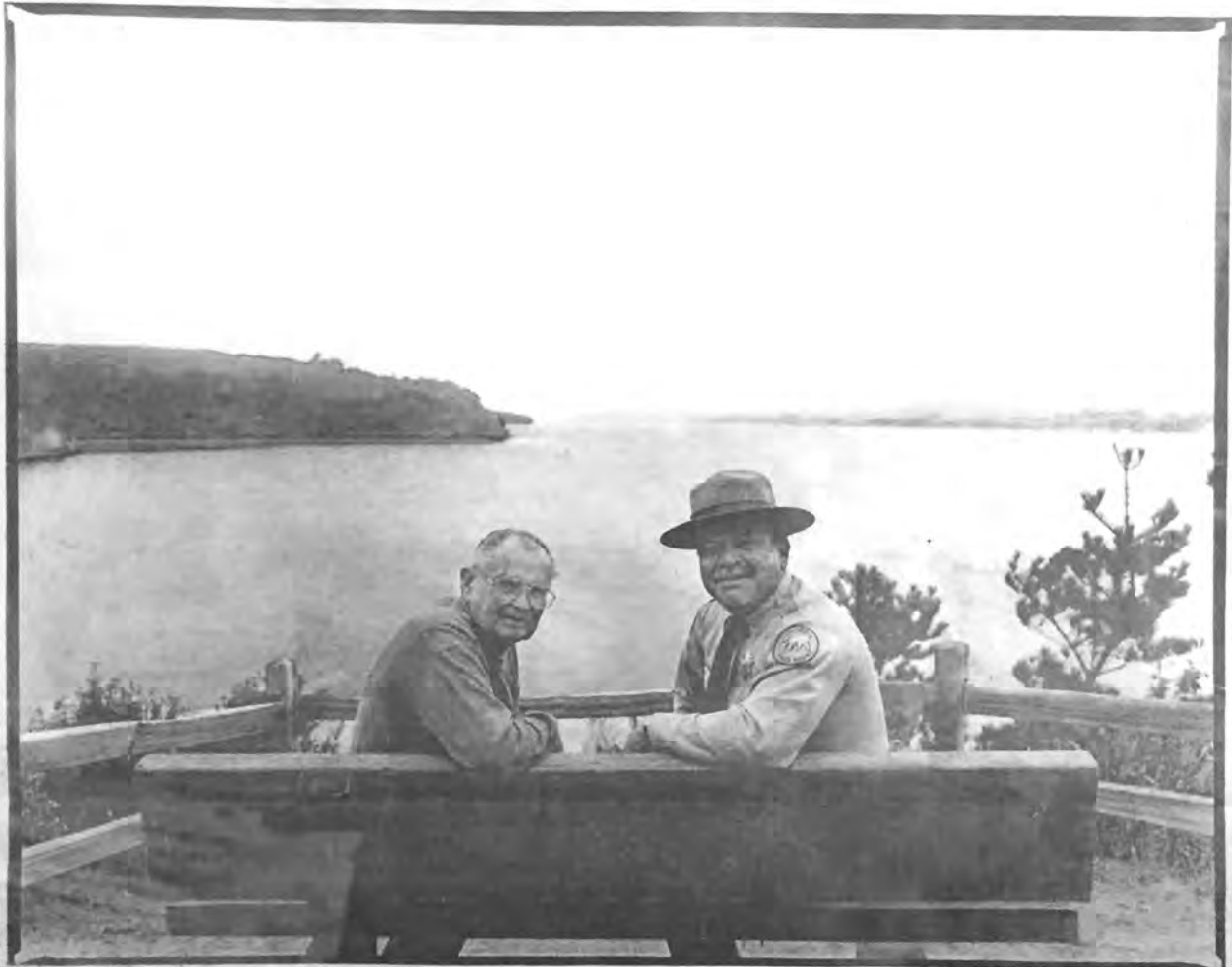
November 14, 2002

V No. 37 Point Reyes Station, California



West Marin's Pulitzer Prize-Winning News

## CELEBRATING 27 YEARS IN THE LIGHT THE POINT REYES FAMILY ALBUM *by Art Rogers*



CHUCK MEHLERT AND CARLOS PORRATA — RANGERS OF TOMALES BAY STATE PARK AT VISTA POINT

*On November 8th, Tomales Bay State Park turned 50 years old. Chuck Mehlert was the first ranger. He opened the park in 1952 after putting in an access road to Heart's Desire Beach, a water system and a picnic area. There have been a half a dozen rangers in this park until Carlos Porrata was transferred from Samuel P. Taylor Park in 1980. He has been there for over 22 years, longer than any other ranger. The park has doubled in size since it's beginning, from 1000 acres to over 2200 acres.*

The front page of the November 14, 2002 Point Reyes Light newsletter featured Chuck Mehlert and Carlos Porrata on the 50th anniversary of Tomales Bay State Park.