

Life's a beach

Two Emerald staffers take a day and bring the Oregon coast back to Eugene. And not in one of those little bottles that you can buy at perhaps the cheesiest gift shop in the state.



Photo illustration

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On a short stretch of Highway 101, along the Oregon coast between Yachats and Waldport, there are several streets named after states, with Kansas and Nebraska among the honorees.

That's certainly a striking contrast: the image of flat fields of wheat and corn vs. the Pacific Ocean's expanse and the shoreline's diversity in terrain.

Just ask two experts. "We love the trees, the hills and the water [along Highway 101] — we don't get much of either back home," says state of Nebraska resident Brandi Beins, formerly of Kansas, the state.

Beins was with her husband, James, at the Cape Perpetua viewpoint just south of Yachats, enjoying their third day of honeymooning, a trip that started June 11 in Seattle. James is a student at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln and he says the choice to visit Oregon was made because the couple wanted to go somewhere they had never been. And to get away from the cows and corn for a bit, he adds.

Hordes of people from Eugene will likely follow the Beins' lead and make at least one coast excursion this summer. Most veteran beachcombers already

Sea lions, kitsch and sand dunes, oh my

Once Highway 126, heading west from Eugene, spits you out onto 101, take a left for an aside to the Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area.

Unfortunately, sand walkers have to sometimes compete for space and tranquility with the presence and constant sounds of all-terrain vehicles or motocross bikes. But the views from the dune tops are enchanting, with sandscapes visible for miles.

This portion of the dunes area is the northernmost tip, but offers a nice spot to play. The Jessie M. Honeyman Park, approximately 3.5 miles south from downtown Florence, is a good site to munch food, catch fish or lose yourself in the endless sand.

The town of Florence is an interesting stop with quite a bit of history, as Dick Kirby, a 32-year resident and volunteer at the town's Visitor Information Center, can tell you. Today, however, he says that Florence is populated mostly with retirees, the majority of which have escaped from the southern wreck known as California.

Kirby says Florence has everything he needs to get by and rarely does he "have to go to the big city," Eugene.

Whatever Kirby can't find in his small burg, at least in the realm of kitschy coast souvenirs, he and other visitors can certainly score at the Sea Lion Caves gift shop, 11 miles north of Florence. You haven't seen bad art until you've been inside this place.

Customers can sift through the shelves for such gems as "Oregon Coast in a Bottle" for \$6 or a 6-inch blue ceramic whale tail — just the tail — glued to a piece of wood. Other beauts include little skiing snowmen made of small seashells (a mere 75 cents) and a cougar head carved inside a set of moose antlers. Get out the credit card for that one, however; the cost is \$195.

Skip the Sea Lion Caves because the gift shop is a hoot, and it's free to wander and laugh. The "attraction" does sit on a small space with a nice overlook, however, one that is perfect for taking in the Pacific's immensity.

"I love the ocean because in Japan you can't see it," Mayo Hotta says, as she and her two friends, Sayaka Mimura and Mikako Kiue, sit outside the gift shop. "I love to see the green of the trees and smell the ocean."

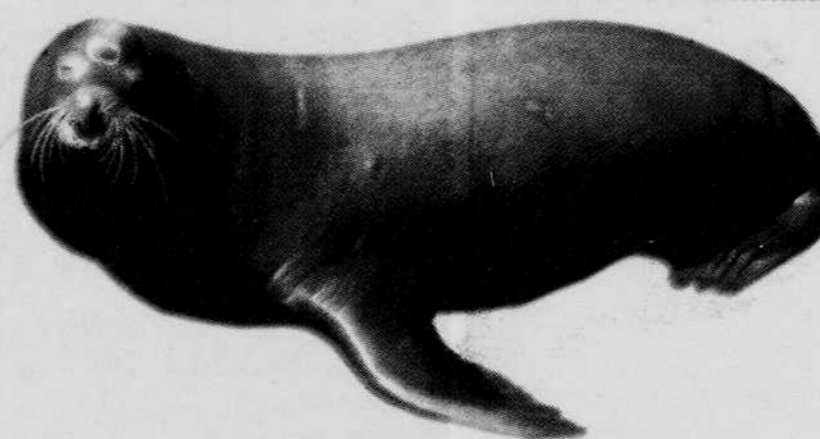
The Central Oregon Community College students were spending a few days of their school break on the coast, away from the Bend campus, and very far away from their homeland, Japan.

"The coast here is more calm [than in Japan]," Kiue says. "And we have no sea lions over there."

The country probably has nothing similar to the Sea Lion Caves gift shop, either.

Presto chango, the road reappears

In February, when heavy rains caused some of the ocean-side terrain to give way, taking big chunks of Highway 101 with it, the gloom-and-doom forecast



ic coastline from Alaska to Chile on one particularly long trek. He first passed through this span of coast in 1955, as a runaway headed from Seattle to San Diego.

He laughs when asked what he does for a living.

"It'sness is my business," Deutsch says, smiling with a look a contentment as his dog Murphy rolls around on the parking lot pavement with Hoffmester's pooch, Prince Andy. "I'd be happy if this is the apex of the whole deal."

Look! Up in the air! It's a ... shark?

The Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport created quite a splash on

May 27 when it opened its newest exhibit, the Passages of the Deep. Replacing the aquarium's most famous resident, Keiko the killer whale, was no easy nor inexpensive undertaking.

The \$6.9 million used to refurbish Keiko's former home bought a lot of water — 1.32 million gallons are used for the exhibit — in addition to a plethora of sea life.

You want quillback rockfish? Check. Red Irish Lord? Covered. Cabezon? Oh yeah, there's cabezon. Shortspine thornyhead? Come on, what aquarium is complete without a few shortspine thornyheads?

There's also literally tons of sharks swimming under, over and around the 200-foot underwater tunnel, which is actually separated into three parts: Orford Reef, Halibut Flats and the Open Sea, which contains most of the "Jaws" imitators.

Not everyone at the aquarium was impressed, however.

"It's smaller than I thought," says a middle-aged visitor who would only give Julius Caesar as his name. "They need more lighting so you can see the color of the fish."

"When you see something on TV, you get all the color." "Caesar" was visiting from Hillsboro, Ore., and was glad he came out to the coast to see the Deep set-up.

"Now I don't have to come back and see it again," he says.

In contrast to that curmudgeonly outlook, 8-year-old Sarah Leuck from Dublin, Texas, wasn't all that sure how to respond to questions about the aquarium, but she knew what she enjoyed the most.

"The sharks. Because they look cool when you walk over the glass," she says, with her grandmother Judy Jacques standing nearby.

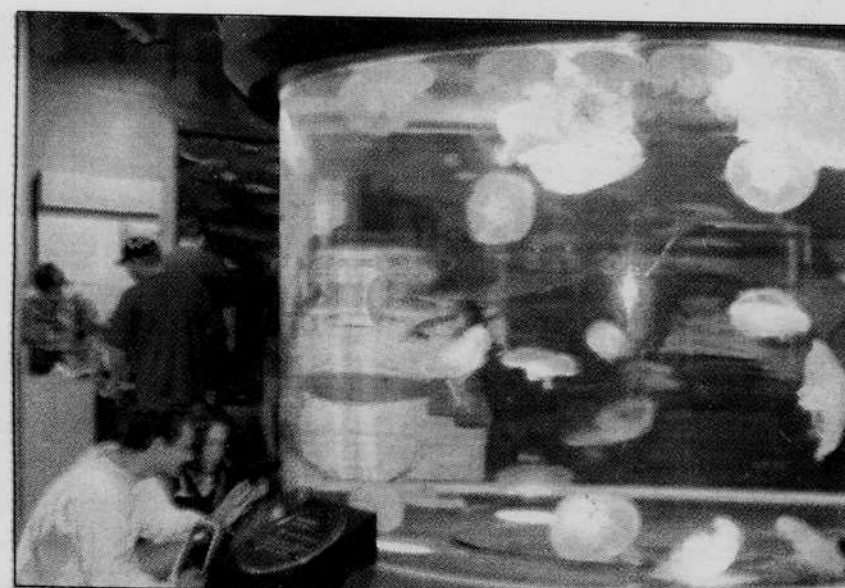
"I was impressed," Jacques says. "Although I thought it was one consecutive tube, it's nice that it's broken up into different habitats."

"We saw two rock fish peeking out in the Halibut Flats section, and they were really tough-looking characters." Hmm, perhaps they were related to Mr. Grumpy.

Home away from home

While the distorted rectangle of a trip — west from Eugene to Florence, then north to Newport, then east to I-5 at Corvallis, and finally south to Eugene — can be made in a day, albeit a long day, some may want to

The Sylvia Beach Hotel in Newport (right) offers rooms with literary themes from the likes of Dr. Seuss and Alice Walker. Less enchanting rooms are available for the budget-minded.



The Oregon Coast Aquarium's new Passages of the Deep exhibit (left) is getting mixed reviews from visitors. But the marine life doesn't seem to mind the environment.



Betty Hoffmester (left) and Michael Deutsch discuss the finer points of escaping to the coast.

