

THE ROCK AT SILVER POINT

Silver Point marks the south edge of Cannon Beach — or, if you prefer, Tolovana Park. It's where the houses stop and the trees continue. Along the sloping ridge, perpendicular to the sea, the limbs are windswept, matted back like hair that's been slept on.

Beneath is a garden of craggy boulders, the tip of which is an enormous rock. It juts up like a deck, overhanging the beach between the tide lines. It's tall — perhaps 20 feet or more. Certainly high enough whereas a fall could mark the end of the line.

I came upon the rock shortly after moving to Cannon Beach. Something — perhaps the position of the sun, or that it's always less crowded — always pulls me south when I walk. Almost as strong is the magnetic desire to climb up. It only takes a second: Scurry over the waist-high wall, and the rest is like a ramp. The only treacherous part is the foot-wide crack, into which slipping would be nasty, full of cuts and scrapes and maybe broken bones. Just being thoughtful, though, is enough to avoid it.

Standing on top is striking. It's much higher than it looks from the ground. A grand perch indeed, the tower between beginning and end of civilization, and a place to survey the tiny bodies buzzing below as they ride by on bikes, explore the adjacent cave,



Submitted photo

A portion of the huge rock at Silver Point in south Cannon Beach toppled forward this winter.

or run free with their dogs. Sometimes they wave. Sometimes they don't see you at first and get startled. Sometimes they miss you altogether.

The rock shelf is comfortable. It's got plenty of space to sit or lay. It's a place to watch sunsets and get suntans, to sing along to music, or simply just to stop, think, or let it all go. It's a place to mourn and a place to celebrate, with kisses and picnics and back-rubs. A place to pose while friends take photos from the ground. A place to turn the camera on one's self. It's a place to spend the afternoon, or just a momentary shift in perspective — up to the top, a deep breath in, nostrils filling with the coolest, crispest, invigorating sea air.

Sometimes, when the winds are gusting,

it can rattle you. The momentary loss of balance, stumbling, careening, peering over the edge. And, there, when the tides come in, looking down at the water swirling below, it feels like the earth is moving beneath you. Dizzying waves of vertigo.

I think of it as my rock, but so do my friends and neighbors. We needle each other about whose it is. Sometimes I'll see someone I know up there and by the look on their face, the fixture of their gaze and how far it is out to sea, I'll know if I should just walk on by and leave them to their contemplation. Other times I'll join them, just as others have joined me, friends and strangers alike. The rock is, of course, all of ours — as much those who've carved their names into the stone as those who've never dreamed of climbing up.

I was sitting there once, all by myself, and three 20-somethings joined me. They were poking around in the crack and I asked what they were looking for. One told me that some years ago they found a little box in the crevasse. Inside was a guest-book, in which visitors had scrawled little notes. Some of them, I was told, dated back to the 1970s. I joined in the search, but we came up empty handed. I wondered if the story was true. I desperately wanted it to be.

If the box and book were ever hidden there, it seemed wholly plausible that it could've been washed out by a high tide. Indeed, there were signs of debris in the space; the water had made its way through.

This January, the tides were particularly high. Torrential storms raged, even by their own wild standards. Closer to home, driftwood was piling up over the bank that leads down to the beach.

Coastal Life

Story by ANDREW TONRY

After the storms mellowed, I wandered again down south. I approached Silver Point, and from a distance, something puzzled me. The boulder gardens were more exposed than usual — deep erosion. But it was more than that.

As I got closer, I saw it: The rock had split along the crack, the front half toppled over, like a car on its side. What was one became two, and the distance between them was wide enough to walk through, arms outstretched. What was the top, where the names were carved, is now the front, facing the sea. It is still hulking, the size of a cottage. The slab

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it broke from remains, however diminished. The high point has become a kind of plank. It is less comfortable, more daunting. And the view, with the broken rock before it, isn't quite the same.

But perhaps the view — and the experience of spending time up on the rock at Silver Point — hasn't diminished at all. It's just different. And it's only through attachment that we feel some sense of loss. The movement, the reshaping of these 10-ton stones is but a minuscule reminder: Nothing lasts forever, and what this wild nature gives us it may just as soon wipe away, in devastating and benevolent fashion. It reminds us too that the only constant is change, and that we have little choice but to embrace it.

Photo by Andrew Tonry

This January, the tides were high, and the storms raged. The rock at Silver Point, left, split along the crack: The front half toppled over toward the ocean, like a car on its side.

