

COASTAL LIFE

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CLOSE TO HOME

It's a small large world

Story and photos by
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Life unfurls in large and small packages. The same can be held true of landscape. Tug and pull shapes our world. Shapes our lives. That same gravity is explained by the ocean tides, the reflex between the moon and mother sun.

Early in June, the great ocean pulled back, exposing its tiny underworld. The beach community witnesses this daily as the ebb. All those small sea creatures that cling to mountains of submerged igneous rock that shape the Columbia-Pacific shoreline, inhaled patiently, and waited. For the next several hours, they would be exposed to the bright light of a summer day. Instead of filtering saltwater, they would inherit the sea air.

Friends arrived, sloughing south from the exciting frenetic city of Seattle. Jeanne was a high school teacher for decades. She fosters an inquisitive nature, well, for nature. Peter remains one of the Northwest's master glass artists. Along with his fine aesthetics, he has a pregnant fascination for science. Their minds are always churning.

Fortified with several cups of steaming black coffee, we headed down the Seaview

approach and south to the headland at the mouth of the Columbia River, the property now called Beard's Hollow. The large cove was named after an unfortunate sea captain whose dead body washed ashore here. First People camped among these same rocks, gathered mussels and dug clams during low tides, a landscape not so different than the beach this morning. Only, their legacy stands as a testament to sustainability and a centuries-old tradition of "help yourself, but don't take too much."

There is easy access to the ocean from the parking area at the east end of the park. A paved trail travels westerly for about a quarter of a mile.

At the beach, the early daylight was alluring. The sky exploded in shades of aqua and gold that one might associate with the tinsel-bright sky in an El Greco painting, a bright annealing blue, back-lit as if by some undefinable spiritual quality. Here, at the ocean edge, sky and igneous rock and a vast salt water ocean coalesced into a marriage that would excite any committed photographer. This is a pantheist's Mecca.

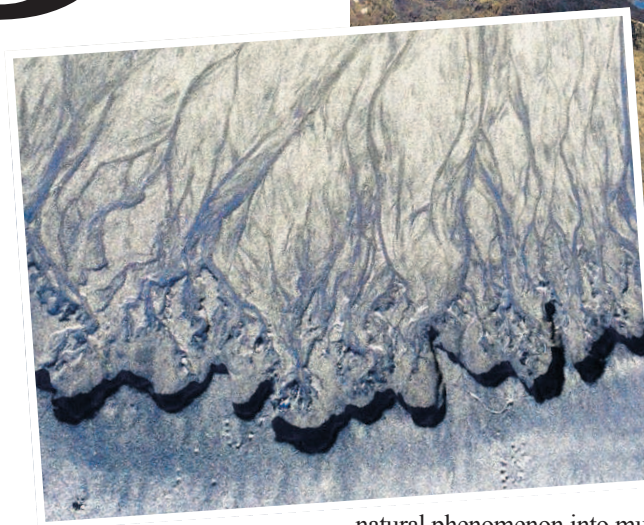
Mystical, these white-capped combers, swelling and lifting. Rushing pall-mall

into shallow water, that magical space where combers roll into an inevitable collision between land and sea. Like the sailing ships of old, these high-capped waves cross the great ocean, riding piggyback above the surge of deeper ocean currents. Here was a kaleidoscope of silver, blue and cresting creamy white against a background of magma, an igneous display of volcanic-shaped stone of pewter hues. Currents swirled sand and light and water into a witch's brew of eryth forms full of galactic-like surprises. By another definition, the ebb and flow of tides!

And where can you witness a divine canvas of such color and force? Translate this



Above: The coastline below North Head Lighthouse.



Left: Beach patterns shaped by the tide.

closed protectively in on themselves. Sprang back as if circling their wagons against an intrusion of foreigners. Gooseneck barnacles reacted much the same, pulled back like the tide itself, or an inhalation of sea breath that revels in ocean spirit.

Sea stars were threatened by a wasting disease two years ago, but according to Jeanne they're making a comeback. A few of the once vibrant creatures clung to sheer faces of rock like desperate refugees seeking a New World colony.

We waded into the tide pools and searched down the wild mussels, an orange fleshed bivalve of delicious flavor. We didn't take any. They simply weren't abundant enough.

Here were sea mosses exposed by the low tide. Saltwater glistened as the liquid coursed through tiny alleyways and tendrils, spangling with sunlight. Small, landlocked perch abounded. There was subtle movement in the tide pools — flounders



The infinite variety of sea creatures includes black barnacles and anemones.



A cove at the south end of the Long Beach Peninsula.

and crab buried beneath sandy earth skin shuttered and shuffled.

Mostly, rich fascination pressed home. This miniature Gulliver's world seemed ours alone. One man and a dog interrupted our revelry. He quickly disappeared. Otherwise, the world remained a private party.

Unlike Cannon Beach or Seaside that so often teem with tourists, the beach between North Head and Leadbetter seems mostly deserted, often left to a few locals and an occasional pickup truck or a couple walking their dogs. Other than popular clam tides, this beach is yours and mine for the asking.

High tide or low, or the ocean surges in between, this land is your land. Herein lies the gift that is the Long Beach Peninsula or the Clatsop Shores. Here stands a huge landscape and a small handful of eager people sure to enjoy natural beauty so close to home.

OUR PLANET OFFERS MANY FINE VISTAS, BUT, AS IT HAPPENS, OUR BACKYARD REMAINS A CONTENDER WITH THE BEST.