



Two vantage points show the sunset reflecting off Indian Beach in Ecola State Park.



David Campiche photos

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the most loyal rain-heads.

We know the enveloping sensation: at times a sou'wester materializes into sodden, rain soaking discomfort.

But would you rather seek residence in Death Valley? I was there early this fall. There were few clouds in the desert sky; no moisture in the mouth. Two-hundred feet below sea level, the ground was dry, hot and threatening. This is lizard country. The heat can snarl out at 130 degrees. It was beautiful in its severe penetrating way. After three days, I missed home.

The skies dumped inches of rain last week. Any depression filled with rainwater. The spruce trees in our yard sighed in relief. Last winter, warm dry temperatures encouraged the migration of millions of aphids and severely wounded the noble pines. The winter was mild and that felt good, but it wasn't us.

So my friends travel to our rain land and stand gaping as the Pacific Ocean plays water ballet. We walk on Benson Beach at Cape Disappointment State Park. Well, not quite—a 10-foot tide soon pushes us onto higher ground.

The cameras come out. As the tide pulls away, I scurry onto the gray, pewter-stained sands and shoot away. Flotsam and sea spray litter the beach.

High on a cliff, Cape Disappointment lighthouse stands forlornly against the storm. The shore pines, shaped by decades of wind, have tucked into the thin soils that are carried on ocean cur-

rents. They seek shelter in any cranny or depression in the lava rocks that created this headland tens of millions of years ago.

A tourist stands on land's end and takes a selfie. I feel violated. Shoot yourself with a camera when God is performing. Please, no. Instead, choose to sing out to the force, or to the indomitable storms created by competing current: warm air, cold air, the stir of earth forces—Incredible. The wind blows away our words.

Today, even the seabirds seem to have flown south or are nestled into shelters beyond our reach.

My friends hold hands and seem suddenly drawn into a partner's embrace. Natural beauty can do that; can draw us together into companionship that speaks of survival and something far beyond. Something undefinable.

Just offshore, over a century or more, 200 ships were scuttled by errant winds and mounting combers. Here is the infamous Peacock Spit and that shallow water grave defined by mariners as The Pacific Graveyard. We are safe in our down coats and rubber boots. Offshore, men on their doomed vessels prayed for life.

I feel grateful, safe and sound. I wonder if all this magnificent passion, this powerful storm, doesn't deserve an adulation, an offering to whatever god you or I might choose. I pray to the force that swirls in a universe impossible to fully discover or envision.

The rain sweeps back upon us and we

retreat to the safe confines of our 20th century miracle: the automobile, the same invention whose emissions threaten, at this very moment, our fragile planet.

The landscape doesn't feel particularly fragile on such a day. We drive home and

concoct a chowder of razor clams that we dug only two nights before. We are very happy. My visitors remain elated by the comfort of a hot kitchen, the sublime smells of food wafting, and the storms of winter, forever ours.

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