



Mabel's Cabrillo Highway Drive

San Simeon to Point Lobos in 37 stops — following Mabel Plaskett's 1959 tour of the Big Sur coast, with today's directions and the family's own photographs.

From the Plaskett family archive · plaskett.family · Original article: "Few Drives as Scenic as Coast's Cabrillo Highway," The Land, July 1959

The drive

Follow the drive exactly as Mabel Plaskett described it in *The Land* in July 1959 — San Simeon to Point Lobos, about 95 miles of Highway 1. Every stop below pairs her words with what you'll find there today. Marker positions are close approximations; the coast will make the fine navigation obvious. Allow a full day with stops, and check Caltrans (dot.ca.gov) or QuickMap before you go — Highway 1 still closes for slides, just as it has since it opened in 1937.

ROUTE About 95 miles, San Simeon to Point Lobos	TIME 3-4 hours nonstop — but give it a full day	FUEL Gas at San Simeon, Ragged Point, Gorda (pricey!), and Big Sur Village
BEST SEASONS Spring for wildflowers and waterfalls; fall for the clearest skies	BEFORE YOU GO Highway 1 still closes for slides — check Caltrans QuickMap before you go	

The stops, south to north

1 San Simeon & Sebastian's Store

"An ideal starting point... The only private property in San Simeon is Pete Sebastian's store and gas station. Here one may buy anything from a pair of Levis to jade jewelry."

Today: Sebastian's Store still stands (1852) near the pier, now with a café and tasting room. Hearst Castle tours run daily from the visitor center — book ahead.

2 Hearst Castle

"To our right rises, in all its splendor, the famous Hearst Castle, now open to the public... some of the finest architectural marvels of Europe."

Today: A California State Park since 1958 — Mabel wrote this the year after it opened to the public. The 1922 sale that ended the Plasketts' Pacific Valley years was to this same Hearst ranch.

3 Piedras Blancas Light Station

"We start north, pass over the bridge at Oak Knoll Creek and soon come to Piedras Blancas (White Rocks) lighthouse."

Today: Tours several mornings a week. Just south, the elephant seal rookery boardwalk is the biggest thing on this stretch that Mabel never saw — the seals only arrived in 1990. Stop; it's free.

4 Arroyo de la Cruz

"A few miles on we cross Arroyo de la Cruz (Creek of the Cross)."

Today: Still Hearst Ranch cattle country — the longest undeveloped stretch of the drive, much as she saw it.

5 San Carpofo Creek

"One glimpses a wide strip of beach, where the creek dams up and seems to disappear, and nearly always a few herd of cattle grazing along the stream."

Today: 'San Carpojo' to the old coast families. This is where the road ended before 1937 — everything north was horse trail. The southern gateway to Big Sur by Mabel's definition.

6 Ragged Point

(Between her stops — the cliffs climb here.)

Today: Inn, café, gas and a black-sand-beach trail. The last easy services before Gorda; a good leg-stretch with a big view.



Surf and stone: the coast turns wild north of here.

7 Salmon Creek Falls

"At Salmon Creek, where we make a deep horseshoe curve, we look back to see a lovely waterfall. Here Los Padres National Forest maintains a guard station."

Today: The 120-foot falls still shows from the horseshoe curve — park at the bend for the short trail. The guard station is gone, but the Plasketts' 'Big Sur begins here' boundary holds: this is the Monterey County line country.

8 Gorda

"Here is a lunch room, gas station and cabins. Below the road is a little church, where the residents from miles around meet on Sunday."

Today: Still a lunch room, cabins, and famously the most expensive gas in America — fill up before you need it. The Gorda Ladies Aid is gone; the ocean view is not.

9 Pacific Valley

"Farther on is Pacific Valley, where a school has been maintained since 1880."

Today: THE PLASKETT HOMELAND. William Lucas Plaskett claimed this valley in 1869; fifty children grew up here before the 1922 Hearst sale. Pacific Valley School still operates — on the east side of the highway directly at Plaskett Creek, across from Sand Dollar Beach and the campground — heir to the school the Plasketts' valley has kept since 1880. Walk the bluff trail across the road.



The Pacific Valley shelf from Plaskett Ridge — Sand Dollar's crescent, Plaskett Rock, and Highway 1.

10 Sand Dollar Beach & Jade Cove

"Here one sees the signs pointing the way to the famous Jade Cove... steps down the cliff to the sand beach, which is the nicest beach along the coast."

Today: Still the biggest sandy beach on the Big Sur coast, and rockhounds still hunt nephrite jade at Jade Cove after winter storms. Taking jade from above the tide line is prohibited — what the sea hands you is yours.



Sand Dollar Beach in full sun, Plaskett Rock standing guard.

11 Plaskett Creek Campground

"Recently the forest service opened the Plaskett Creek camp."

Today: Camp where the family homesteaded: the campground occupies William Lucas Plaskett's 1869 homesite, and his soapstone fireplace stones are still there. Up the creek stood the family's water-wheel arrastra — see our story 'The Arrastra on Plaskett Creek.'



The arrastra site on Plaskett Creek — the family's water-powered gold mill.

12 Mill Creek

"Mill Creek, named for saw mills operated on the stream in early days. Here is another nice little campground below the bridge and right on the ocean's edge."

Today: The mill was E.R. Sans's — Mabel's father's. She grew up at the mouth of this creek. The picnic ground under the bridge is still one of the coast's best-kept secrets. See 'Return to Mill Creek' in our stories.



Fire-scarred old-growth redwoods above Mill Creek.

13 Kirk Creek & Nacimiento-Fergusson Road

"At this point the road from King City, via Jolon and the Nacimiento River, meets the Cabrillo Highway. The sign says King City 49 miles."

Today: Kirk Creek Campground perches on the bluff. Nacimiento-Fergusson is the only road over the Santa Lucias — the Plasketts' old route to Jolon — but it closes often; check before attempting.

14 Limekiln Creek

"Where lime was shipped out in the 1880s... if one has the time, the most beautiful scenic walk in the world up the creek."

Today: Limekiln State Park: the four stone kilns still stand at the end of her 'most beautiful walk,' now a maintained trail through the redwoods to kilns and falls.

15 New Camaldoli Hermitage

"Here the brothers are trying to achieve a self-sustaining existence on a 600-acre place recently acquired."

Today: The Hermitage was two years old when she wrote; it's still there, still quiet. The bookstore sells the monks' famous fruitcake and Holy Granola. Visitors welcome up the two-mile drive.

16 Lucia

"Lucia Lodge is a few miles on... the lunch room extends onto an open veranda where one may eat literally over the ocean."

Today: Named for Lucia Dani of the coast's Dani family. The lodge's cliff-edge veranda survives storms and slides alike — check ahead, services here come and go with the road closures.

17 Rigdon Memorial & Big Creek Bridge

"A drinking fountain and a memorial plaque to Senator Elmer Rigdon, one of the men responsible for the building of the road... Big Creek bridge is a beautiful structure and often a subject for the artist's brush."

Today: The double-arched Big Creek Bridge is the painters' favorite it always was. The UC Big Creek Reserve behind the gate protects the canyon now.

18 Esalen (Hot Springs Lodge)

"Hot Springs Lodge nestles on a shelf down close to the ocean. This well-known resort is famous for the hot mineral baths to which people come from all over the world."

Today: Three years after her article, Hot Springs Lodge became the Esalen Institute. The baths still draw the world — by reservation (or the famous 1 a.m. public soak slots).

19 Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park & McWay Falls

"Between here and Castro Canyon is Saddle Rock Ranch, where you can see along the shore dark, oddly shaped rocks closely resembling a saddle."

Today: Saddle Rock Ranch became Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park — named for the pioneer ranchwoman in our stories. McWay Falls, dropping 80 feet onto the beach, is now the most photographed sight on the coast. Mabel doesn't even mention it: in 1959 it wasn't visible from the road.

20 Partington Cove

"A dirt road leads down to a deep tunnel through the rock. At the end of the tunnel is a sheltered cove where steamers once landed... the names on the row of mailboxes tell the tourist that artists, authors, sculptors live there."

Today: The 1880s tanbark tunnel is still open — the short steep trail through it to the hidden cove is one of the coast's magic moments. Henry Miller lived on the ridge above when Mabel wrote this.

21 Anderson Creek (Henry Miller Memorial Library)

"Across Anderson Creek on the right is the home and art gallery of Emil White, whose paintings have been bought by people near and far."

Today: Emil White's cabin on the highway is now the Henry Miller Memorial Library — bookstore, coffee, sculpture garden, and summer concerts under the redwoods. White founded it himself in memory of his friend.

22 Deetjen's Big Sur Inn

"We now come to Deetjen's, where the Big Sur Restaurant offers meals while a fine record concert is softly playing."

Today: Grandpa Deetjen's hand-built Norwegian inn is on the National Register now. Breakfast at Deetjen's is still the coast's favorite ritual — the candlelit rooms still have no locks worth mentioning.

23 Nepenthe

"Soon we behold on our left the famous Nepenthe restaurant and we think of Poe's lines, 'Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe...'"

Today: Still family-run, still the terrace with the 40-mile view. The Ambrosia burger and a seat by the fire pit at sunset — do it once in your life.

24 Post Ranch (Rancho Sierra Mar)

"On the very top of Big Sur hill is Rancho Sierra Mar run by the Post family... The Posts are early pioneers and the old Post home nearby has recently been renovated."

Today: The Post family's hilltop is now Post Ranch Inn — the coast's most famous luxury hotel, its restaurant named Sierra Mar after the old ranch. The restored 1877 Post homestead still stands by the highway.

25 Pfeiffer Beach (Sycamore Canyon Road)

"Sycamore Canyon road on our left leads to the famous Pfeiffer Beach, where one may collect shells of all sorts."

Today: The unmarked right turn is deliberate — locals never signed it. Purple sand, the Keyhole Arch (photographers mob it at winter solstice sunset), and wind you'll remember. Small parking lot fills early.

26 Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park & Big Sur Village

"This park was donated by the Pfeiffer family who settled here in 1869. They and other old timers like the Post family were the backbone of Big Sur country. Big Sur Lodge, Redwood Lodge, Ripplewood Lodge, Walker's Camp, River Inn follow closely."

Today: The Pfeiffers settled the same year the Plasketts claimed Pacific Valley. The park's redwood loop to Pfeiffer Falls reopened after the 2020 fire. River Inn (with its chairs IN the river), Ripplewood, and the Big Sur Lodge all still serve travelers.

27 Andrew Molera State Park

"The Molera ranch buildings are nearly hidden below the road. This ranch dates back to 1834 when it was part of the 9,000-acre Rancho El Sur."

Today: The old ranch is Andrew Molera State Park — the mile walk to the driftwood-strewn river-mouth beach is the easiest big payoff on the coast. The 1861 Cooper Cabin is Big Sur's oldest building.

28 Point Sur Light Station

"The Big Sur Lighthouse perched on top of the rocky mesa... built in 1899 and ever since its powerful million-candlepower light has been flashing its beam every 15 seconds nightly."

Today: The great volcanic rock and its 1889 lighthouse are a State Historic Park — docent-led tours a few days each week are the only way up, and worth planning around. The shipwreck stories in our archive happened on these rocks.

29 Little Sur River & Pico Blanco view

"We look eastward toward Pico Blanco (White Peak), 3,710 feet above us. The Little Sur, like San Carpojo, wells up behind a great rock and sinks in the sand. This is a lovely wide beach, but I've never seen anyone on it."

Today: Still nobody on it — the beach is closed to protect snowy plovers, so enjoy exactly the view she did. Pico Blanco's limestone crown gleams the same white.

30 Hurricane Point

"We round Hurricane Point..."

Today: The windiest pullout on the highway and the classic long view back over Bixby Bridge — hold onto your hat and your car door.

31 Bixby Creek Bridge

"The highest single-span concrete arch bridge in the world. An airplane has been known to fly under it. It was from this bridge the sea otter, thought to be extinct, was discovered in 1938."

Today: The most photographed bridge in California (and the Big Little Lies title shot). The otters she mentions came back from those 50 survivors to the whole coast. Park only in the pullouts — it's a working highway.

32 Palo Colorado Canyon & Notleys Landing

"Near the highway stands the old Swetnam house, a three-story log house... At the mouth of the Palo Colorado Creek is Notleys Landing where tan bark was shipped in early days."

Today: Her marker for the NORTH end of Big Sur Country. The redwood canyon was hit hard by the 2016 Soberanes Fire; the road up it remains closed to through traffic. Jeffers' 'zebra-striped' log house appears in our Point Sur stories.

33 Rocky Point

"Rocky Point Lodge is on the edge of a cliff below the road."

Today: The cliff-edge restaurant still serves that view.

34 Garrapata State Park

"We come to Garrapata Creek (Tick Creek) where Weston Trout Farm is located, on past Granite Canyon bridge where the ocean surf pounds underneath."

Today: Now Garrapata State Park: Calla Lily Valley blooms in late winter, Soberanes Point trails year-round. Free, unsigned, and the locals' favorite stretch.

35 Malpaso Creek & Yankee Point

"Mal Paso Creek, named because of the bad crossing before the bridge was built. We pass Yankee Point, called the Carmel Riviera."

Today: The 'bad crossing' later named Clint Eastwood's production company. The Carmel Riviera is now exactly as expensive as it sounds.

36 Point Lobos State Natural Reserve

"At Point Lobos State Park can be seen the gnarled windblown cypress often seen on postcards. Here are facilities for picnicking."

Today: 'The greatest meeting of land and water in the world.' Reserve parking fills by mid-morning — the Cypress Grove and Sea Lion Point loops are short and unforgettable. Whales pass December-May.

37 San Jose Creek — journey's end

"We drive on to San Jose Creek."

Today: Monastery Beach, at the edge of Carmel. Mabel's 'three or four hours' still holds if you don't stop — but you will stop. Give it the day; she gave it her whole life.

Mabel Plaskett promised her readers they would “not be bored for a moment,” and sixty-some years later the promise still holds. Drive gently, pull over for the view, and when you pass Pacific Valley, know that everything you can see once answered to one family’s name.

The interactive map, Mabel’s complete writings, and the family’s stories live at **plaskett.family**.