

Sept. 6 1995

Bob Bernard

Start @ 9:30

Park @

Del Cerro Park

OTP Hike #0293

### Day Hike

## Nature's Wonders on the Palos Verdes Peninsula

In Palos Verdes one has the impression of entering a paradise designed by the Spanish for the anointed of heaven.

—Louis Bromfield  
Vogue magazine, 1930

By JOHN MCKINNEY

The little-known and infrequently traveled trails of the Palos Verdes Peninsula offer the hiker a tranquil escape from metropolitan life. During March, the hills are colored an emerald green and sprinkled with wildflowers, and you might spot a migrating California gray whale on the horizon.

One short loop trip, suitable for the

whole family, explores the hills above Portuguese Bend, one of the most geologically interesting (and unstable) areas in Southern California. Earth movement during 1956-57 wrecked about 100 homes. At one point, the rate of land movement was slightly more than an inch a day.

Portuguese Bend takes its name from the Portuguese men who practiced the risky but lucrative business of shore whaling. Most of the hardy whalers who worked the waters off Palos Verdes Peninsula from the 1850s to the 1880s were of Portuguese descent. Many a whale was slaughtered, but the peninsula whaling operation was abandoned not because of lack of gray whales but because of a shortage of fuel with which to process blubber into oil.

Geographically, the Palos Verdes bluffs and beaches resemble the Channel Islands. Long ago, before the Ice Age began, the peninsula was an island, separated from the rest of the Los Angeles Basin by the sea. However, toward the end of the last glacial period, the 18-mile-long peninsula was connected to the mainland by masses of

sediment discharged from the mountains to the north.

The peninsula is famous for its rocky cliffs, which rise from 50 to 300 feet above the ocean and form 13 wave-cut terraces. These terraces, or platforms, resulted from a combination of uplift and sea-level fluctuations caused by the formation and melting of glaciers. Today the waves, as they have for so many thousands of years, are actively eroding the shoreline, cutting yet another terrace into the land.

You don't have to be a geology student to enjoy a walk in the Palos Verdes hills. The route I've dubbed Portuguese Bend

Trail links various paths and fire roads and offers great clear-day views of the peninsula and Catalina Island.

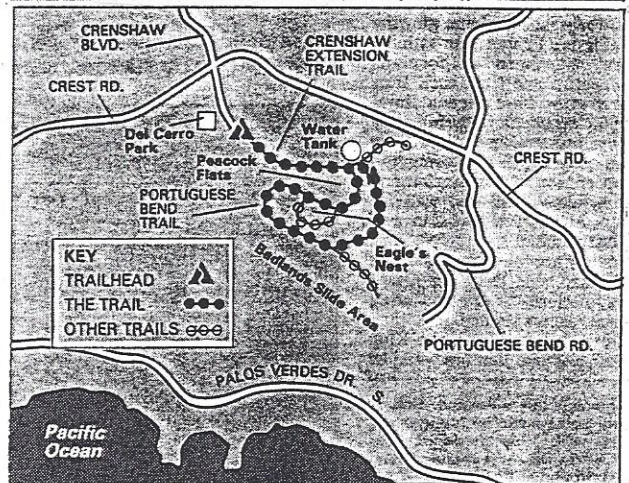
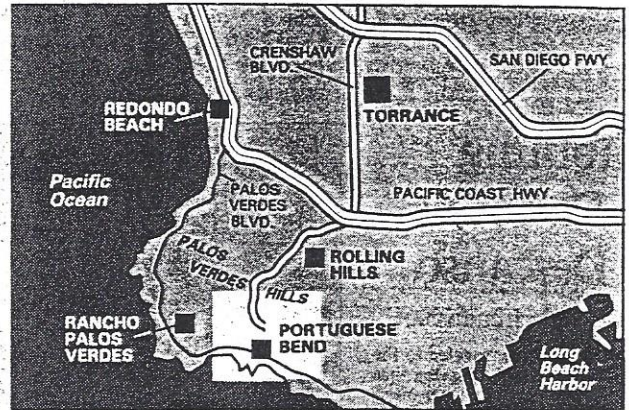
**Directions to the trailhead:** From the San Diego Freeway in Torrance, exit on Crenshaw Boulevard and head south. Continue on Crenshaw past Pacific Coast Highway and into the hills of Rancho Palos Verdes. Park at boulevard's end at the side of the road or at nearby Del Cerro Park. The trail begins at a steel gate, which separates the end of Crenshaw Boulevard from the beginning of a dirt fire road.

**The hike:** Walk down the unsigned fire road, which is officially named Crenshaw Extension Trail. Leaving red-roofed, million-dollar residences behind, you'll look ahead to a million-dollar view. The green hills, bedecked with lupine in spring, roll to the sea. Geology students will note several marine terraces, while botany students will observe the peninsula's unique blend of native brush and imported flora gone wild.

A half-mile descent from the trailhead brings you to a water tank and an unsigned three-way

### Portuguese Bend Trail

Del Cerro Park to Badlands Slide Area: ~~2 1/2 miles~~  
signed loop, 400-foot elevation gain.



JOHN SNYDER / Los Angeles Times

intersection. The leftward trail climbs to a fire station. The trail dead ahead will be your return route on this walk. Continue right with Crenshaw Extension Trail, which soon drops into a wildflower-splashed meadow known as Peacock Flats. It's doubtful you'll see a peacock here, but you might hear the shrill call of the "watchdog of the peninsula" from other parts of the trail. The birds are popular pets with local homeowners.

Above Peacock Flats, two short trails lead up a hill topped with a dozen pine trees. From the crest of this hill, known as Eagle's Nest, you'll have grand clear-day views of Catalina. The nest is close to the southwesternmost point of the peninsula, meaning Catalina is but

17 nautical miles away, and meaning you can identify many of the island's geographical features.

Return to the main trail, which heads northwest, then make a long horseshoe bend to the southeast. After descending past a stand of eucalyptus and a second water tank, you'll begin crossing the geologically unstable terrain known as Badlands Slide Area.

A water pipe on the left parallels the dirt road at this point. Look sharply left for an unsigned trail that climbs to the east. After a steep and tentative start, the trail widens and ascends at a more moderate pace atop a canyon wall. Sweet-smelling fennel lines the path, which turns north and climbs to the above-mentioned three-way trail junction.