

# SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BEACH TOWN CYCLING

## LA JOLLA, DEL MAR, SAN CLEMENTE, DANA POINT, LAGUNA BEACH CYCLING

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For me, the California coast is one of the best locations to experience



the natural beauty of the beaches and the surrounding cliffs while cycling. I have ridden in Southern and Central California and the San Francisco Bay area, and I

have never been disappointed in the natural beauty.

We have visited north San Diego County and south Orange County on numerous occasions. When it works out for me, I always plan on getting a bike ride in. I have ridden from La Jolla to Carlsbad northbound and from Newport Beach southbound to Pendleton Marine Base. As with other California coastal areas, the beaches and the cliffs surrounding the beaches are very picturesque. A ride from La Jolla to Newport Beach is about 100 miles one way, and no, I don't want to ride that long of a distance. I will stick to biking shorter routes.



## HISTORY

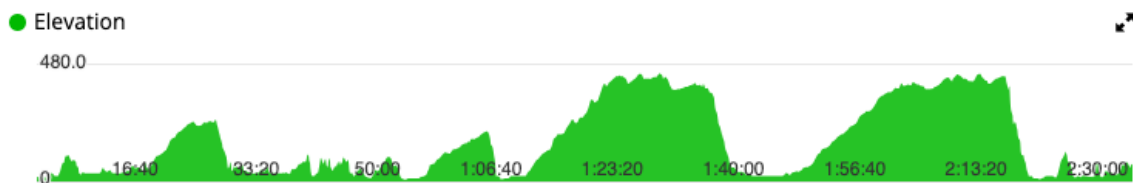
Southern California is rich in history. This area was part of the Spanish empire until 1820. Mexico assumed control of this area from 1821 to 1848. When Mexico lost the Mexican-American War (1845-1848), it ceded to the United States a portion of the current southwestern United States and any rights to disputed territories with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848. With a nod to the Spanish colonial era, some of the towns kept their Spanish names, and some of the newer towns were given Spanish names. Developers also reflected the Spanish influence in the architecture for new buildings and homes. Examples include San Clemente (1925), Mission Viejo (1960s) and Solana Beach (1923).

## BIKE ROUTES AND POINTS OF INTEREST

Here are couple of the rides I have enjoyed around Del Mar and Dana Point.

### DEL MAR – RANCHO SANTA FE – LA JOLLA





Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30  
34.19 miles, Total ascent 1,962 feet

Starting from Solana Beach, I rode east to Rancho Santa Fe on Via De La Valle. (Santa Fe translates to "holy faith" in Spanish.) Rancho Santa Fe, nicknamed "The Ranch," was a land grant in the 1840s and developed starting in 1921. The Ranch has great views of the ocean, and the central village area has a very rustic vibe to it. I biked to Rancho Santa Fe to satisfy my curiosity about the site of the Heaven's Gate mass suicide. From Rancho Santa Fe I rode back to



Solana Beach on Via De La Valle, passing by Del Mar Horsepark. This venue hosts competitions attended by equestrians from all over the world. Once I reached Solana Beach, I rode south on Camino Del Mar through the beach towns of Solana Beach (Spanish for "sunny side," established in

1910s), Del Mar (Spanish for "by the sea," established in 1885) and La Jolla by the Sea ("the Jewel" in Spanish, also its nickname, founded in 1850).

Del Mar is a beach town worth visiting. I always incorporate a stop here; be it to get coffee or a bite to eat. The beach gets crowded, and traffic can be hard to navigate, but it is absolutely worth the trouble to stop. I have come back here with my family for dinner and have very fond memories of our experience - the food, walks on the beach after dinner, and shopping.



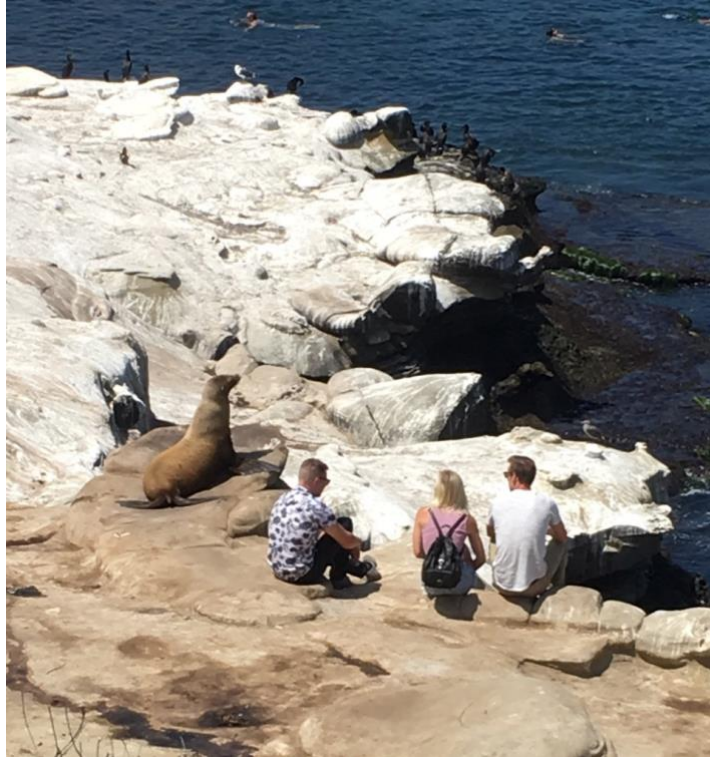
After Del Mar, I rode by Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve (which has Torrey Pines beach) and Torrey Pines Golf Course. Along North Torrey Pines Road, there are relief stations with food and water for riders.



The University of San Diego and

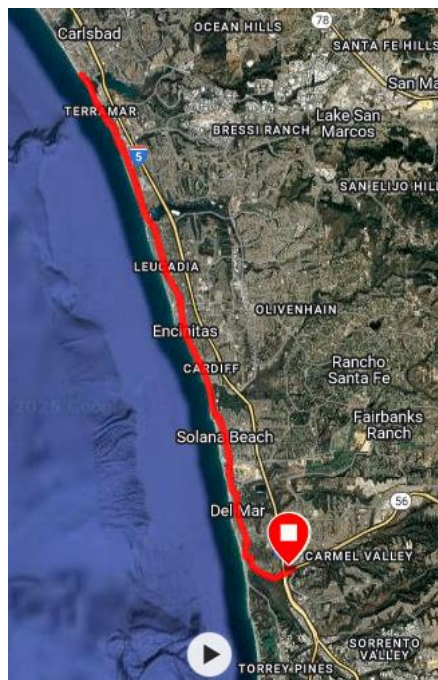


the Birch Aquarium are located in La Jolla. Riding down to the cove of La Jolla is a steep decent of 480 feet and then climbing back the same 480 feet. La Jolla Bay is also home to sea lions. There always is a colony of sea lions sunbathing on the rocks and a raft of sea lions floating in the bay.

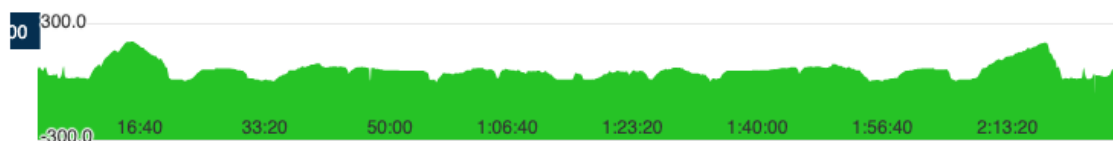


A Sea Lion enjoying the view of La Jolla Bay

## MONARCH AT CARMEL VALLEY – DEL MAR- CARLSBAD



● Elevation



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30  
34.75 miles, Total ascent 979 feet



This ride is on U.S. Highway 101 north from Del Mar to Carlsbad. The route is relatively flat with great views of the Pacific Ocean. I went by Del Mar Racetrack (picture on left). I rode through Solano Beach, which used to have a Trek factory store where I bought my bike, and a Pinarello store. Both are closed now. North of Solana Beach is Cardiff-by-the-

Sea (named after Cardiff, Wales). As I was riding through Cardiff, I noticed that there were a lot of surfers. Cardiff Reef is a popular surf spot.



After Cardiff, I went through Encinitas ("little oak" in Spanish; its old town was established in 1881) and is touted as the flower capital of the world. It is well known for poinsettias. After Encinitas I rode through Leucadia (Greek origin), another beach community, to Carlsbad and turned around at South Carlsbad State Beach. A stop just south of the State Beach is South Ponto Beach, another popular spot for surfing. I didn't ride by it, but Legoland is located in Carlsbad in case the kids and all the adults that grew up with Legos (and now are stepping on their kids' Legos pieces left around the house) want to visit.

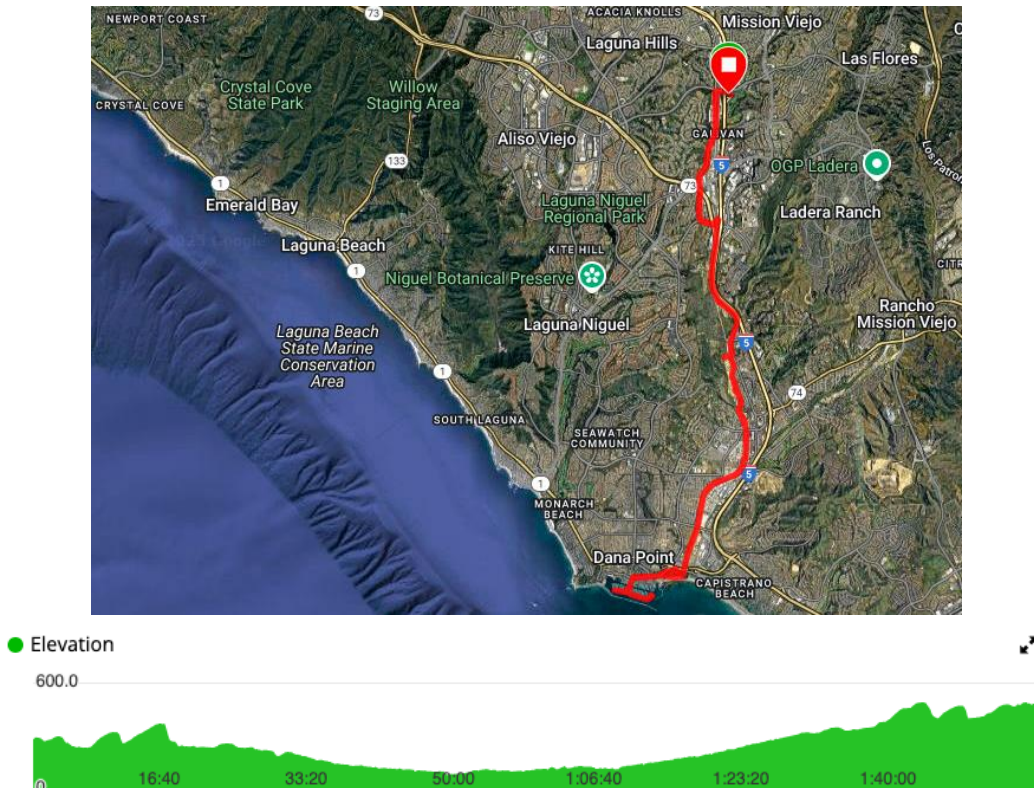
This was a very enjoyable ride with views of the Pacific and beach towns.



View of Racetrack from the west



## MISSION VIEJO – DANA POINT HARBOR



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30  
23.54 miles, Total ascent 1,000 feet

One route I rode was from Mission Viejo (Spanish for “old mission,” which was master planned as a city in 1963) to Dana Point Harbor. Mission Viejo is hilly, and some of the climbs are steep. There are couple of routes to take to Dana Point, and I took the route that was less hilly down to Dana Point (and had climbs on the way back). The ride is about 25 miles, and the ascend is approximately 1,000 feet. The Dana Point Harbor elevation is at sea level, and Mission Viejo is 500 feet above sea level. The climbs are spread over three miles.





Most of the route is on city roads. The final seven miles to Dana Point are on a bike/pedestrian trail. The bike trails are accessible from Oso Road off Camino Capistrano and first right on Avenida De La Vista. There is an equestrian center with various barns. At the end of the road, there is a cul-de-sac, and the Trabucco Trail is accessible to the right. The Trabucco Trail merges into the San Juan Creek Trail, which ends at Dohney State Park. I like being on the trail since I avoided the traffic and streetlights of Camino Capistrano. I



rode through a tunnel under CA Highway 1/Pacific Coast Highway to avoid the congestion around the State Park.

I recommend a visit to Dana Point Island. The island is accessible from Dana Point Harbor Drive by Island

Way. On the island, there is a statute of Richard Dana Jr., for whom Dana Point is named when it incorporated in 1989. Richard Dana was an author and sailor who visited the area when it was known for hide trading. The harbor is also home to the Ocean Institute, a marine museum that hosts educational trips regarding marine life. Whale watching trips are also available from the Institute.



Ocean Institute

When the Spanish ruled the area, Saint Junipero Serra, a Jesuit priest, was tasked with establishing missions in current California. There are 21 missions from San Diego to Sonoma, and the road linking these missions is called El Camino Real. In 1776, Saint Serra established Mission San Juan Capistrano, named for Saint John of Capistrano, "the Solider Saint" (an Italian Franciscan friar from Capistrano in the 14<sup>th</sup> century). The mission is worth a visit, as the Chapel in the mission is the oldest continuous used building in California. During Mexican rule, the mission was secularized and renamed San Juan de Arguello. The mission's original name was restored when the area became a part of United States. In 1865, President Lincoln returned ownership of the Mission and the surrounding lands to the Catholic Church. The old mission had fallen into disrepair after an earthquake in the early 1800s and secularization in the 1830s. Since 1849, numerous attempts were made to renovate the mission with mixed results.

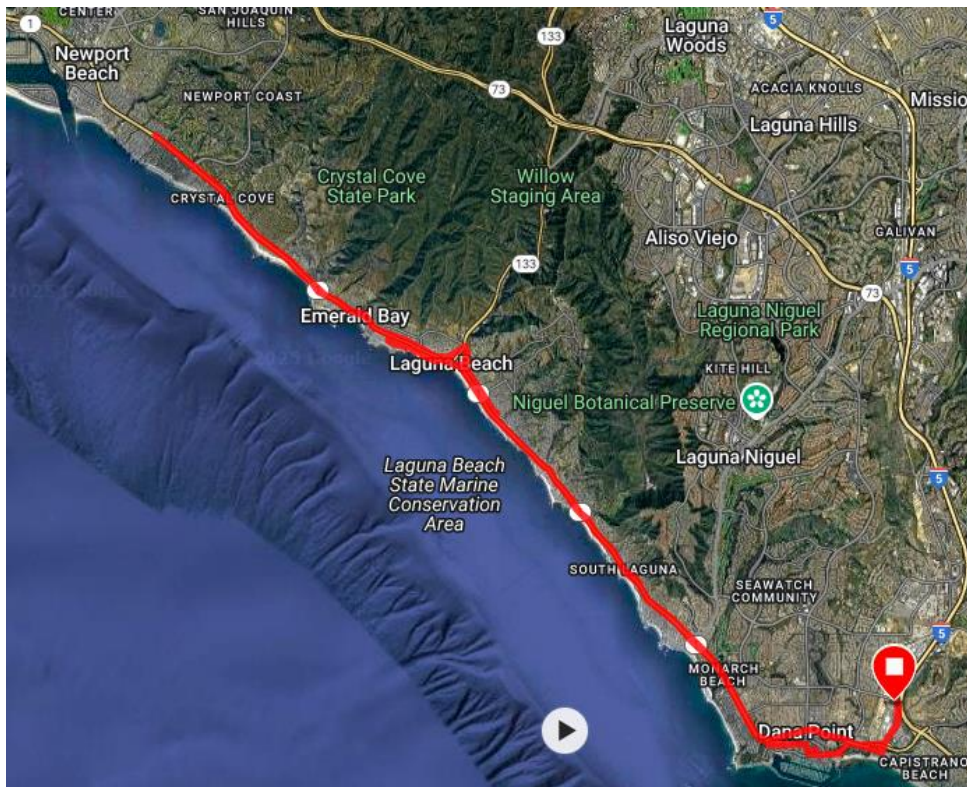
The Catholic Church built a new parish church, Mission Basilica San Juan Capistrano, and I went by the new church on my ride. The

church grounds are very peaceful. and the bell tower on the church is very distinctive.



Dana Point Harbor

## SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO – DANA POINT - LAGUNA BEACH – NEWPORT





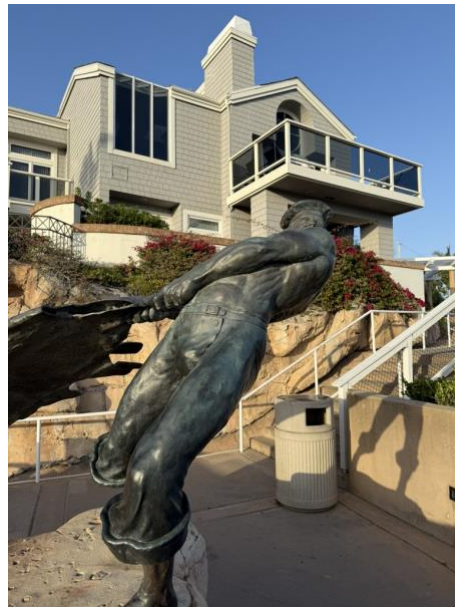


Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30  
31.18 miles Ascend of 1,769

I rode from San Juan Capistrano to Huntington Beach. The route took me through beach cities until I turned around in Huntington Beach. I rode through Dana Point's Lantern District on Pacific Coast Highway (US 1). The Lantern

District gets its name from the practice started in the 1920s to signal ships going by the harbor using different colored lanterns. The district was developed in the 1930s and has homes, restaurants, and shops with Spanish colonial style architecture. As I rode towards the bluff overlooking the harbor, I noticed that some of the architecture switched from Spanish colonial to Cape Cod style.

Overlooking the harbor is Dana Point Bluff Top Trail for pedestrians. The panoramic views of the harbor, Dana Island, and the Pacific Ocean are awe inspiring. On one end of the trail is a life-size statue of *The Hide Drougher* tossing cow hide down the cliff for trade (picture on right). This was a practice to throw cow hides down the cliff to be loaded onto the ships that were in the harbor below.

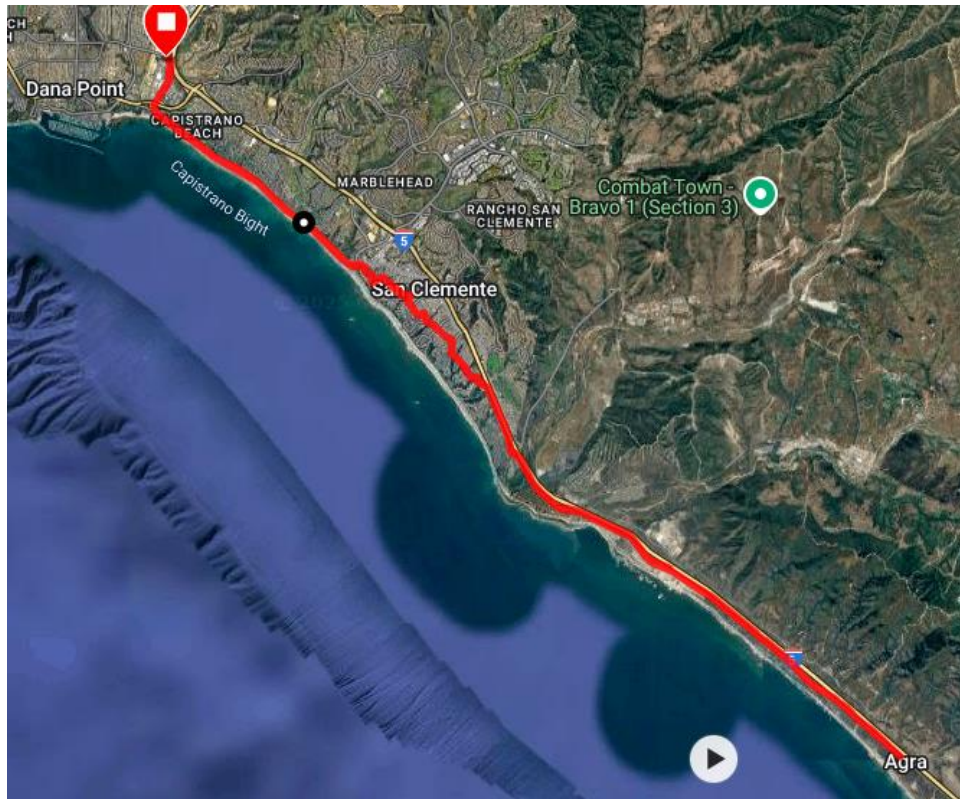


From Dana Point I rode past Monarch Beach, home to various resorts (Ritz Carlton, St. Regis). After Monarch Beach, there are panoramic views of the Ocean and beaches. I went by Emerald Bay and then Laguna Beach. The next town I explored was Laguna Beach. I rode up a couple of cliffs, and the views were worth the climb. I also stopped by Heisler Park Beach Stairway, and again, the view was spectacular. I ran into the University of California-Irvine Cycling Club – boy, did they make climbing the cliffs look easy. After they dropped me, I continued on Highway 1. I went by Crystal Cove State Park Tunnel and Crystal Cove State Park Vista Point, both of which are worth a stop. The picture on the right is Crystal Cove State Park from the California State Park Foundation. I turned around at Cameo Shores Road in Corona Del Mar, a neighborhood in Newport Beach, as I was starting to ride into a congested area.



The ride back was even better than the ride up. Since I was riding south, most of the time the ocean was on my right, which meant I didn't have to worry about traffic merging from my right.

## SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO - SAN CLEMENTE – PENDELTON



● Elevation

360.0



Map Route's source: Google map - Garmin Edge 705, Software 3.30  
30.88 miles Ascend of 711 feet

This route is relatively flat. I started in San Juan Capistrano and headed west towards Dohney Beach in Dana Point. From Dohney Beach, I headed south on US 101 to San Clemente and south towards the Pendleton Marine Base.

There is a rail line that parallels US 101 from Dana Point to San Clemente, and I never grew accustomed to seeing and hearing







the "Pacific Surfliner," the train connecting San Diego to Los Angeles, coming towards me or passing me from behind. I met some fellow riders that biked to Del Mar and then took the train back from Solana Beach (closest train station) to San Juan Capistrano. One of these days, I would like to ride from Dana Point to Del Mar, get some lunch, and then take the train back to San Juan

Capistrano, the closest train station to Dana Point.



Looking South towards San Clemente from Dana Point

San Clemente was founded in 1925 and named for San Clemente Island, the southernmost island in the chain of Channel Islands. The Spanish named the island in honor of Pope Clement I (Saint Clement) from the first century. San Clemente, also known as the Spanish Village by the Sea, is a beach town known for its Spanish Colonial architecture and beaches. Riding through San Clemente can be a



challenge, particularly during the summer months with all the beach goers. There are bike shops along the route in San Clemente in case there is a need for emergency repairs, and the staff is very friendly and helpful.

Source for the picture above: [https://www.sanclementeguide.com/san-clemente-photos#google\\_vignette](https://www.sanclementeguide.com/san-clemente-photos#google_vignette)

After San Clemente, I headed south and made my way back to the



San Clemente Bike Trail, which is accessible right before the Cristianitos Road on-ramp to South I-5. President Nixon's former residence, La Casa Pacifica, dubbed "The Western White House," is located about a mile south from this intersection.

Photo Credit : [Western White House - Casa Pacifica - 11 Dec 1969.JPG](#).

The trail goes into San Onofre State Park and beach. The views of the ocean and beaches are spectacular. When I rode this section, I saw a structure in the distance that looked like a nuclear plant. The closer I got, I confirmed that, yes, it is a nuclear plant. That was a first for me to ride that close to a nuclear plant. (The plant has been decommissioned.) After San Onofre State Park, the trail is named California Coastal Trail/ Old Pacific Bike Trail and heads into Camp Pendleton. I was starting to get tired and decided to turn back in Agra. Gladiator Beach is located off Agra. I didn't make it down to the beach but admired the ocean from the cliff overlooking the beach. Recently I have heard that Gladiator Beach is a clothing-optional beach. No, I didn't see any nudity, nor did I participate in that practice. From Agra, I made my way back to San Juan Capistrano and I can't say enough or adequately describe the natural beauty that I saw.



Bluffs – San Juan Capistrano