



RENEWAL



The splendor of California's Pacific Coast along the route from Monterey to Morro Bay walked by Ron Forseth

# Time out from life

Businessman unplugs, takes a hike and collects memories to last a lifetime

Story and photography by RON FORSETH  
Special Contributor

Ten years in the corporate world had worn me down. I needed a timeout.

I made arrangements for the journey of my life, a 130-mile solo trek from Monterey Bay to Morro Bay along central California's Highway 1 and the spectacular Big Sur coast. I would totally unplug: no TV, no e-mail, no Internet, no cellphone.

On July 1, I departed Oceanside, Calif., by train for the 10-hour ride north. I arrived in Monterey, mounted my pack by the Monterey Bay Aquarium and walked past the Presidio Defense Language Institute, spending my first night in Veteran's Park. Early the next morning, I joined the legendary Highway 1, a narrow and inviting strip of pavement along the coast, and headed south. The land cast rocky crags into the sea, and the sea tossed back crashing waves.

My pack weighed 60 pounds. Loaded with water and ready-to-eat food, it made for a very tough start. By the end of my first day, serious blisters had set in. My imagining of the adventure had somehow omitted the element of pain.

Along the way, my nightly ritual was to find a safe place to bed down in my sleeping bag. This usually meant a roadside nook that I would settle into after nightfall. One of my favorites was a grassy hill overlooking the

Pacific. As the sun set on my second night, I felt like heaven had come down upon me.

The next morning, I managed to mount the pack onto my wobbly body for a 15-mile trek into the town of Big Sur. I took a rest day July 4.

In defense of my ridiculously sore legs, I decided to eliminate 15 pounds of provisions. I gave away much of my dried fruit and jerky, smoked salmon, trail mix, powdered lemonade for my hydration bladder, cookies, candy — and water. It might have been a gamble. For eight of my 12 days on the road, no restaurant was available. When one was, I ate like crazy.

I took advantage of the lighter load the next day and walked 8½ miles by noon. By supper, I'd cleared 20. But I'd run out of water and decided it was time to take out a sign I'd made: "Accepting water." Within 20 minutes, several passing cars had donated three bottles. I camped out that night on a cliff,



Forseth underestimated the discomfort of carrying a 60-pound pack.

listening to the waves crash below.

I pushed past Lucia along "The 1" the next day. I met John, a friendly groundskeeper, who shared some of the lore of Big Sur. I enjoyed the bark of seals below and the slap of a large whale's tail on the ocean's surface. I arrived in Gorda, a roadside hamlet of 22 souls, after nightfall. I put down in a seaside cleft behind a stone wall. In the morning, I ate a hot breakfast of eggs, bacon and hash browns at the Whale Watcher Cafe.

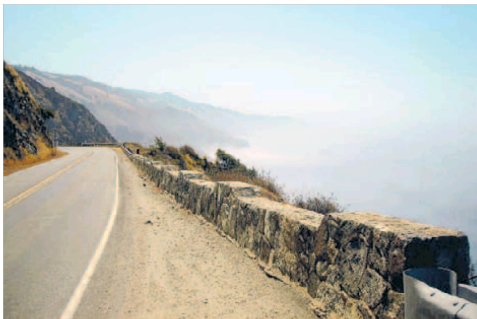
On the afternoon of another rest day, two tourists, Jim and Tobi, noticed me watching for whales. They were curious: "Are you alone?" "Where do you sleep?" "How can you make it on such a dangerous road?" "How did you get the time to do this?"

Like me, Jim and Tobi were in their 40s, slogging it out in the business world. It was clear they, too, were longing for a timeout.

I had stored up two weeks of vacation for this break, and my boss allowed me two additional weeks of sabbatical. In truth, time off without pay would have been worth it.

To Tobi and Jim, I was in the midst of an enviable trek, a sort of constructive midlife crisis. I appreciated their listening ability. It was the most interaction I'd have with anyone along the way and was a welcome break from the isolation. They cheered me on my way, strengthening my confidence that I would reach my goal.

Departing Gorda, I crossed into San Luis Obispo County. As I glanced back toward Monterey, I noticed a sign: "No roadside camping next 72 miles." I hadn't seen such a prohibition the other direction for the same stretch of road and was glad I wasn't hiking



Forseth spent 12 days on California's Highway 1, nine of them walking, a journey he estimates of about 275,000 steps.



Carnival costumes often satirize Lucerne celebrities and politicians.

EUROPE

## Swiss gone cuckoo

Lucerne marches to a boisterous beat during Carnival

Story and photography by MARK SISSONS  
Special Contributor

LUCERNE, Switzerland — At precisely 5 a.m. the starting gun goes off, shattering my sleep. On the street outside my hotel room, crowds of rowdy revelers gather on the shore of Lake Lucerne as snare drums start pounding. I rise and hurriedly slip into my borrowed costume of handmade cloth pants, a white silk blouse, and a heavy tunic with leather shoulder pads, rabbit fur protruding from them. Half Musketeer, half Conan the Barbarian, I stumble outside to join the party of the year, already in full swing.

It's still dark on the first morning of Carnival in the medieval Swiss city of Lucerne. The alleys and squares of the old town are already jammed with boisterous, costumed revelers cheering on dozens of brass-and-percussion bands marching in fearsome monster masks.

Before the party ends nearly a week later on Ash Wednesday, this ancient city probably most famous for its superbly restored medieval covered bridge will have gone more than a little crazy.

Lucerne's notoriously raucous Carnival (or Fasnacht, as it's called in this German-speaking city in the heart of Switzerland's Bernese highlands) kicks off each winter in late January or early February. It may not rival its more infamous counterpart in Rio for pure hedonism: the chilly winter weather precludes g-strings. But anyone who thinks Switzerland is just pretty mountains and chocolate hasn't danced in Lucerne's streets with cross-dressing bankers to bossa nova beats, or mingled with roving bands of marching Martians during this manic six-day celebration.

Carnival's origins in Switzerland date back to pagan spring festivals in which villagers wore grotesque masks to ward off evil spirits. During medieval times, religious authorities tried to lean what they considered subversive displays of devilry, only to face open rebellion from the lower classes determined not to forfeit their annual opportunity to mock their rulers from behind satiric disguises. Lucerne's version of this last blast before Lent, the 40-day fasting period in the Christian

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Thousands of spectators gather along Lucerne's parade route during Carnival.



# Nature's drama in the Outback

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known is the Bush Camp at Faraway Bay, which was used by *Australia's* film crew. About 170 miles northwest of Kununurra, it lies on the Diamond Coast, edged by the Timor Sea. Guests fly from Kununurra.

The campsite, which can host as many as 12 people, is perched on a headland with 180-degree views. A no-walls, thatched-roofed communal area is a dining room, bar and, after sunset, gathering place for fly-watching and lively conversation. Beds are in secluded two-person cabins.

A leisurely day is spent meandering along the coast, watching thousands of birds, spotting 15-foot crocs, fishing for tasty barramundi, hearing Aboriginal stories or getting to know your Aussie boatmates. This is the way Australia should be seen but rarely is.

## The Bungle Bungle

A short plane ride or half-day drive south of Kununurra, through rugged New Mexico-like country, is the town of Halls Creek, jumping-off point for the overnight fly-camp Bungle Bungle tour.



The Bush Camp at Faraway Bay has a communal area for dining, drinking or just contemplating an evening's fire.

The 350 million-year-old Bungle Bungle Range dramatically thrusts 700 feet up from the surrounding desert. Its striking beauty lies in its deep gorges, sheer chasms and distinctive beehive-shaped, striped towers.

For more than 20,000 years, Aborigines have used the Bungle Bungle for burials and rock paintings. Today, the range is part of Purnululu National Park, which was declared a sanctuary in 1987 and covers more than 450,000 acres.

For years, the only way to see the Bungle Bungle was to fly over or make an arduous four-wheel-drive trek to a camp nearby.

Now, a handful of government-approved tour operators offer fly-camp options that include an extensive flight over the range, a walking tour of the beehives, Cathedral Gorge and Echidna Chasm, and a stay at one of just three park campsites.

## Emma Gorge

Emma Gorge is tucked away in the fiery red landscape of the Cockburn Range and is part of the million-acre El Questro Station (ranch). It's an hour's drive northwest of Kununurra.



Photos by JEFF MILLER/Special Contributor

One of the Bungle Bungle's unique rock formations: the Beehives. The stripes are created by lichen (a fungus) and silica.

By far the most upscale of the three camping sites, Emma Gorge boasts platformed tent cabins, modern bathroom facilities in a central location and a headquarters featuring a restaurant, bar and swimming pool.

A muscle-stretching 40-minute walk from the campsite takes visitors up a gorge filled with pandanus and palms. The gorge leads to a waterfall that feeds numerous

natural pools that offer good swimming — free of crocodiles.

Farther afield, visitors can get a one-hour guided tour of Chamberlain Gorge by small boat, stopping to hike and view Aboriginal rock paintings. For those who want the big picture, helicopter rides that include both gorges are offered.

*Jeff Miller is freelance travel writer in Colorado who has traveled and lived in Australia.*

## 14 things to know about the Outback

1. No specific place is the "Outback." Australia's Outback starts about 250 miles inland from any point on the coast.
2. Wild camels roam parts of the Outback. They're descendants of camels brought to work on the railroad between Alice Springs and Ayers Rock.
3. Like any wilderness, the Outback can be dangerous. Carry food and water on any trip, and if your vehicle breaks down, stay with it.
4. An Aussie once advised: "You have to stay in an Outback town at least two days. The first day the locals talk about you; the second day they talk to you."
5. Ever-present flies are responsible for the "Aussie salute": your hands waving in front of your face to shoo them.
6. "Backo" or "Bourke" means any remote, isolated place. Bourke is an Outback town in western New South Wales.
7. It's been reported that in the Outback you can see about 5,000 stars with the naked eye, as opposed to an estimated 3,000 visible in the Northern Hemisphere. That's because more of the Milky Way can be seen in the Southern Hemisphere.
8. Because of the Outback's harsh climate, only 10 percent of the Australian continent — the thin coast strip — can support modern life.
9. It's a tourist tradition to climb the Outback's famous Ayers Rock. But there's an alternative that honors the wishes of the Anangu Aborigines. Walk around the monolith and see little-known caves, crevices and intriguing rock formations. The Anangu ask (not demand) that tourists not climb the sacred rock they call Uluru.
10. A uniquely Australian institution started in 1920 is the Royal Flying Doctors, which still provides medical service to the Outback.
11. Qantas Airlines' name was shortened from Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services.
12. Road trains are semis that pull three or more trailers. They're restricted to the Outback. If you meet one while driving, pull over and let it — and its rooster tail of red dust — roar past.
13. The rugged individualism of the jackaroos, who helped tame the Outback, is as much a part of the Australian psyche as Wild West cowboys in America's identity.
14. Most Outback roads are red dirt. Paving is rare; a generic term for it is bitumen.

Jeff Miller



A sweeping view of the Ord River and its tidal basin in Australia's Kimberley region

# Staid Swiss party down at Carnival time

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calendar preceding Easter, dates back only to the 19th century.

## Battle of the bands

Picture the intergalactic bar in *Star Wars* in which Luke Skywalker and Obi-wan Kenobi first meet Han Solo. Then beam the alien extras from that scene onto the streets of Lucerne, hand them all instruments, ply them with brandy, beer and schnapps, and send them off to pound on the pavement. That only begins to describe what surrounds me on the pre-dawn streets and squares of the old town.

Dozens of masked, marching, flute-and-drum bands called *Guggenmusigen* parade anywhere they like, purposefully bashing out popular show tunes off-key, acting out scenes from the songs, playing practical jokes on one another and parrying with rowdy onlookers.

Emerging from guilds dating back to the Middle Ages, *Guggenmusigen* are connected to local groups and associations. Some choose costume themes satirizing recent events involving local celebrities and politicians, which they have great fun lampooning. Others wear more traditional costumes depicting Napoleonic soldiers, harlequins, medieval mythical



MARK SISSONS/Special Contributor

Costumed marching bands called *Guggenmusigen* parade through Lucerne's historic streets and squares.

creatures and even science-fiction characters.

This madness carries on intermittently until early afternoon, when the *Guggenmusigen* begin converging to form a rowdy parade that snakes down the main avenue and over the modern bridge past the train station. Joining them are lavishly decorated floats and roving creatures of all sorts, from gothic monsters and mythical heroes to freakish, machine-like mutants from the imagination of Swiss surrealist H.R. Giger (who also inspired the creature in Ridley Scott's *Alien*). Later that evening, many of the bands will regroup and wander through the city, stopping to play in bars, restaurants and

squares still crammed with parties.

## Dirty, fat and fun

The official Carnival meritment has only begun. Today, the Thursday before Mardi Gras, is *Schmottzig Donnsticht* (Dirty Thursday). The following Monday is *Güdis Müntig* (Fat Monday), followed by Mardi Gras itself, appropriately dubbed *Güdis Teeschicht* (Fat Tuesday). *Güdis* comes from the word *güdel*, meaning belly, while *schmottzig* is rooted in the word for grease or fat, according to Switzerland's yours.com.

Evidently, for citizens of Lucerne, Carnival traditionally offered more than an excuse for excess. It was also an op-

## When you go

**Getting there**  
Lucerne is about an hour by express train from Zurich international airport.

**Carnival**  
Lucerne's 2009 Carnival will be Feb. 19-25. Information: Lucerne Tourism ([www.luzern.org](http://www.luzern.org)) and Swiss Tourism ([www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)).

**More to see**  
■ Lucerne's medieval quarter is small, and most other interesting sites, including the Swiss Transport Museum ([www.verkehrshaus.ch](http://www.verkehrshaus.ch)), are within 30 minutes by foot.  
■ Paddlewheel steamers offer cruises of picturesque

portunity to eat plenty of fried, sweet pastries (*Fasnachtskiechli*) before the fasting began in earnest, the Web site explains.

## Having a ball

Already drummed out by midday, I slip away from the parade and head back to recharge at my hotel, the historic Hotel Schweizerhof on the famous pedestrian Bahnhofstrasse. Its elegant lobby is packed with costumed locals but is nowhere near as loud as the streets outside. Nearly tripping over a pile of severed heads (*Guggenmusigen* members' discarded papier-mache masks), I sink into a chaise and

Lake Lucerne, while a cable-car trip up nearby Mount Pilatus offers spectacular views of the Alps.

**Where to stay**  
■ For a taste of historic opulence in the heart of Carnival action, consider the family-owned Hotel Schweizerhof ([www.schweizerhof-luzern.ch](http://www.schweizerhof-luzern.ch)) on the waterfront. Moderately priced options include the three-star Hotel des Alpes ([www.desalpes-luzern.ch](http://www.desalpes-luzern.ch)) offering mountain views, and Goldenster Stern ([www.gold-ener-stern.ch](http://www.gold-ener-stern.ch)), a centrally located, family-run, two-star hotel.

take in the frenzied preparations under way for tonight's masked ball, at which Lucerne's elites will let it all hang out in extravagantly costumed anonymity.

A week from now, the costumes will be packed away, the *Guggenmusigen* disbanded, and the streets and squares swept of all signs of festival detritus. The sober citizens of this normally straitlaced city will go back about the very serious business of being Swiss. But tonight, and for several days and nights to come, the people of Lucerne are going to party like it's 1499.

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## EUROPE

### Hall in Roman baths complex reopens

ROME — A huge hall in the ancient baths of Diocletian has reopened after 30 years.

The hall, which contains ancient tombs dating to the second century A.D., underwent structural restoration.

One of the tombs on display has a vault surface covered with circles and is decorated with geometric and flower motifs.

The other features niches for the ashes of the deceased and graffiti with their names.

Archaeologists said that the hall, open daily except Monday, is believed to have served as a recreational room. Its marbles and decorations have been lost over the centuries.

The bath complex was built between 298 and 306 A.D.

Including libraries, gardens and areas dedicated to shows and games, it could accommodate up to 3,000 people.

Rome tourist office: [www.romaturismo.it/v2/en/main.asp](http://www.romaturismo.it/v2/en/main.asp) (click on National Roman Museum).

The Associated Press