**Central Coast of California**

The Central Coast of California is the approximately between the Santa Barbara area on the south, and Monterey/Carmel on the North. This area is excellent for weekend trips from Calabasas. There have been several adventures there over the years.

**Lake Cachuma –** This lake in the mountains behind Santa Barbara provides most of the water for the town. Recently, due to the drought, it has been almost dry. Ronald Reagan’s *Rancho del Cielo* was located in the mountains between the lake and the ocean. We have been gone with Tricia and Dennis to the Rancho Oso RV and camping resort. There is nice fishing in the lake and there is a naturalist led boat tour to locations around the lake. Boat rentals are available. State Route 154 goes by the lake and is a shortcut (instead of the 101) between Santa Barbara and Santa Maria.

**Solvang -** This town off of the 101 highway is known as little Denmark. There are windmills, Danish bakeries, and smorgasbords. There are several festivals celebrating the Danish heritage of the town. Many of the shops in the town feature chocolate and antiques. Generally, I am not impressed with the food quality there, but renting a four or six person cart and pedaling around the downtown area is an interesting thing to do. For those that are interested, the area also has the Chumash Indian Casino, and several wineries with tasting rooms that have excellent white wines.

**San Luis Obispo –** My first trip to San Luis Obispo was in 1960. The Cal Poly Air Conditioning Engineering department invited the best students from local LA area high schools to spend three days there with dorm accommodations, food, and seminars. That was a great trip, but nobody that they selected was interested in that field of study. The Madonna Inn has been there since 1960 with unique rooms and bathrooms. There is also one of the early Franciscan missions, founded in 1772. The Amtrak *Pacific Surfliner* travels between San Diego and San Luis Obispo.

**Morro Bay –** This is a large mostly tidal basin and the only good port along the coast. The large Morro Rock is at the harbor entrance. The harbor was dredged and turned into a naval base during WWII, and then it became a fishing resort. We like to meet with Katy around there and camp at Montana de Oro State Park. Morro Bay State Park is overcrowded. There are excellent seafood restaurants and interesting shops in town along the wharf area. There is a commercial tour to see sea lions and sea otters. We like to rent plastic kayaks and canoes to go down into the bay during incoming tide, stop along the sand dunes separating the bay from the ocean, and hike over the dunes to the mostly vacant seashore. When the tide shifts to outgoing, it is time to go back to the mouth of the harbor. Otherwise, the kayaks become stranded on the sand and have to be carried a long way to the remaining water in the bay.

**San Simeon –** This town on the coast has a pier and a State Park. The coldest night I ever spent was a Memorial Day night there. The Mark Twain comment comes to mind: *“The coldest winter I ever had was a summer in San Francisco”*. It was so cold that I abandoned the tent site at midnight and fled to a motel in Morro Bay. During the season, there are hundreds of very large elephant seals meeting on the beaches north of town. The very rustic and development averse town of Cambria is nearby. There are sometimes severe water shortages there.

**Hearst Castle –** William Randolph Hearst assembled a ranch of 250,000 acres and decided to build a residence on the *“Camp Hill”* in 1919. The residence was furnished with many artifacts from Europe that were acquired. Some other artifacts were faithfully copied. Since he was a noted newspaper publisher, many famous people were invited to visit the ranch and stay there. The castle became a California State Park and has been open to the public since 1958. There are different tours of the main residence, the guest houses, and the upstairs bedrooms. Due to conservation efforts, the grounds have been maintained and development of the area has been restricted. Occasional wild grazing animals remain from the time when he imported them into the area around the castle.