

Campers at Carpinteria's Beach State Park are only minutes from both beach activities and downtown shops.

Tips for exploring Carpinteria's beach

Carpinteria has a long corridor of beautiful beachfront that offers recreational opportunities ranging from sand volleyball to surfing. But if you want to experience the ocean as the locals do, join the people who comb the beach to explore the tide pools and sift through the debris that the ocean deposits along the shore.

To enhance your enjoyment of a beachcombing experience, a Carpinteria man who has spent his life along the South Coast offers some suggestions about specific things to look for along the beach.

The best advice to new beachcombers is to be observant. Look carefully at the sand — are there tiny holes without bird tracks nearby? What causes those ripples in the sand at the water's edge?

Tide pooling

Its best to explore the beach at
Carpinteria Magazine

low tide, when lots of interesting creatures are exposed in and around the tide pools, or just after a big storm, when unusual rock scallops, sea snails and shells are washed in from the reefs.

Low tide is a resting period for salt water animals. When the tide comes back in, normal life functions resume. Most local newspapers run tide charts, or you can purchase one at a bait store.

There are tide pools created in the rocks right along the beach, or there are more exotic ones just offshore that require rolling up the pants. Keep an eye on the tide, though, you don't want to have to swim back to shore.

The flower-like animals that live on the rocks are anemones. They are usually white or green. Touch the sticky petals and they draw in like a hand. This delicate-looking animal is strong enough to break

open small clams. It eats the insides, then uses the shell and bits of sand to camouflage itself to look like the rock around it.

The large, shell-less snails feeding along the bottom are sea rabbits or sea hares. They are usually brown with black spots, a ruffly-looking back and two tentacles that resemble rabbit ears. The sea hares emit a dark purple dye when threatened.

Varieties of crabs

If you see a small shell moving along the bottom of a tide pool, it probably contains a hermit crab. True to their name, these crabs travel from shell to shell as they grow and require larger quarters.

The crusty, brown cancer crabs blow bubbles at you if you pick them up. These crabs are used commercially. Their claws often

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look mismatched because they grow back if broken off. Without their claws, these crabs are defenseless, so if taking crab legs, take only one per crab.

Purplish red crabs also scuttle around the tide pools. These crabs make good fish bait. (Fish that live around reefs love crab.)

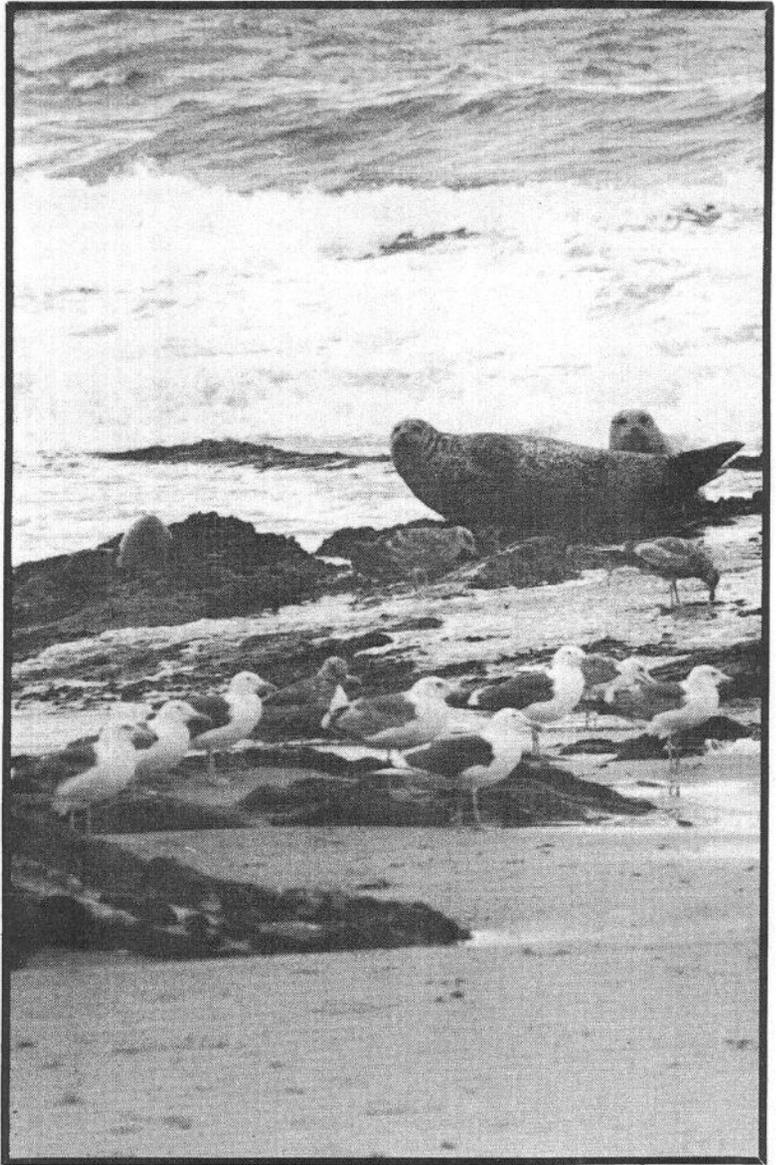
If you see ripples in the water at the very edge of the ocean, rush up quickly and dig into the sand. Chances are you will find sand crabs. (Approach quickly, the crabs can feel movement through the sand and will burrow deeper to avoid you.)

These crabs bore into the sand and use their tails to catch the plankton living in the water. You can sometimes see bright orange eggs in the stomachs of the female crabs. Sand crabs are used for fishing bait.

As you dig for the sand crabs, look for the small kidney bean-shaped baby pismo clam, which is also a frequent visitor to Carpinteria's lovely beach. Be sure to put them back. It is illegal to take them.

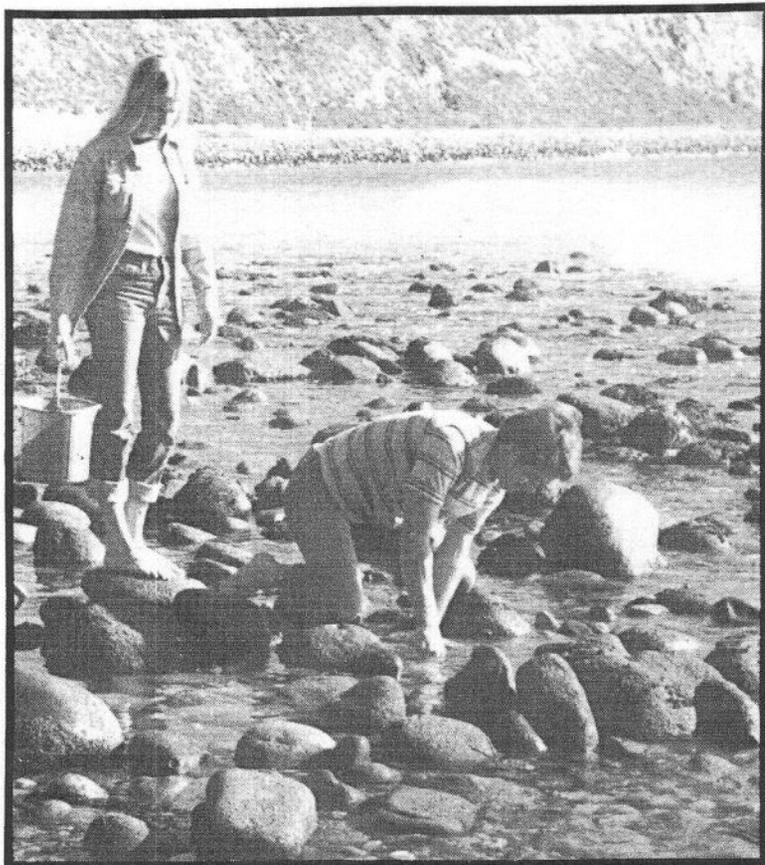
Sea urchins & starfish

Sea urchins live in the rocky
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Harbor seals (above) rest on the beach at Carpinteria. The seals put their tails up when people draw near, in preparation for taking to the water if they decide the situation is dangerous. At left, sandpipers search incoming tide for small crabs and other tasty morsels.





A couple hunts crab during low tide on the beach at Carpinteria.

A guided tour of Carpinteria's lovely beach

crags at the edges of the tide pools.

They are spiny purple animals with small red mouths underneath. Their spines move socketlike on a base and provide the animal with a protective covering. Sea urchins are herbivores and move along the

ocean floor feeding on kelp and other plants.

When the tide falls back, it often reveals starfish clinging to the rocks. The spines on the skin of the starfish contain tiny pincers which grind up anything that might get on them. With its strong arms, the

starfish can open clams or mussels. It then extrudes its stomach into its victim and devours it. Most starfish are ochre colored but there are many brown and purple ones.

Many types of tiny fish live in the tide pools. However, they disguise themselves to look like their rocky surroundings, so only the most observant beachcombers will see them.

Rock dwellers

In addition to the crabs that live in and around the tide pools, there are many interesting animals that are primarily rock dwellers. The black or dark blue clams clinging to the rocks are mussels. They are edible, but there is a season for collecting them. Read the notices posted along the beach or consult a local bait store to find out if it is safe to collect mussels for eating. If they are out of season, you can collect them strictly for use as bait for fishing.

The white animals living among the mussels on the rocks are rooster tails, named for the red comb they produce when underwater.

Peer into holes and underneath outcroppings. You might find a different variety of crab or a cache of eggs left to hatch when the time is right.

Characteristics of kelp

Just off the Carpinteria beach, one can see a large kelp bed which is a breeding ground for small fish. This, of course, attracts larger fish, thus creating an excellent spot for fishing or snorkeling.

From beneath the surface, kelp looks like a giant tree. The air pockets that grow on the kelp leaves keep the plant afloat and rising toward the sun. Sharks deposit their egg sacks in the kelp beds. The egg sack looks like a large dog tag with a curly cord attached at the top. It will contain a very small, but nevertheless unmistakable, fish. The cord attaches to a strand of kelp near the surface so the eggs can incubate in the sun.

Conditions for kelp are ideal
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Carpinteria's Beach State Park

Carpinteria is fortunate to have one of the largest state beach parks in California. It offers a total of 262 camping spaces in three different areas, accommodating all levels of equipment. The 48-acre park is open year round. Reservations can be made through Ticketron up to eight weeks in advance or as late as Saturday for a stay beginning the following Friday through Thurs-

day. During the summer, the park is usually full, so good planning is required to be assured of a camping space.

For Ticketron outlet locations, call these numbers between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on business days: Los Angeles, 213-216-6666; San Diego, 619-565-9949; San Francisco, 415-393-6914; Sacramento, 916-445-8828; and TDD 916-324-1891.

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Hunting for treasures On Carpinteria's beach

here — it can grow from 12" to 18" per day.

Beachcombing

An easy way to find small ocean creatures is to explore the big clumps of kelp that clutter the beach. Pull the seaweed apart at the base. Among its inhabitants you will find sand worms, crawling starfish, small crabs and miniature shrimp.

There are lots of collectibles on the beach — bits of rare turquoise or dark blue glass, edges rounded off by the ocean, and unusual rock scallop or sea snail shells. Cherrystone clam shells were used as the model for Chumash Indian baskets. Many specimen shells can be found on the Rincon beach.

If you see tiny holes in the sand and there are no bird tracks around, dig for sand worms, short red worms that live just beneath the surface.

Shy harbor seals usually bask in the sun on the rocks just off the Carpinteria shore. With their fat cheeks and whiskers, they look like characters out of a Lewis Carroll story.

They don't mind being watched from afar, but will take to the water if people approach. The seals are very protective of their young. You will notice that the mothers always position themselves in front of the babies if they feel danger threatens.

At sunrise and sunset, there are frequently seals on the beach toward the oil company's pier.

Carpinteria's beach is unusual for its natural tar seepage. Be sure to wear old shoes. Even if you're careful, it's easy to pick up tar on the bottom of shoes and track it through your hotel or car. Watch where you sit. Some of the rocks on the beach have little globs of tar on them.