Wandering & Wondering

John Maybury

Road man

If you like back roads, blue highways, and scenic detours as much as I do, here's a good one for going down to L.A. Three days before Christmas we left Pacifica on Highway 1. (Hey, L.A., we don't call it The One.) It was a beautiful clear day: Pacific Ocean the bluest blue, the horizon as sharp as a razor clam, a fillet knife, or a Popeil Veg-o-Matic. The wonderful stench of fresh-chopped broccoli and Brussels sprouts hung in the air. We turned east at Watsonville and crossed over to Hollister and Highway 25, the old Air-Line Highway that runs down the seismic backbone of California, behind the Pinnacles, through verdant ranchland and the twisted, tortured ridges of the San Andreas faultline.

Midway in the trip, we overnighted at Paso Robles Inn, with its comfortable, 1940s-era lodgings, pool and spa fed by mineral hot springs, quiet grounds shaded by olive and palm trees, steakhouse and coffeeshop, and all of it right beside the town square, where we also found a coffee roaster, a chocolate shop, a movie theater, and a great old-time Italian restaurant called Busi's (founded in 1932, and where it is said that more important local politicking went on than in city hall).

After a stout breakfast of chilaquiles and steak-and-onion quesadillas at Los Robles Café, we motored down more of Highway 1past the planting crews readying the strawberry fields for spring, the Pismo sand dunes, the eucalyptus forests, Oceano, Guadalupe, Betteravia, Orcutt, Lompoc, Gaviota, then back to 101 until Oxnard, and finishing up on PCH through Malibu, where I strained my brain in vain to spot where Jim Rockford had kept his trailer (we found it on the Internet: Paradise Cove).

Curry favor

After every election there are cries to reform the Electoral College and our miserably outmoded, overloaded voting system. Although I appreciate Senator Dianne Feinstein's call to abolish the E.C., I'm afraid it will go nowhere in Bush Country. But I have an idea I think will really take off: outsourcing elections to India, where earnest, well-educated, super-efficient workers would collect and tabulate all returns, guaranteeing an honest result with accurate numbers, no recounts, no hanging chads, and due to the time difference, no problems with projections, exit polls, and spin rooms. Wouldn't that be loverly?

Vets take notice

Take a good look at VeteransForCommonSense.org. They not only help vets get better health care and other services, they also help troops in the Middle East get needed supplies and force protection. Just one of their many concerns is the troops' exposure to depleted uranium in artillery shells and ammunition. DU is thought to be one of the possible causes of Gulf War Syndrome, which afflicts so many veterans of that conflict 14 years ago. God only knows what the troops in Afghanistan and Iraq will start coming down with after they come home. (Thanks to Steve Patton of PPP and Harry Hurtt of London CND for the leads.)

Clogging

Deep-fried Mars bars have taken Scotland by storm. They are sold in fish-and-chip shops, which also deep-fry pizza, bananas, pineapple rings, and Cadbury crème eggs, according to the British medical journal Lancet. Scottish public health officials are aghast at these developments as they struggle to educate Scots to eat a healthier diet. Scotland has one of the highest rates of chronic heart disease in Western Europe. (Source: Lennart Lundgren, our correspondent based in Farum, Denmark)

Ciao, baby!

Have you run the gamut of e-cards and found them wanting? Here's one from Italy that will put a little zip in your zip code: www.cartolineanimate.it

Sick transit

Tell the planners what is wrong with Bay Area transit and how to cure it. Take the Transportation 2030 Web Survey, and help the experts figure out which direction to go over the next 25 years. Before January 7, log on to www.mtc.ca.gov/T2030 and voice your priorities for the Bay Area's transportation future.

Pickell in a pickle

I have been enjoying reading about the trials and tribulations of the disgraced former president of the James Beard Foundation for culinary excellence, one Leonard Pickell, Jr. Indicted and jailed for second-degree larceny in New York, Pickell maintained that all he was guilty of was "bad record keeping and insufficient resources." Now that's spin control!

Blue over red

If I ever have to shop at a Big Box, it will be a blue one like Costco, not a red one like Wal-Mart. I will choose Cuervo over Bushmill's, Hyatt over Marriott, Shell over Exxon/Mobil, Jet Blue over Continental, and Calvin Klein over Fruit of the Loom. See more political preferences at www.BuyBlue.org and www.Choose TheBlue.com.

Swami Sez

"I have never killed a man, but I have read many obituaries with great satisfaction." (Clarence Darrow)

Mayburritoville

Happy New Year from mayburrito@goofbuster.com.