

Angel Island

This day-tripper's paradise used to be the Ellis Island of the West.

by Sheila Koren

SAN FRANCISCO HAS PART of an island within its city limits. Nine acres of Angel Island lie inside San Francisco's boundaries (the rest is part of Tiburon)—and it's a day-tripper's paradise in our own back waters.

A California State Park since 1954, Angel Island supports a resident community of about 20 people. Its park ranger and maintenance staff mostly inhabit former army officers' quarters, some dating back to Civil War times when the U.S. military installed itself in case the South should attack California. Staff homes, therefore, are spacious, fabulously situated dwellings with some of the best views in the area, undoubtedly worth the \$11 per month each tenant pays the state in rent.

"Living here is not all a bed of roses," says ranger Nan Haynes (though her own well-tended garden overlooking the bay is full of them). "It's a difficult place from which to send out for pizza."

Angel Island, pentangular in shape like the starfish found along its coast, is accessible only by boat—either by ferry from San Francisco or Tiburon, or by privately owned boats. San Franciscans seemed to take Angel Island for granted until the Red & White Fleet cut back its ferry service there last winter. But despite many protests, ferry service to the island is still limited. This year, Red & White's service ended in November and will not resume until April. For now, Milt McDonough's Angel Island-Tiburon Ferry Service runs hourly ferries on weekends and holidays out of Tiburon.

The island is open to the public during daylight hours only, except for its nine overnight campsites. The island derives its name from the Spanish festival of the angels that fell on the

day explorer Juan Manuel de Ayala first sailed through the treacherous Golden Gate passageway in 1775 and anchored off the largest island in the bay.

The coastal Miwok Indians were the first known civilization in Angel Island's history. As long as 3,000 years ago, the Miwoks traveled to the island in tule reed boats and lived there in groups of 25 or 30. Described by a European observer as "friendly and gentle and black, like Ethiopians," the coastal Miwok had all but disappeared by 1850.

A climb to the top of its 781-foot peak provides a spectacular view of all three San Francisco Bay Area bridges.

Evidence of Indian ceremonial and eating grounds, through the discovery of middens (shell piles), has been found in four locations around Angel Island—not surprisingly, the same locations used by the United States Army after President Millard Fillmore declared Angel Island a U.S. military reservation in 1850. These areas are now known as West Garrison, East Garrison, North Garrison, and Ayala Cove.

Other organizations significant in Angel Island's history have been the U.S. Public Health Service, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (USINS) and the Coast Guard, which still maintains an automated station there.

ANGEL ISLAND OFFERS a change of pace for the fair-weather athlete. Its five-mile-long perimeter road provides scenic jogging grounds, while its more elevated fire road is ideal for bicycling. A climb to the top of its 781-foot peak, Mount Caroline Livermore (named for the conservationist most prominent in lobbying for Angel Island's state park status), provides a spectacular view of San Francisco's three bridges.

The Northridge Trail offers a pleasant walk in spring through a meadow of wildflowers at 500 feet, and views of the Tiburon peninsula, San Pablo Bay, and the campanile at the U.C. Berkeley campus. Take the Sunset Trail in late afternoon to watch the sun sink behind the Golden Gate Bridge.

Angel Island's hiking trails also provide access to a wealth of natural history. Among the island's more interesting flora are the medicinal foxglove and aloe plants that surround the former hospital buildings at both Ayala Cove and West Garrison. Digitalis is derived from the foxglove's radiantly colored, bell-like flowers, and the juices of the gargantuan aloe plants must have soothed many a sunburned West Garrison cadet. Other flora on the island are wild violets, French and Scotch broom, pride of Madeira, and sticky monkey flower. The island's edible berries—acorn and buckeye—along with mussels from the bay, were the staple foods of the coastal Miwoks.

Although Richard Henry Dana referred to the place as Wood Island in his classic *Two Years Before the Mast*, by the 1830s whalers had depleted most of the native oak, bay laurel, and toyon. Today, the island grows im-



Angel Island at sunset, haloed by a whimsical skywriter

ports—eucalyptus, cypress, Monterey pine, bunya-bunya, and Norfolk Island pine. Sea otters, which once populated the island's waters, were hunted to extinction by Russian fur traders as far back as 1825.

The plant and marine life on and around the island is more apparent to visitors than is the wildlife, which tends to wait until the last ferry has left to emerge for a post-picnickers feast of leftovers. For campers, visits from deer and raccoons are almost guaranteed.

The overpopulation of deer (currently estimated at 200) has been an ongoing problem on Angel Island since the drought of the 1970s. Deer, like much of the natural life on the island, were imported by the army for sport and food and have no natural predators there. State officials, environmentalists, animal protectionists, and the public have been battling for years about how best to deal with the fact of the limited vegetation available for a growing deer population. In 1981, over 200 deer were translocated to Mendocino County where, it was thought, conditions would be similar to those on Angel Island. But about 75 percent of those deer died from the trauma of being moved. A sterilization program, developed by the SPCA, was next attempted in an effort to control the deer population.

Joanne McGarry, a leader of the Angel Island Deer Sterilization Project, admits that the program was not able to capture many does for synthetic hormone implants. Despite a tantalizing menu that included "apple mash cocktail, alfalfa salad, molasses, grain, and rose petals," only 30 does were trapped. Thirty-seven bucks tried to pass but couldn't, and one doe, whom the project workers

named "Rerun," came back 12 times.

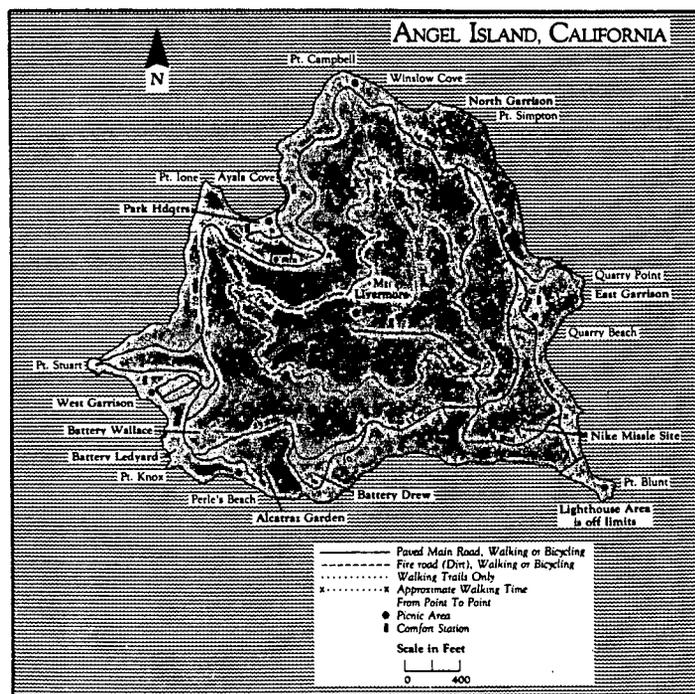
While the San Francisco SPCA, according to its president, Richard Avanzino, prefers to use "life-sustaining rather than management-by-death techniques," they are labeled "humaniacs" by many who feel they cater to the oversentimentality of what has come to be called "the Bambi syndrome."

The Department of Fish and Game, as well as many of the island's rangers, would prefer to revive the idea of a controlled hunt. Although the Department of Parks and Recreation is evasive on the issue, ranger Mark Windham personally believes it is "more humane to kill a deer with one shot of a rifle than to let it starve to death." Ranger Nan Hanes (also personally) suggests that should a hunt be instituted, the rangers (along with those from the Department of

Fish and Game) could do the culling themselves and then donate the venison to the St. Anthony dining room.

DESPITE THE AIRY freedom one feels there, Angel Island, like other such isolated spots surrounded by icy waters, has often been associated with imprisonment. During the 1850s, until the state prison was completed at nearby Point San Quentin, convicted criminals were held on abandoned ships anchored near Angel Island. Prisoners were employed in the quarry operations (one rock crusher still stands) that used Angel Island serpentine to construct many of San Francisco's early buildings. During the 1860s, at first

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soldiers and then prisoners from Alcatraz Island came to their neighboring island to raise fruits and vegetables.

But Angel Island is perhaps best known as the Ellis Island of the West. At North Garrison, a museum now pays tribute to the 175,000 people who were imprisoned there without ever having committed a crime. Between 1910 and 1940 the USINS detained the largely Chinese would-be emigrés who sadly discovered that the Americans who had enticed them to come to build railroads had only contempt for them when the job was finished. Out of fear of alien competitors in the job market, the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed in 1882, paving the way for dissuasive techniques that would limit immigration from China.

Many suicides took place in the barracks' bathrooms, when rejection by authorities meant returning in shame to China.

Many suicides took place in the barracks' bathrooms, according to Paul Chow of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation, when rejection by authorities meant returning in shame to China after having exhausted a family's life savings for one trip. "It would take six lifetimes in China to earn the \$300 fare to America in the early 1900s," said Chow in an interview with the *Sacramento Bee*; Chow is largely responsible for the museum that stands today in tribute to the mistreated refugees.

Although the USINS moved back to San Francisco in 1940, barbed wire still encircles the deserted barracks; platforms where guards once stood with machine guns are still intact; and an inscribed monument donated by the late "Trader Vic," called by some descendants of detainees "our Plymouth Rock," commemorates the courage and perseverance of the Chinese immigrants.

It is within the eerie confines of these barracks that poetry can be seen preserved on the walls. One of the most poignant lines reads: "There are no angels here."

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Silver 1980 Zinfandel

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Gold 1983 Zinfandel
Gold 1983 Gewurztraminer
Silver 1983 Fume Blanc.

1984 Western Wine Competition

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Silver 1983 Gewurztraminer.

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