



# Smoke and Oysters

Well, I'm ashamed of myself. In beautiful April weather, I drove 600 miles from Mendocino to Portland, over a period of four days, along a highly scenic coastal highway, and I hardly took a picture worth sharing after I got home and started writing about that portion of the 17-day trip. Even when we stopped to rest or spend the night, I seldom reached for the camera in my tote bag. My only excuse is that driving makes me tired nowadays, more than it used to, and it has forever been boring, especially on a highway that curves a lot, which the 101 in northern California and coastal Oregon certainly does. Yoshi can gawk in the passenger seat, but I, the poor driver, must remain alert and keep staring at the damned stripe in the road. We weren't yet out of California when I snapped the above photo at tiny Trinidad just north of Eureka. I liked the sea stacks in the cove. The term "sea stack" was new to me, learned back in Mendocino as I viewed large and small rocky outcroppings just off the cliffs at a friend's home. Over the eons, crashing waves had carved out and further eroded these "stacks" from the headland where I stood that morning, creating perfect perches for seals and other sea creatures. Our stopover in Eureka was typical of

the routine we followed everywhere we settled for the night. First, check into a hotel of some sort, then go to dinner, then go to bed. Essentially we were travelers, headed somewhere, not true tourists. In the older section of Eureka, we found a nice seafood restaurant with attached bar. As we waited for the restaurant to start serving dinner, the bartender provided us with an ashtray. Never mind that the state of California forbids smoking almost everywhere, even bars. It was at this bar that a friendly young man suggested Trinidad as a good breakfast spot when we continued our journey the next day. A few minutes later we shifted to a linen-covered table in the dining room. We ordered oysters on half shell and lobsters. For Yoshi especially, these oysters in Eureka set a culinary theme that would last the entire trip. She hungered, morning and night, for raw oysters. Our next stopover was Gold Beach, Oregon, not very far above the California border. The inn was pleasant enough in a motel sort of way. Our balcony – smoking was allowed there if no place else – offered a panoramic ocean view and would have staged a marvelous sunset if there had been one that evening. But the memory we carried away from Gold Beach was annoying for me and traumatic for Yoshi. She

left behind, hanging in the closet, a favorite jacket, an expensive one she had recently purchased in Laguna Beach near our Southern California home. She didn't notice it was missing until we arrived at Newport, Oregon, 176 miles north of Gold Beach. Of course I had to get on the phone and arrange for the jacket to be shipped at my expense to a Portland hotel sufficiently far ahead in our itinerary. This was done, although Yoshi worried about it for more than a week. The inn's clerk received a thank-you note and a generous tip for her trouble. On the way to Newport, we stopped for an early lunch at Bandon, a pleasant town at the mouth of the Coquille River. A waterfront snack bar – not much more than a trailer fancied up with an awning-covered patio – shucked a dozen oysters for Yoshi. I settled for a hotdog and a cup of chowder. I had a question for the folks running the snack bar. What were all those bright yellow bushes that grew in patches large and small throughout the town and its outskirts? The answer came quickly but was laced with scorn. This was Irish gorse, a spiny bush that thrives in salty, sandy soil – Bandon's curse for more than a hundred years. Nothing, absolutely nothing, would kill it. It seems that an Irish lord founded the village in the 1870s and then, quite literally, sowed the seeds of its ruin. He was trying to harness the area's wayward dunes. Yoshi and I pulled off the highway to take closer look. I snapped the photo at above right. Gorse flowers are pretty but no one with an ounce of sense will attempt to pick a bouquet. The thorns are sturdy and wicked. A drunkard who topples into a gorse bush will need a doctor's attention. For much of two days I had been driving through Oregon, but it wasn't until I got to Newport, on the northwest coast, that I learned I could smoke



in many bars in the state. Smoking bans have not yet reached them, even those that serve food. Oh, I knew that our inn's sports bar – the one shown in the fuzzy Internet photo at bottom left – allowed smoking. Even before I made reservations, I called the inn to verify that those glass containers on the bar were ashtrays and not peanut dishes. But until I got there, I thought this was an illegal aberration, not something that was generally permissible. We dined that evening in Newport's Old Town on Yaquina Bay, next to the bay's fishing fleet. Yoshi slurped a bunch of fat Yaquina oyster shooters. The next day, just before heading inland for Portland, we stopped in Lincoln City for breakfast at – yep, you guessed it – an oyster bar, a smoke-filled place filled with friendly locals. More raw oysters for Yoshi, eggs and sausage for me. I asked about the town's name, and was told, as I expected, that it was named after Abraham Lincoln. It seems that Lincoln was once offered the governorship of Oregon. Old Abe with his rustic roots may have entertained the idea, but Mary Todd Lincoln, a Kentucky belle, wouldn't dream of living among Oregonian barbarians. A statue of Lincoln on a horse stands in a park on the edge of town. I didn't stop to see it. I've seen actual photos of long-legged, top-hatted Lincoln on a horse. It's not a pretty sight.



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