



Coast Range Chronicles 19: “Solo Camping”

by

Tom Mahony
pacificoffering@sbcglobal.net
www.tommahony.net

Try solo camping sometime. Go by yourself at least once. It’s an interesting experience. You’ll bond with your surroundings more than you would camping with other people.

Because you really have nothing else to do but bond with your surroundings.

There’s nobody to talk to, except yourself¹. There’s no electronic gadgetry to distract you². There’s a lot of blank staring into the distance.

But in that blank staring you’ll learn plenty. You’ll learn that you can sit for hours watching a squirrel roam around a tree trunk. You’ll learn that every campsite picnic table has an ambiguous sticky residue on it. You’ll learn that some campers think bottle caps are biodegradable.

¹ Warning: not recommended.

² Though, if car camping, there are plenty of other distractions; see “CRC 9: Campground” for an exhaustive list.

And you're motivated to leave the campsite for the entire day. You'll go on long hikes, and if you're on the coast, you'll surf or linger on the beach. You'll get deeply into these activities, achieving a meditative focus.

Because, again, you have nothing else to do.

Admittedly, the evenings are a little dull. The campfire experience is not quite the same without a chatting partner (see footnote warning against self-chatting). And drinking beer by yourself around a campfire feels a little cringey.

Well, okay, a lot cringey.

Other campers—families, couples, packs of friends, boozy retirees—look at you strangely. Like you're a little creepy. But what do they know? They're not on the solo-camping team. They're not in search of campground enlightenment.

When you see another solo-camper, there's a strong kinship. But do not approach them. To do so would break solo-camper protocol. Act as you might when visiting the elephant seals at Año Nuevo: stay back at least 25 feet.

Approaching a solo-camper would disrupt their squirrel staring or their campfire wrestling, wherein they try to get the flames visible above the five foot tall cast iron campfire ring endemic to state park campgrounds (seriously, what's up with those things? You have to get a full fledged white-man's pallet blaze going to even see the flames above the rim).

The accepted protocol for an encounter with another solo-camper is a terse exchange of nods. Nothing more. The connection is sealed, that of the outdoor loner, the vision seeker. It's an elite group.

But, watching a solo-camper lurk around their site, you can't help but wonder, what's up with this guy? What's he hiding from?

He seems a little creepy.