

## TAKE A HIKE!

Three nearby hikes for those who like to stretch their legs on a scenic trail.

Ed Neely

A walk along the beach with the sound of the surf, the lapping of the waves on the shore and your toes in the sand is a great experience; and to be sure, Doheny State Beach provides a long length of beach on which to ramble. From the harbor jetty to passed south day-use area, a stroll in the Doho sand in the early morning calm; in the midday excitement of surfers, swimmers, volleyball players and sun worshipers; or to watch a fiery sunset and perhaps catch the green flash is a wonderful experience any time of year. But just outside our park, only a short car drive away, are other wonderful hikes to be had amongst the wonders of this coastal community. As with all hikes, appropriate preparations are important: good shoes suitable for the terrain (all three of these hikes are good with tennies), water, sunscreen and a hat. Optional items to carry along in a fanny or backpack are binoculars, camera, snacks and (depending on the weather) a sweatshirt or jacket.

### THE DANA POINT TIDEPOLS AND THE PIRATE'S CAVE

Approximately 3.5 miles round trip

*You may want to time your hike so you'll be at the tidepools in the two-hour window surrounding low tide. Check at the Visitor Center, with the Lifeguards or at the entrance kiosk for tide times. Those wishing to skip the walk along Dana Point Harbor Drive can motor or bike to and park at the Ocean Institute or in public parking nearby. This hike should be avoided during extreme high tides with large surf running. Dogs are not allowed on the beach or in the tidepools.*

This is a hike you can start in the State Park, no driving required. At the entrance to the State Park, walk west (left) along Dana Point Harbor Drive (DPHD) to the entrance of the Ocean Institute, about 1.2 miles. Along the way, you'll pass the harbor village, the bridge that crosses to the island, Baby Beach (favorite launch site for outrigger canoes, stand-up paddlers and kayakers), and the good ship "Pilgrim". DPHD ends at the entrance to the Ocean Institute's parking lot. Continue walking through the parking lot, on the hill side of the Ocean Institute and out to the breakwater jetty.

This is a great spot for a break and to take in the beauty that surrounds you. To the south is the outer channel leading to the entrance of Dana Point Harbor, and beyond that, the coastline down to San Mateo Point in San Clemente. On a clear day, you can see all the way to the La Jolla



*Sammy the harbor seal*

peninsula. In front of you (west) is a beautiful stretch of California shoreline; a sight Richard Henry Dana called the only romantic spot on the California coast. The three large rocks just beyond the breakwater are home to numerous tidepool critters: sea stars, limpets, chitons (ki / tons), barnacles, muscles and more. Depending on the season and the tide, you can climb on the first rock. The rock furthest out often provides the daytime haul-out for "Sammy", a local harbor seal. The large rock island far out off the headlands is San Juan Rock, also noted by Dana in his book, Two Years Before the Mast. On most clear days, you can see Santa Catalina Island on the horizon and just south of that, the hilltops of San Clemente Island.

If you look carefully at the farthest headland cliff visible from this location, you'll see an Indian's profile, "The Whale Watcher". One local historian tells us the local Acjachemen Indians had a story that the Whale Watcher would keep look out for whales off the coast and call them when whales were close enough to hunt. The Acjachemen were not great whale hunters,

but they did bring some in, probably gray whales. The Whale Watcher provides a service to us today. As interesting as the tidepools are closest to the jetty, the really good ones start down by “The Whale Watcher,” and just get better the further out you go.

At the base of the jetty by the cliff is a caged covered staircase down to the beach. The first piece of ground to cover on this stretch is across the sand, no problem. Where the sand ends and the rocks begin is a trail at the base of the cliff that leads out along the headlands and eventually (a bit more than half a mile) to the entrance of “The Pirate’s Cave.” In places, the trail becomes a bit tricky as you’ll be walking on round rocks rather than dirt. Getting down to explore the tidepools requires care as well, as the rocks are round and once in the intertidal zone, wet and slippery. Either on your way out to the cave or on your way back, do take time to explore the tidepools. They are much different than the tidepools at Doheny. While exploring, remember the Good Tidepooler Rules: 1) Never remove critters, shells or rocks; 2) Don’t pull critters off rocks or poke them; 3) Walk gently taking care not to step on plants or animals; 4) Never turn over rocks.



*The Whale Watcher with Catalina on the horizon*



*The Pirate’s Cave*

The trail turns northwest at the end of the headlands. There’s a sandy beach here, affectionately known to some as “Golf Ball Beach”. You will often find golf balls in these tidepools that have been washed down from a local golf course after the rains. This stretch of sandy beach ends with large rocks and you’ll need to find the trail again at the base of the cliff. Where the trail dead-ends, you’ve reached the entrance to the Pirate’s Cave; a large crack in the hillside wall.

Depending on the tides, the weather and the waves, the entrance can be dry and easy or wet and a bit of a challenge. Once through the entrance tunnel, the cave opens into a large cavern with an opening to the sea. Although called the Pirate’s Cave, real pirates probably never used it. There are stories, however, that rumrunners may have stashed their contraband here during Prohibition on ocean runs between Mexico and Los Angeles.

For most of us, this is the end of the trail and we’ll be heading back the way we came. For those more adventurous, at the right time of year and the right tide, this hike can be extended. It needs to be done during very low tides occurring in late November, through March. With a low tide of negative one foot or more, hikers can go through the cavern’s opening and around to Dana Strands Beach, passing two smaller caves and an arch along the way. You can backtrack your route to return, or see the return route below in the Dana Point Headlands Hike. The piece from the Pirate’s Cave to Dana Strands Beach can be difficult, as you will be climbing over large rocks, boulders and outcroppings.

For those of you reading on-line, here are two YouTube videos of the Pirate’s Cave. The first will show why, although fun, you’ll probably not want to take this hike at high tide. The second will show you why low tide is best.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6COc7aJJlqU>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mo-mZ-Pi-Jc&feature=endscreen&NR=1>

## Go to Part 2 of Take a Hike

<http://www.dohenystatebeach.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/TAKE-A-HIKE-PART-2.pdf>