

Channel Islands

National Monument • California





The Channel Islands are of the sea. Sandy beaches, craggy headlands, quiet coves and rookeries of sea fauna are their boundary; isolation is their soul. Mighty forces have both sculptured them and set them apart. Within easy distance of the mainland, the islands today beckon hurried, urban man.

Extending over a range of about 150 miles in the Pacific Ocean, from the latitude of San Diego to that of Los Angeles, and from about 10 to 70 miles offshore, are the eight Channel Islands of California. In 1938 the two smallest of the group, Anacapa and Santa Barbara, were set aside for preservation as a National Monument. Here are preserved and protected many outstanding examples of nature's adaptations in the plant and animal world; and here also is a sanctuary for numerous marine mammals and nesting sea birds, and for a number of unique plant forms.

In the Channel Islands you can see much of the story of the earth's geological and biological past. Millions of years ago, in an era of widespread upheaval, mountains rose out of the depths of the sea; huge areas along the continent cracked and convulsed; and volcanoes spewed forth lava and ash. Great land masses intermittently rose above the ocean, to sink slowly, millions of years later, beneath the waves. The offshore islands once were connected to the mainland of southern California.

But a general subsidence occurred, and a great land mass eventually submerged, leaving only eight small mountaintops protruding above the Pacific Ocean.

Plants and animals through years of evolution adapted to the changes in environment caused by this geological activity; failure of any form to adapt resulted in its extinction. When the islands were formed—that is, when their land masses were detached from the mainland—the plants and animals were essentially the same as the mainland of which they had been a part. Since the separation from the mainland, some of the island's plants and animals have followed a different evolutionary course from the mainland forms. The result is that now many of the plants and a few animals on the islands are found nowhere else.

Thus, the Channel Islands afford the scientist and nature-lover a splendid opportunity to observe the effects of geographical isolation, as well as the geological story of this region.

The National Park Service, in order to realize the benefits of the scientific and recreational values, is planning the development on Anacapa Island of improved services for visitors—easier access, improved camping accommodations, and a more extensive interpretive program.

Santa Barbara Island lies 38 miles off the coast, opposite San Pedro, the port of Los Angeles. It is roughly triangular, its greatest dimension being 1¼ miles. The island is girdled by almost vertical sea cliffs, ranging from only a few feet to more than 500 feet in height. Small, rocky bays and infrequent sandy beaches offer excellent resting places for marine mammals. Here is a large rookery of sea lions, and sea birds nest on the cliffs. Numerous caves, rock bridges, offshore pillars, and spray-sputting stacks create beautiful and dramatic seascapes.

The surrounding ocean, whose water temperature varies from about 60° in winter to about 70° in summer, has a moderating effect on the island's climate. The air temperature does not vary greatly from that of the water, and frosts are rare. Though there is considerable wind, the slopes of the island afford a measure of protection. Rainfall is scant, and fogs are rather frequent.

Anacapa Island, 40 miles to the north of Santa Barbara Island and 10 miles from the mainland, is really a slender chain of islands about 5 miles long, with an average width of one-half mile. The sea cliffs are generally higher, and there are fewer beaches favorable for sea mammals. But nesting sea birds, evidently finding Anacapa's steep cliffs and canyon walls much to their liking, are even more abundant than on Santa Barbara.

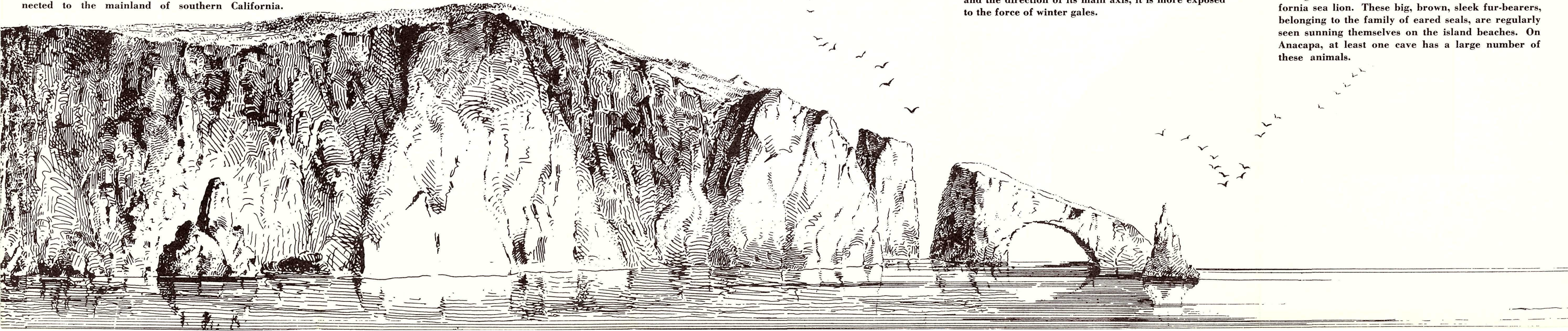
Of the Channel Islands, Anacapa is the nearest to the mainland. Its climate is similar to Santa Barbara's, but because of its height, its narrowness, and the direction of its main axis, it is more exposed to the force of winter gales.

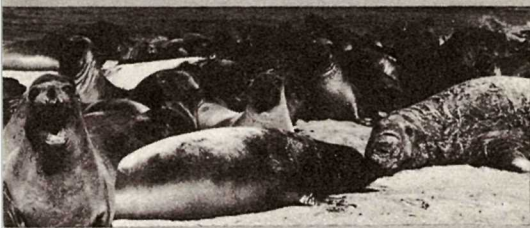
Sea Mammals

Along the shorelines of Anacapa and Santa Barbara, herds of marine mammals find refuge from the restlessness and perils of the sea. The almost continual barking of California sea lions mingles with the cries of thousands of western gulls and the muffled roar of breakers. Occasionally, a sea otter is sighted; and it is hoped that these rare mammals may someday return to the islands.

Transients to the islands are the rare, comical-looking sea elephants, so-named because of their huge size and the male's foot-long, trunklike snout. When angered or frightened, an old bull may issue a resounding bellow that seems to make the beach tremble. Still more rare is the Guadalupe fur seal, long thought to have been completely exterminated. In recent years individuals have been sighted near the Channel Islands. In time, under continued Government protection, all these rare animals of the sea may again become regular inhabitants.

A great attraction of the monument is the California sea lion. These big, brown, sleek fur-bearers, belonging to the family of eared seals, are regularly seen sunning themselves on the island beaches. On Anacapa, at least one cave has a large number of these animals.





Plant Life

One of the most conspicuous and striking of the island plants is giant coreopsis, a long lived, treelike sunflower, with a thick, gray-barked, rigid "trunk" and stubby, stiff branches. It occasionally attains a height of 8 feet and a base diameter of more than 6 inches. During the rainless summer its flowers and foliage shrivel and hang lifelessly—like miniature palm fronds—from bare, gray, dormant branches. With the coming of winter rains a profuse new growth of feathery, bright-green leaves appears, climaxed in April by a gorgeous canopy of hundreds of large, intensely golden-yellow blossoms.

Santa Barbara Island contains the largest and most extensive single stand of coreopsis remaining in the world. When in the full bloom of spring, this brilliant, golden expanse is visible 10 or more miles.

The 8 Channel Islands have about 830 varieties of plants; of these, 175 have so far been recorded from Santa Barbara and Anacapa. Some are so distinct from their mainland relatives that botanists have designated them separate species or subspecies. There are about 80 such endemics in the Channel Islands. Of these, 45 have so far been found on Anacapa or Santa Barbara or on both islands. They include varieties of oak, poppy, cherry, mountain-lilac, and morning-glory, and two brilliant species of painted-cup (paintbrush).

The springtime show of wildflowers on the islands of the monument rivals in scenic magnificence any of the celebrated displays of desert regions.

About Your Visit

Anacapa and Santa Barbara have received few visitors in the past, and remain undeveloped. No accommodations, facilities, or services are yet available. Camping is permitted on Anacapa, but you will need to bring your own food, cooking equipment, water, and fuel for campfires. Bring warm clothing, too, for the nights are cool. You may desire a tent as shelter from the moderate-to-strong winds that usually sweep the islands.

There are no permanent structures on either island. There is no public radio or telephone communication between Santa Barbara and the mainland; but in summer a ranger is stationed on Anacapa and has communication by radiotelephone with his headquarters, and with the Coast Guard on Anacapa, in case of emergency.

The *Cougar*, National Park Service boat based at Channel Islands Harbor in Oxnard Calif., patrols Anacapa and Santa Barbara Islands on a year-round basis.

Transportation to Anacapa and Santa Barbara must be arranged privately. Visitors planning to take their personal boats should study U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey Charts 5110 and 5114 before attempting to navigate the Anacapa Passage or the seas around Santa Barbara Island. The Santa Barbara Channel is subject, without warning, to high rising sea and wind conditions, particularly in the afternoon. Moorings at both islands can be hazardous under certain sea conditions, so sufficient anchors and scope should be provided.

Administration

Channel Islands National Monument, established on April 26, 1938, and comprising 18,167 acres, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is Box 1388, Oxnard, Calif., 93030, is in immediate charge.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—bears a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute their full measure to the progress and prosperity of the United States . . . now and in the future.

The destruction, injury, disturbance, or removal of any trees, flowers, birds, tide-pool animals, marine mammals, or rock specimens is prohibited.

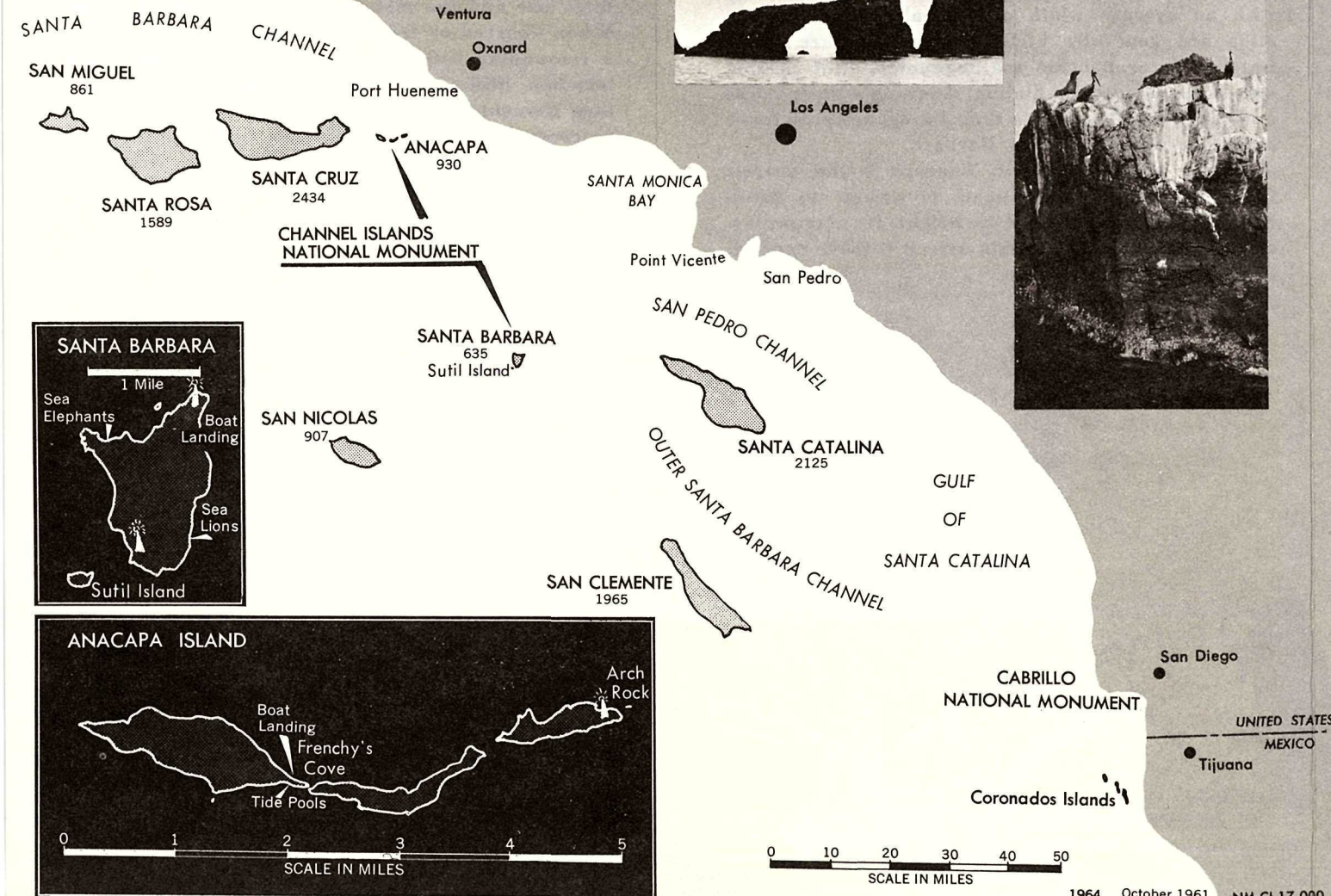
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