



SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHANNEL ISLANDS

Cruising Notes

Francis Hawkings



ROYAL CRUISING CLUB
PILOTAGE FOUNDATION

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All positions and waypoints are included to help in locating places, features and transits. Do not rely on them alone for safe navigation.

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Chartlets are included to help to identify locations referred to in the text. For access to the complete charts go to:

<https://charts.noaa.gov/InteractiveCatalog/nrnc.shtml>

Click on *Paper Charts*. Zoom in onto the chart you want to view. Click on *PDF (view/download)* under *Available Products*.

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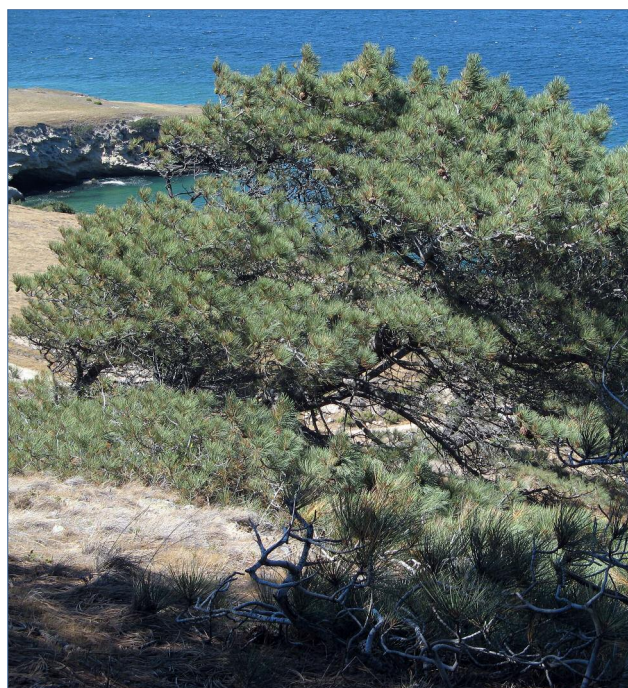
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<https://rccpf.org.uk/Provide-Feedback>

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Torrey Pine at Santa Rosa Island
By User:Geographer /Wikimedia Commons/ CC BY 2.5



The Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation was established in 1976 and is a registered charity with the charitable objective 'to advance the education of the public in the science and practice of navigation'.

The Foundation's principal activity is to collate and publish pilotage information for the benefit of cruising sailors worldwide. A team of dedicated authors and editors, all of whom are experienced sailors, work with the Foundation's publishers to update and develop its portfolio of pilot books and cruising guides.

In line with its charitable status, any surplus generated finances new publications and subsidises those publications that cover the more remote areas where commercial publication is not viable.

The Foundation's website gives full details of its activities and provides a portal for the sale or download of its books and passage planning guides as well as Cruising Notes comprising up to date navigational and other reports.

For further details about the Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation and its publications visit: www.rccpf.org.uk



TRINITY HOUSE

TRINITY HOUSE

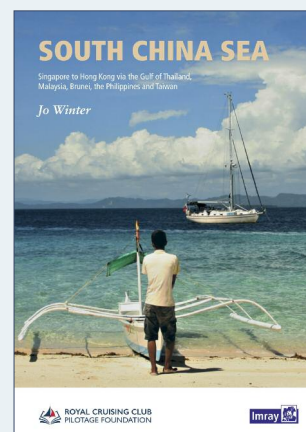
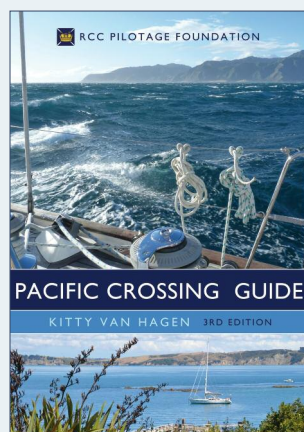
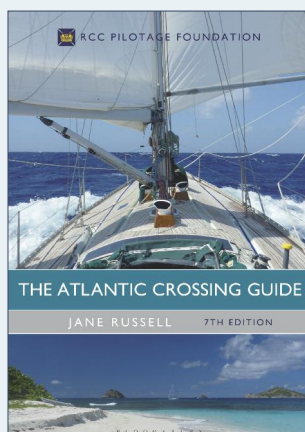
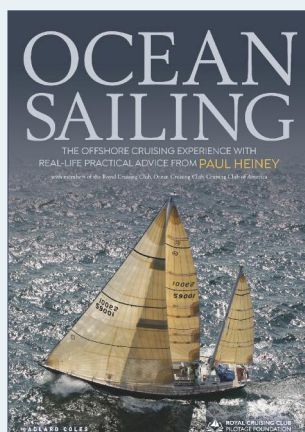
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The Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation is privileged to have Trinity House as its Patron. Trinity House, established in 1514 under King Henry VIII, is a charity dedicated to safeguarding shipping and seafarers by providing education, support and welfare to the seafaring community as well as by delivering and monitoring reliable aids to navigation for the benefit and safety of all mariners. Proud of its long history and

traditions in navigation and pilotage, Trinity House is nevertheless at the forefront of technological developments and works closely with other organisations around the world to improve aids to navigation and to optimise global navigation satellite systems and e-navigation. The ongoing safety of navigation and education of mariners are common goals of Trinity House and of the Pilotage Foundation.

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For more titles from the Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation see <https://rccpf.org.uk/Publications-Catalogue>



FOREWORD

In 2009 Francis Hawkings generously shared with the Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation his first set of cruising notes for the Southern California Channel Islands and we made them available as a PDF download.

Now, 12 years on, Francis has updated his earlier publication which has been enriched with a wealth of images of landfalls and anchorages – some helpfully annotated - to comprise an authoritative and attractive companion for cruising the islands. The Pilotage Foundation is delighted to add this to their steadily growing portfolio of PDF publications and is enormously grateful to Francis for sharing his cruising knowledge of this area.

The Foundation is also grateful to Jenny Taylor-Jones and Jane Russell for their production and editorial input, in particular the incorporation of chart and satellite images, additional photographs and graphics to further enhance the work.

As changes and developments arise, the Pilotage Foundation seeks to incorporate these into revised editions so that an accurate and up to date cruising companion for this area can be maintained. To this end we welcome any updates from visitors to the islands. Please contact us at info@rccpf.org.uk or via our website at www.rccpf.org.uk

Antony Wells

Director, Royal Cruising Club Pilotage Foundation

August 2021



Channel Islands National Park

National Park Service Digital Image Archives/Public domain/Wikimedia Commons



Channel Islands National Park

National Park Service Digital Image Archives/Public domain/Wikimedia Commons



Inspiration Point, Anacapa Island

National Marine Sanctuaries/Public domain/Wikimedia Commons



Santa Cruz

Toby Roberts



Anacapa Island Coreopsis - The bright yellow bouquets of the giant Coreopsis are so vivid they can sometimes be seen from the mainland

Derek Lohuis, National Park Service/Public domain/Wikimedia Commons

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Anacapa Arch Rock and Lighthouse

Shauna Bingham, CINMS, NOAA, Public domain/Wikimedia Commons



Introduction

The Channel Islands of Southern California make a lovely cruising ground in all seasons. They are recommended as a delightful stopping point for any voyaging yachts heading southwards towards Mexico, as well as a more local cruising ground for boats based locally.

The islands can be split into two groups. To the north are four islands running east to west from Point Magu on the mainland: Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa and San Miguel. These are all easily accessible from Channel Islands Harbor (part of the town of Oxnard), or from Ventura or Santa Barbara. Further south lie Santa Barbara, Santa Catalina, San Nicolas and San Clemente. These lie closer to the Los Angeles and Long Beach/San Pedro mainland harbours.

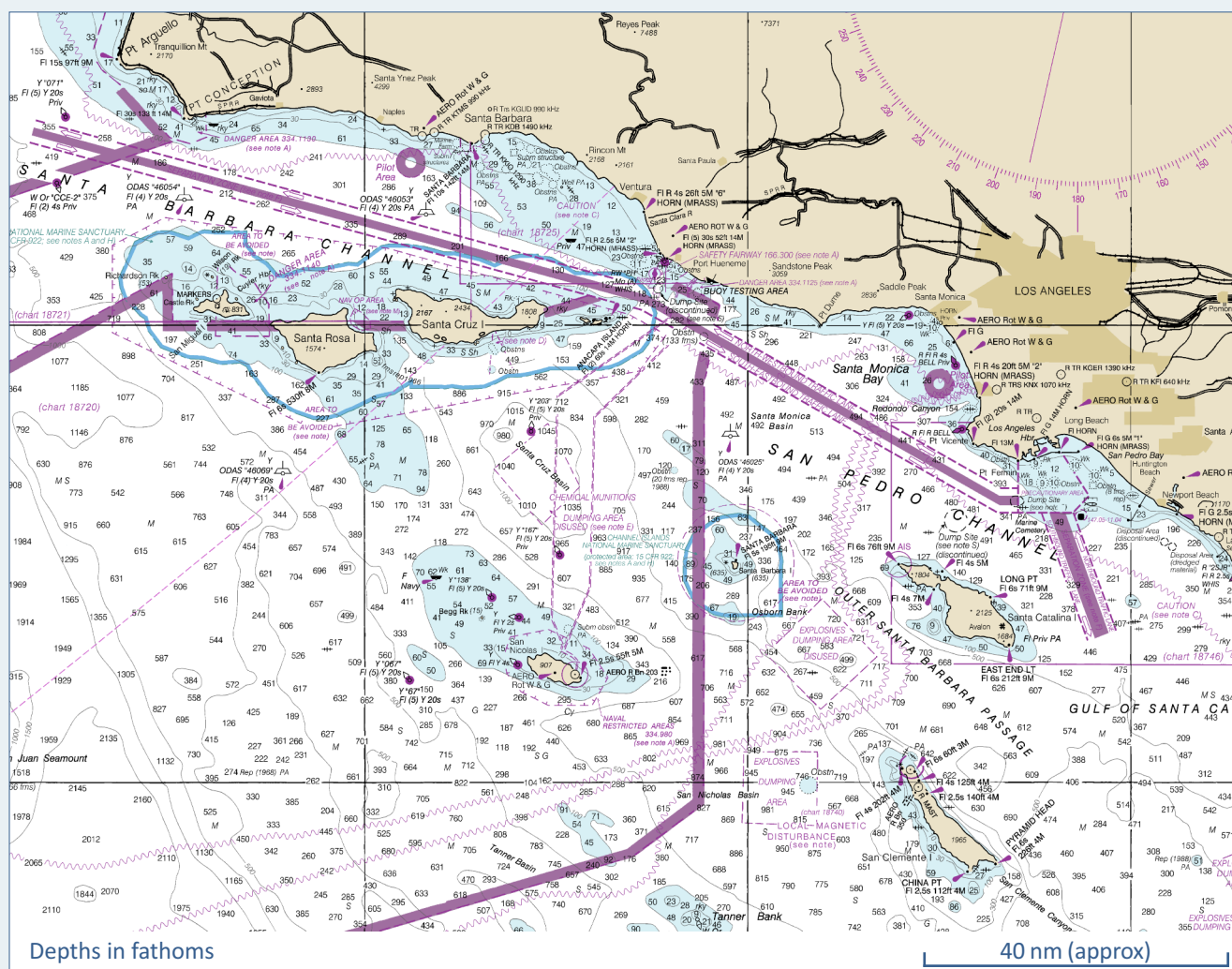
Only Santa Catalina is developed. San Nicolas and San Clemente are under the control of the military and not open to yachts. The remaining islands are either National Park or Nature Conservancy. This puts some constraints on hiking on the islands, in particular San Miguel (NPS) and the western half of Santa Cruz, W of Prisoners Harbor (NC). Information is available at

- National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/chis/index.htm>
- Nature Conservancy: <https://www.nature.org/en-us/>

Details on applying for hiking permits for western Santa Cruz and San Miguel are in the respective island sections.

The mainland towns have all the facilities you can imagine. Los Angeles is an excellent place for transport connections, flights, crew change, etc. The mainland harbours also make a good place to lay a boat up for a winter season. See pg.12 for more information.

These notes are not intended to be comprehensive and are more of a cruise planning guide than detailed navigational information. There are some excellent cruising guides and good charts for the area.



Books and Charts

Cruising Guide to Southern California's Offshore Islands by Brian M. Fagan, now out of print, but used copies are available at <https://www.amazon.com>

The Cruising Guide to Central and Southern California: Golden Gate to Ensenada, Mexico, Including the Offshore Islands, 2002, ISBN 0-07-137464-7

There is also an excellent online cruising guide (Captain Dan's) published by the Sail Channel Islands charter operation, which has lots of anecdotes, photos, videos and local tips:

<https://sailchannelislands.com/channel-islands-cruising-guide/>

US (NOAA) charts: <https://charts.noaa.gov/InteractiveCatalog/nrnc.shtml>

Click on **Paper Charts** (RNC & PDF).

Zoom in onto the chart you want to view.

Under **Available Products** click on PDF (view/download).

- **Passage Charts**

- 18720 Point Dume to Purisima Point

- 18740 San Diego to Santa Rosa Island

- **Coastal Passage Charts**

- 18721 Santa Cruz Island to Purisima Point

- 18746 San Pedro Channel; Dana Point Harbor

- 18774 Gulf of Santa Catalina; Delmar Boat Basin Camp Pendleton

- 18765 Approaches to San Diego Bay; Mission Bay

- **Island, Coastal and Harbour Charts**

- 18724 Port Hueneme and Approaches; Port Hueneme

- 18725 Port Hueneme to Santa Barbara

- 18727 San Miguel Passage

- 18728 Santa Cruz Channel

- 18729 Anacapa Passage

- 18744 Santa Monica Bay

- 18756 Santa Barbara Island

- 18757 Santa Catalina Island; Avalon Bay; Catalina Harbor; Isthmus Cove

- 18749 San Pedro Bay; Anaheim Bay—Huntington Harbor

- 18751 Los Angeles and Long Beach Harbors

- 18772 Approaches to San Diego Bay

- 18773 San Diego Bay

In chandlers such as West Marine you will find annual almanacs for the west coast which include lights, radio beacons and tide tables, as well as good marina information.

Tides

You can find small tide tables in local boat stores. Tidal ranges are quite small, normally no more than 1.5 – 2m (4-6') or so.

A full list of California tide stations is available online here:

https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/tide_predictions.html?gid=1393.

You can click through from this list to individual locations, for example Prisoners Harbor, which is a useful more-or-less midpoint on Santa Cruz Island: <https://tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/noaatidepredictions.html?id=9410971>

Imray Tides Planner app also gives tidal information for the area: <https://www.imray.com/tides-planner-app/>

Currents

Currents do not run strongly, though they can produce choppy, almost dangerous, conditions in places, particularly the Santa Cruz Channel between Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa.

Weather

The weather is very benign, and you can sail the islands all year round.

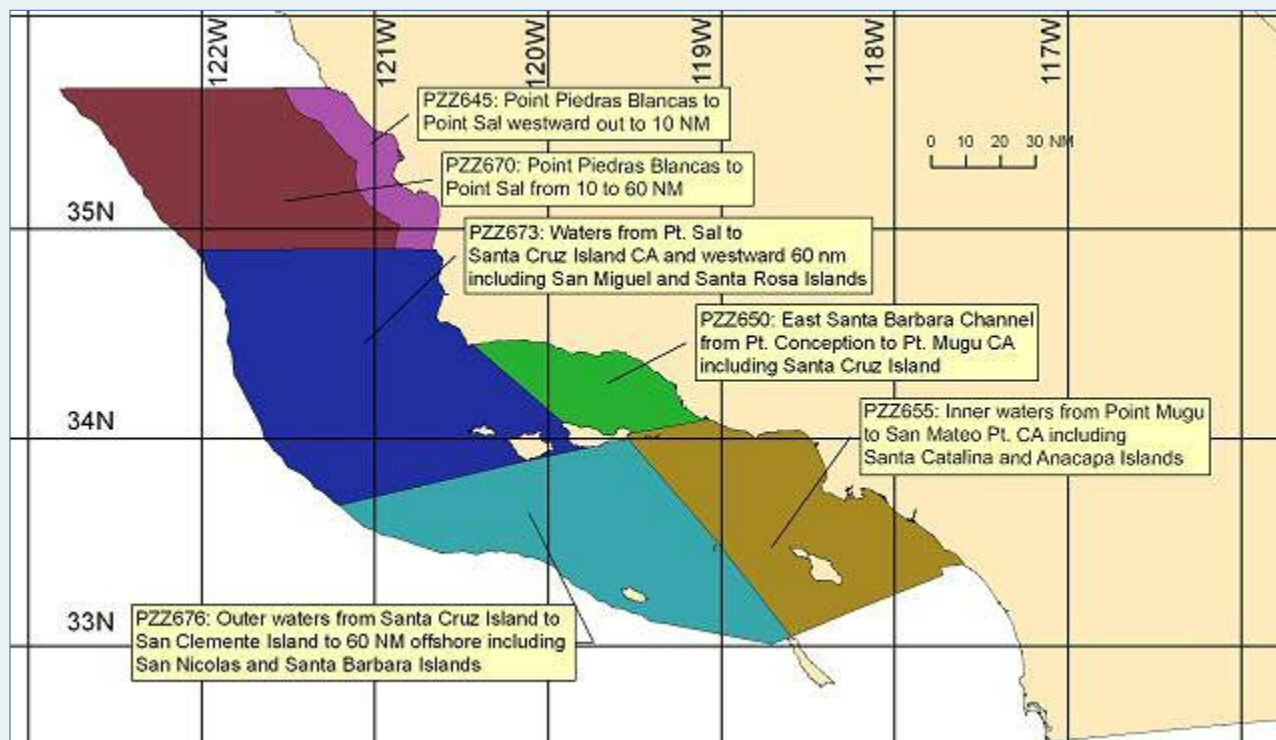
Ashore, summer weather is hot but not humid during the day (27°C/80°F). It is cooler on the water (21°C/70°F) and cooler still at night. A sea breeze builds around lunchtime as the land heats up, blowing 10-15 knots or so from the west in the afternoon and then fading away in the evening. Nights are usually calm, at least by midnight and through to late morning.

Winter weather is not dissimilar, though cooler, perhaps down to 16°C/60°F during the day and colder by night, except when a Santa Ana wind is blowing. This is a dry offshore wind produced by high pressure over the inland high desert. It brings strong winds that blow down through the canyons from the east and out over the sea towards the islands, sometimes very strongly. The danger is that you get caught on the north side or east end of the islands on a lee shore. However, the weather forecasts are good and Santa Ana conditions, of a very dry, unseasonably hot and easterly wind, are usually pretty obvious. A solution is to move round to the south side of the islands, though beware that the Santa Ana can blow down off the tops of the islands through the canyons and gullies and be felt strongly in the anchorages too. Alternatively, head for the mainland where the harbours are all perfectly sheltered marinas.

Spring into summer tends to be foggy in the mornings before the sun burns it off, and again at night. May through July are worst for this. A cruise as late as July can be surprisingly grey.

Weather forecasts

Weather forecasts are good. There are continuous NOAA/NWS weather broadcasts on VHF weather channels: 162.400 MHz, 162.425 MHz, 162.450 MHz, 162.475 MHz, 162.500 MHz, 162.525 MHz and 162.550 MHz. On the mainland and north side of the islands, the most relevant weather forecast is generally on WX3, 162.475 MHz. On the south side of Santa Cruz, it can be hard to pick up a signal because this station is blocked by the island and the more southerly stations are a long way away.



Source: NWS/NOAA; <https://www.weather.gov/marine/loxmz>

Swell

There is often a westerly swell, which creates the surf for the Southern California beaches. This can make many of the Channel Islands anchorages roly, even if the wind has dropped completely at night.

Anchoring

Partly to keep themselves aligned with the swell and partly because some anchorages get crowded on summer weekends, a lot of boats in Southern California put down a stern anchor as well. If you are in a crowded anchorage where others are doing this you will need to follow suit.

Bottoms are mainly mud and sand. Kelp and sea grass on the bottom are an occasional problem, but in general the holding is reasonably good.

Communications

Once you are out at the islands, you will have spotty mobile phone coverage on the north side and east ends – sometimes voice and data, sometimes only data and sometimes nothing – and most likely no coverage on the south side.

Local regulations

Holding Tanks and Pump-out

All boats in the Channel Islands should use holding tanks as it is a legal requirement to do so. There are pump-out facilities in the mainland marinas, or you can pump out beyond the six-mile limit.

Provisioning

Water

There are no convenient sources of water on Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa or San Miguel. On Catalina, water is likely to be available at Avalon and Two Harbors.

Facilities and Services at the Mainland Harbours

Each of the large harbours has several independent marinas within it. The following marinas, services and boatyards are those with which RCC members have had long-term experience.

From north to south from Ventura:

Ventura

Safe Harbor Ventura Isle Marina is very professionally run and has excellent facilities, including wifi on the docks. It is close to Ventura Harbor Boatyard, chandlers and restaurants.

Tel: 805 644 5858

<https://shmarinas.com/locations/safe-harbor-ventura-isle/>

All the Ventura marinas are quite a long way from a serious supermarket.

Channel Islands Harbor

Peninsula Yacht Marina is 'cheap and cheerful' and the people who run the marina are very helpful. It has been slated for redevelopment for a long time and is certainly showing its age. The slips are pretty narrow and the facilities are somewhere between not-posh and grotty. But the smaller slips – up to about 35' or so – are bow-on to a row of apartments, so although you have a neighbour close by you are not on a finger and have immediate access from the more easterly of the two main channels in the harbour. There is also access to a swimming pool.

Tel: 805 985 6400

<https://peninsulayachtmarina.com>

Safe Harbor Anacapa Isle Marina could be a good alternative to PYM.

Tel: 805 985 6035

<https://shmarinas.com/locations/safe-harbor-anacapa-isle/>

These two marinas are the closest of the Channel Island Harbor marinas to the supermarket, West Marine, banks, drug store, restaurants and all facilities (walking distance).



Peninsula Yacht Marina, Channel Islands Harbor

Marina del Rey

Marina del Rey Marina was redeveloped in 2019-20 and is now very smart, though it does not have wifi on the docks. It is near the head of the basin and is therefore a very convenient walking distance to no less than three supermarkets, West Marine and many other shops and restaurants.

Tel: 310 822 0316

<https://marinadelreymarina.com/>

In general, marina prices in Marina Del Rey are easily the most expensive in the area.

Most boats in all these marinas use divers to keep their bottoms clean, typically once a month. This is especially useful in Ventura where, in addition to weed, there is a very pesky organism which leaves a calcified deposit on your hull.

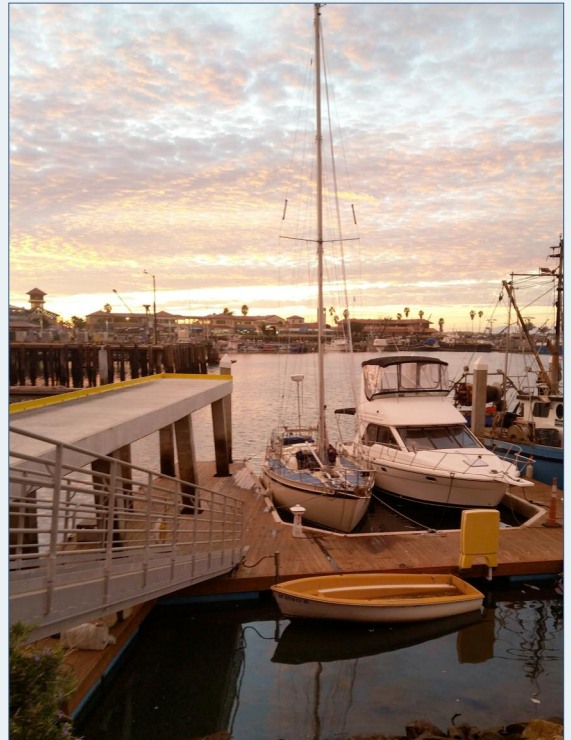
Boatyards

There are yards in Ventura, Channel Islands Harbor and Marina del Rey.

Ventura Harbor Boatyard has a full range of services and does very good work. They will also allow outside contractors to come and work on your boat, which some yards will not.

Tel: 805 654 1433

<https://www.vhby.com/>



Alongside the haul-out facility at Ventura Harbor Boatyard; restaurants in the background

Specialist services

Boat specialists in the north routinely come to either Ventura or Channel Islands Harbor, whichever you are in. But the northern experts and Marina del Rey experts will normally not travel between the two areas (they are 50 miles apart).

North

Electrics: Dave Decrevel. Fantastic guy, great work. He also restores classic cars!

Tel: 805 218 3657 charr328@yahoo.com

Rigger: Kim Weir. Excellent.

Tel: 805 607 1113

Sailmaker: Gary Swenson at Ullman Sails in Ventura (very close to the Ventura Isle Marina). Fantastic.

Tel: 805 644 9579

<https://ventura.ullmansails.com>

Engines: Les Nickeas. Tel: 805 701 6218

Canvas: Juan Gonzan. Tel: 805 218 4874

Deck work, fiberglass, craftsmanship, all sorts of marine projects: Chris Panto, South Jetty Marine. Perfectionist; great team, great work. Tel: 805 218 6614

Chris is based in Ventura Harbor Boatyard but will work on boats afloat as well. In the yard, he and VHBV trade work between them so that each gets their fair share, depending on the nature of the work and the source of the client, with the yard generally getting first dibs if a boat is in the yard. Brad Hawes/Mike Hanson of VHBV and Chris will sort out which is best for both the client and them; speak to the yard first if you are ashore. Through his team Chris has access to many skills, including Sevan Sullivan of Sullivan Marine Woodworking (Tel: 805 850 5182) who is an incredible craftsman.

Surveyor: Mike Pyzel. Tel: 805 895 8081 mpyzel@hotmail.com

Divers: Ready Rick. Wonderful. They work in both Ventura and CIH. Dawn: Tel: 805 983 3132

South

Refrigeration: Alan Rosner. Excellent. Tel: 310 822 1946

Metalwork: Carter Miller. Excellent but can be very hard to get hold of. Tel: 310 422 1687

Woodwork: Michael Blair. Excellent. Tel: 310 913 3715

Canvas: There are a number of canvas shops in Marina del Rey; of the two I have used, Good Vibrations Canvas is easily the best. Rick Balabuck, Tel: 310 386 7293 www.goodvibrationscanvas.com

Divers: S&K Dive Service. They do boat detailing, woodwork maintenance, etc. as well as hull cleaning. Tel: 310 822 8349

Engine service: CC Marine Service. Excellent. Tel: 310 823 4821

Plus three services used by other boats on my dock in Marina del Rey Marina:

Rigging and Electrics: Carl Sarnoff Rigging. Tel: 310 305 1122

Boat detailing and maintenance: Hector Munoz Tel: 424 202 4838, Trinidad (Trino) Gonzales Tel: 310 617 3168

Further South

Yanmar distributor: I have only indirect experience, but I was impressed with the professionalism of Boatswain's Locker in Costa Mesa when I had some dealings with them. They are distributors and a service center for Yanmar and a number of other power machinery brands. <https://boatswainslocker.com>

Perkins parts: S&W Diesel, Wilmington (near Long Beach) Tel: 310 835 3155

Shuttle Services to and from LAX

These services generally provide expensive personal rides or more affordable shared rides, which are either on a schedule or tied to passengers' flight times (so you are not fully in control of the pick-up time).

Ventura County Airporter Shuttle: Shared, scheduled rides from designated pick-up points. The Ventura pick-up point is very close to the Ventura Isle Marina, if you are starting from there. They also pick up from Oxnard Airport, but this is some distance from the Channel Islands Harbor marinas.

Tel: 805 650 6600

<http://venturashuttle.com>

Smart Shuttle: Shared or personal rides from your address.

Tel: 805 482 0202

<https://www.smartshuttle805.com>

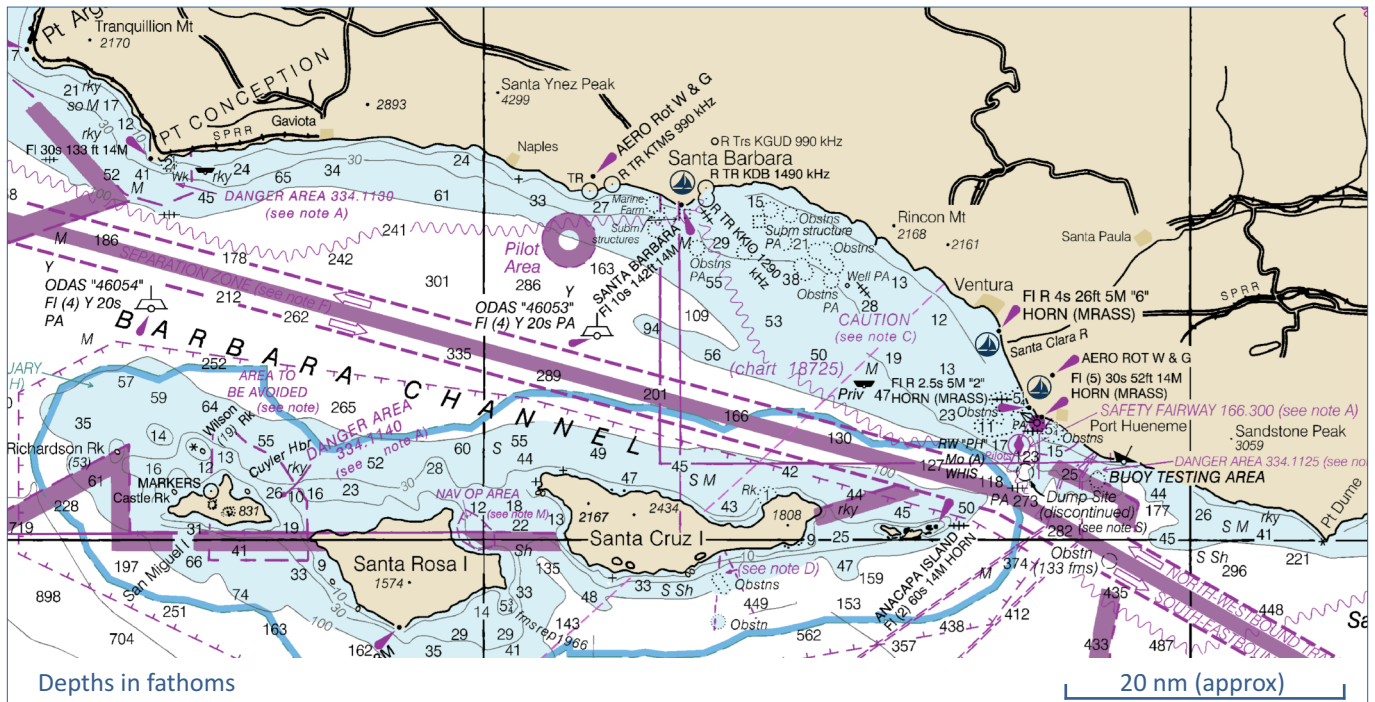
Santa Barbara Airbus: Tel: 805 964 7759

<https://www.sbairbus.com>

Part I. Mainland California

Northern Area Harbours

For the northern Channel Islands, the jumping off points are Channel Islands Harbor, Ventura or Santa Barbara. All are relatively small towns, but all have marinas and a full range of facilities. Santa Barbara has a small airport for commercial flights.



Channel Islands Harbor

The largest of the three northern mainland harbours, with two boat yards, a West Marine within walking distance of the marinas, and all services. It has the larger town of Oxnard behind it, but most of the services a sailor needs are close to the marinas and downtown Oxnard is not worth a special visit.

Ventura Harbor

A smaller harbour, but also has two yards (one of which, Ventura Harbor Boatyard, is particularly good; see pg 10). Ventura Harbor is about four miles from downtown Ventura (which is a nice place), and also from other commercial areas in the suburbs, but there are restaurants near the marinas.

The West Marine in Ventura closed, but Ventura Harbor Boatyard has a chandlery and there is another chandler, Beacon Marine, a short walk from Ventura Isle Marina on the corner of Spinnaker Drive and E Harbor Blvd. This is also where the Ullman Sails loft is, along with a very useful second-hand boat parts store, Mike's Consignment Marine Supply, which is a good place both to get rid of formerly-loved gear and to buy used bits and pieces at reasonable prices.

Ventura is home to the headquarters and a ritzy store for Patagonia outdoor clothing (235 W Santa Clara St, Ventura, CA 93001). But there is also a very good store

which sells excess inventory from Patagonia and other sportswear makers; it is a good place to look for new oilskins, fleece, etc. Real Cheap Sports, 36 W Santa Clara St, Ventura, CA 93001; Tel: 805 648 3803;

<https://www.realcheapsports.com>

Santa Barbara

This harbour is the most picturesque of the three, though relatively small and crowded, and probably only really recommended for short stays. Santa Barbara itself is a really lovely little town, and very pedestrian-friendly.

As you enter Santa Barbara marina, steer for the head of the main channel where there is a temporary visitor dock to which you can moor alongside while you visit the marina office. The office assigns short-stay slips belonging to yachts that are away.

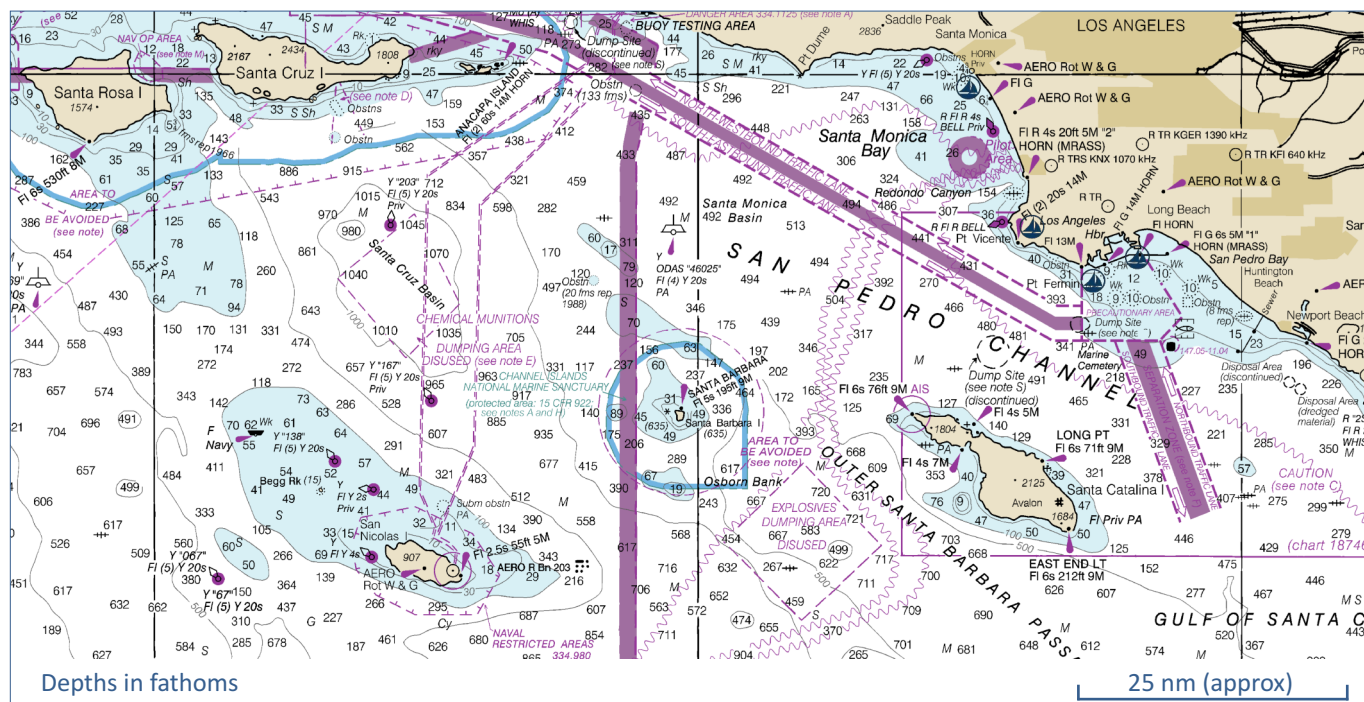


Image: Google Earth

Southern Area Harbours

For the southern Channel Islands, and especially Catalina, the mainland harbours at Los Angeles or Long Beach/San Pedro are closer.

Note that LA is about an hour and a half south of Channel Islands Harbor by road. There are reasonably priced shuttle services between the northern towns and Los Angeles, particularly LAX airport. See the services section at the beginning of the guide.



Marina del Rey

33° 58'.6N, 118° 26'.8W

Marina del Rey is the harbour for LA. It is a huge basin with many marinas, two yards, a West Marine chandlery and all facilities. There are visitor docks on the E side of the main fairway in front of a grassy park. Visits are restricted to seven days, first come, first served. Berths are \$1.25 per foot per night in 2021. Details here:

<https://beaches.lacounty.gov/marina-del-rey-guest-docks/>

For a longer stay, you would need to make an arrangement with one of the individual marinas within the Marina del Rey basin.

Marina del Rey

By Howcheng/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 3.0



King Harbor

Just south of Marina del Rey is King Harbor in Redondo Beach. It has a marina (currently full, with a waiting list) and a boatyard.

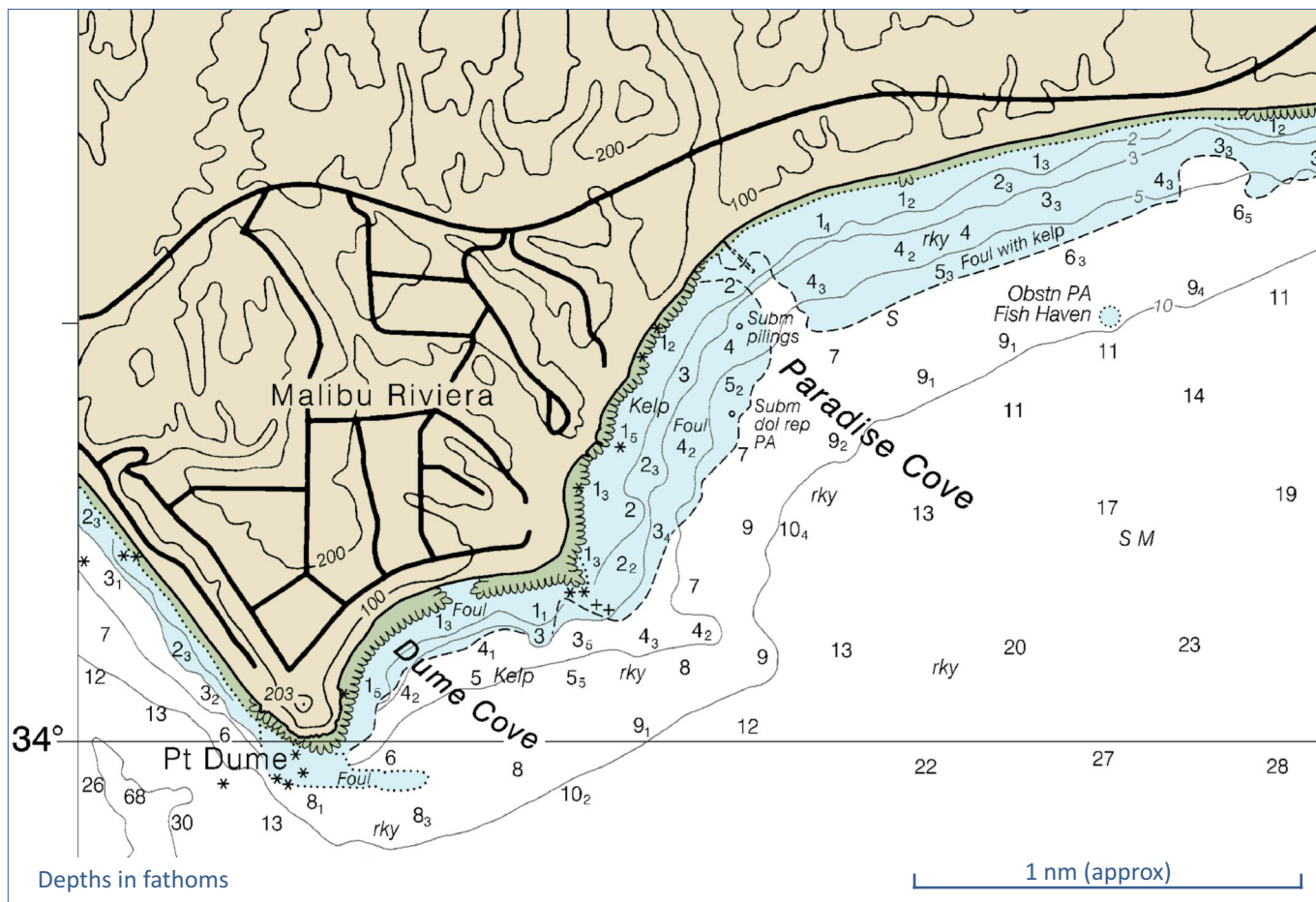
Long Beach and San Pedro

Long Beach and San Pedro form another huge basin with many marinas and facilities for a long stay.

San Diego

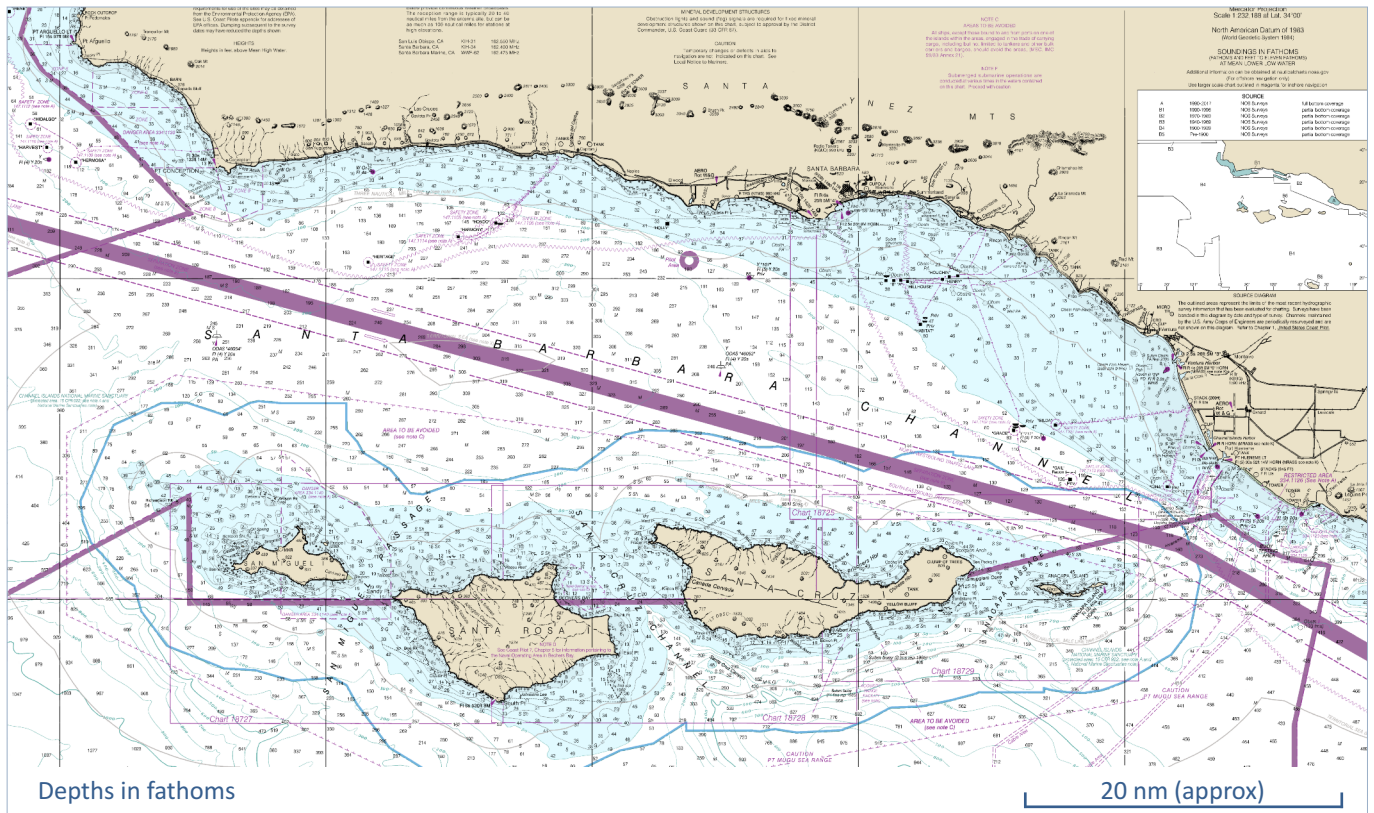
Further south than the Channel Islands, San Diego is another medium-size city with excellent harbour facilities for yachts. It is a good jumping off point for an ocean voyage. Transportation to San Diego is not quite as convenient as Los Angeles for crew changes - they are two to three hours apart by road.

Mainland Anchorages



Part 2. The Islands

Northern Group - Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel



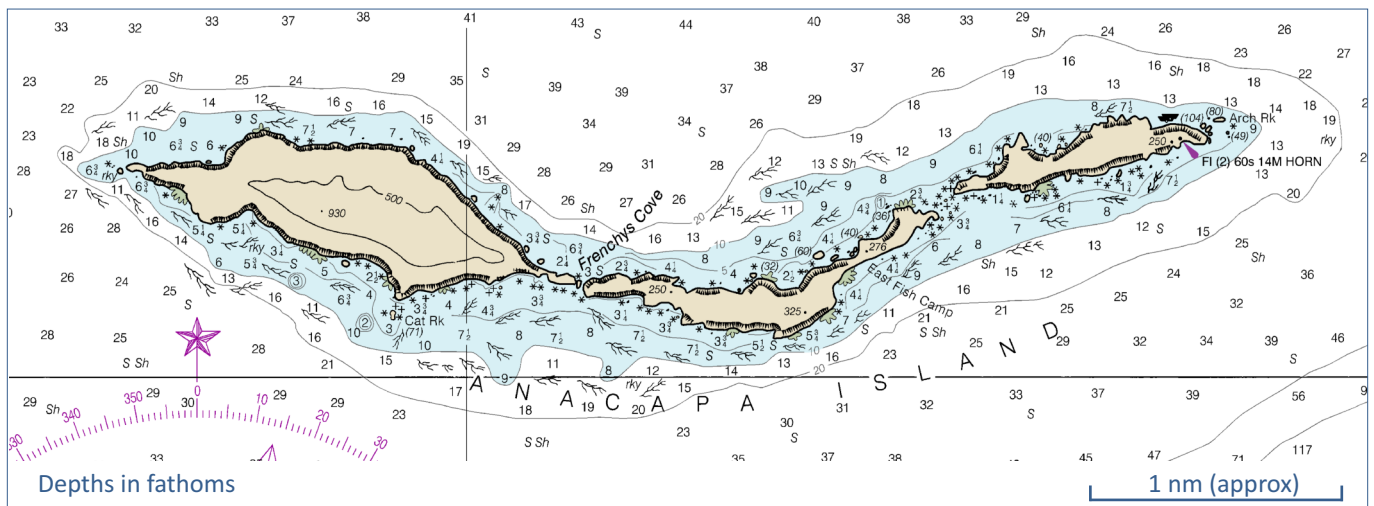
Aerial view of the Channel Islands National Park. Looking northwest with Anacapa Island in the foreground.

By filippo_jean/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 2.0

Anacapa Island

Anacapa is the smallest and easternmost island of the northern group, only about 12 M offshore from Channel Islands Harbor. It is very picturesque.

<https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/anacapa.htm>

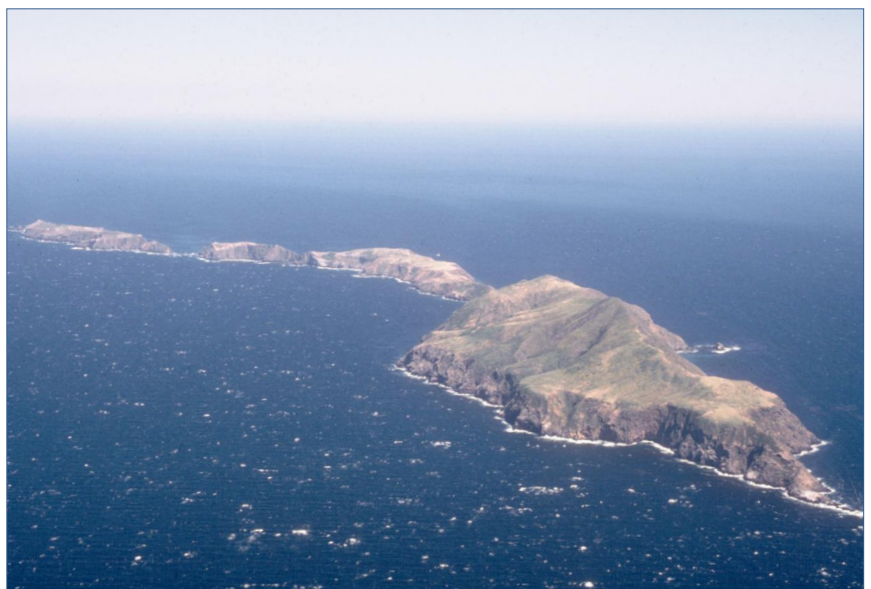


Frenchy's Cove

34° 00'.5N, 119° 24'.7W

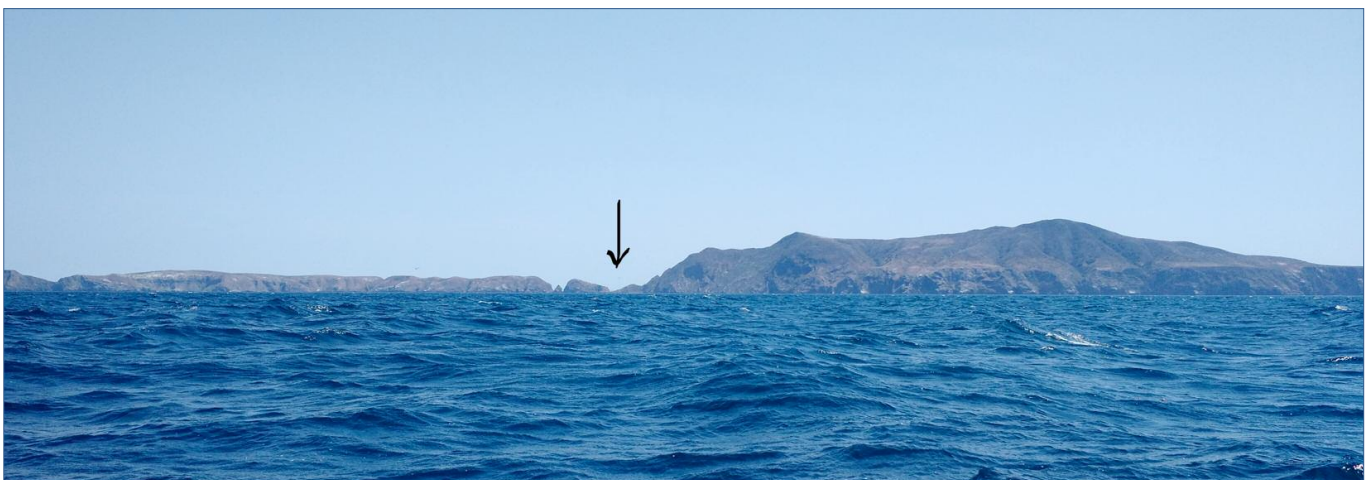
The only real anchorage is Frenchy's Cove in the middle of the north coast. It is pretty and offers surprising shelter from the prevailing westerly swell. But it is still more of a fair-weather anchorage than a refuge for a windy night. When it is windy, the wind and waves tend to run down the coast right into the anchorage, making it uncomfortable (and a lee shore). Anchor in less than 10m. The holding is good.

The westerly swell tends to turn SW on the south side of the island, so the anchorages on the S side of Anacapa tend to be uncomfortable and exposed.



Anacapa Island looking to the SE

National Park Service, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

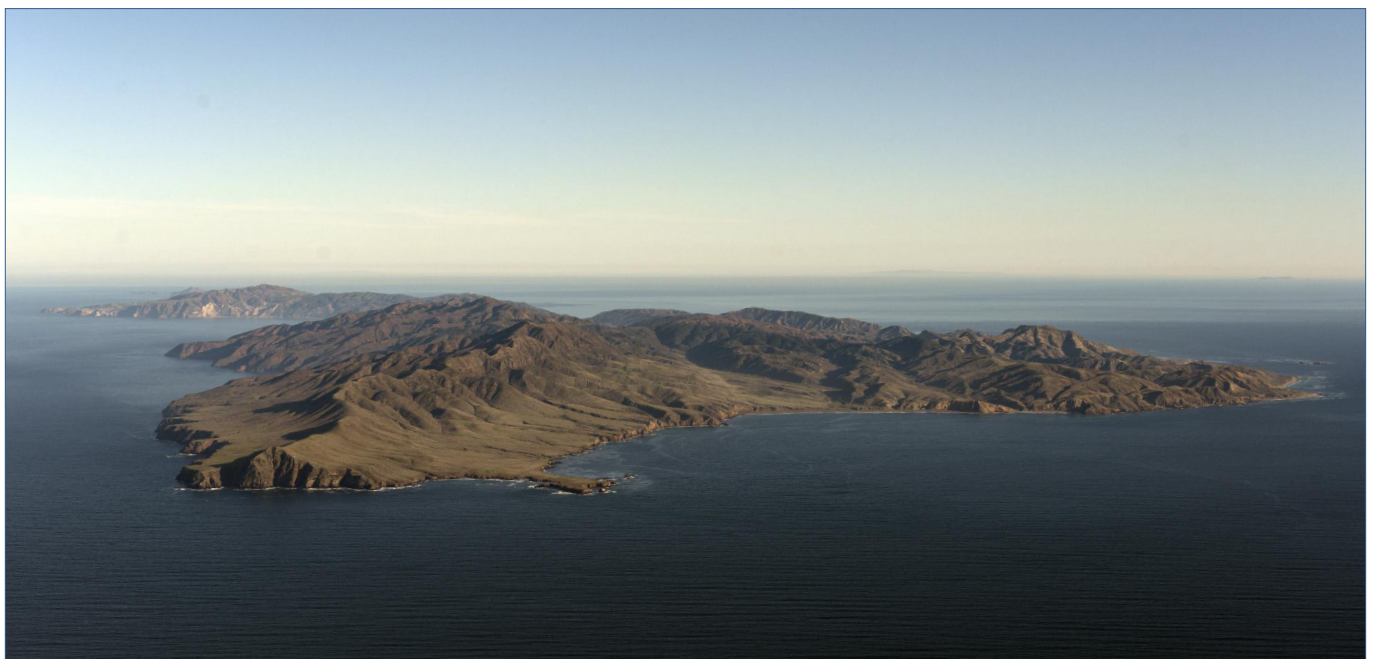
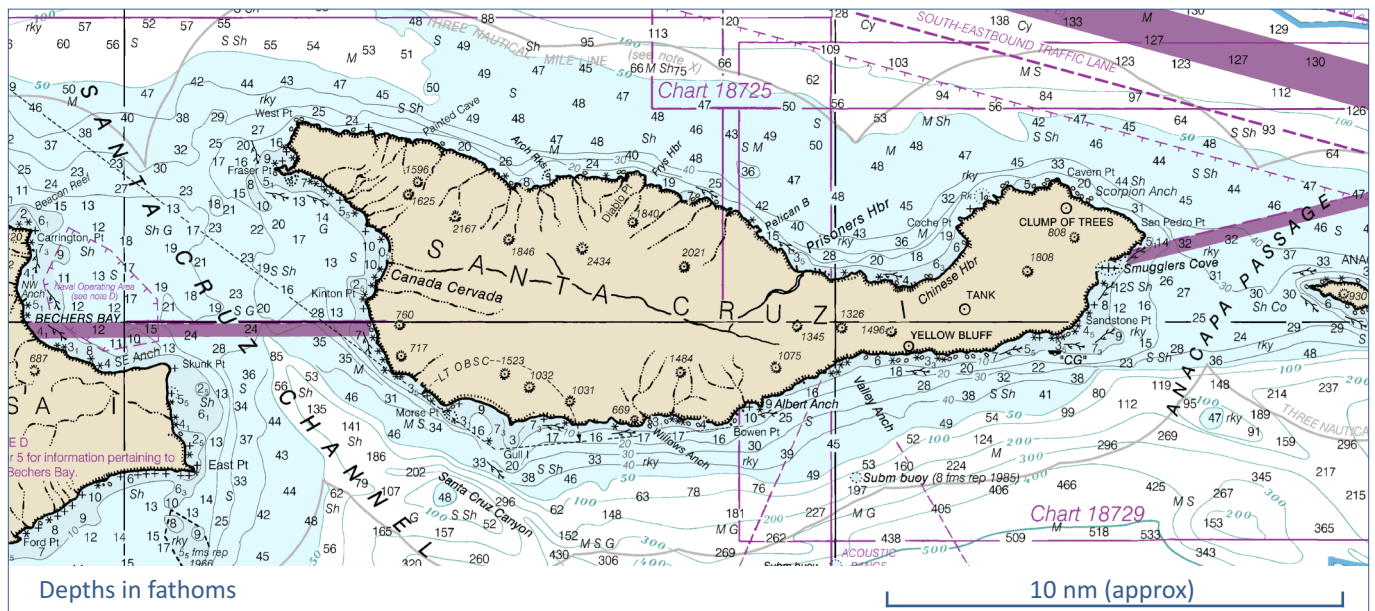


Approaching the north side of Anacapa. Frenchy's Cove is right in the middle under the arrow

Santa Cruz Island

A lovely island. There are some two dozen possible anchorages detailed in the cruising guides, though some of these are more like fair weather lunch stops than real anchorages.

<https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/santa-cruz-island.htm>



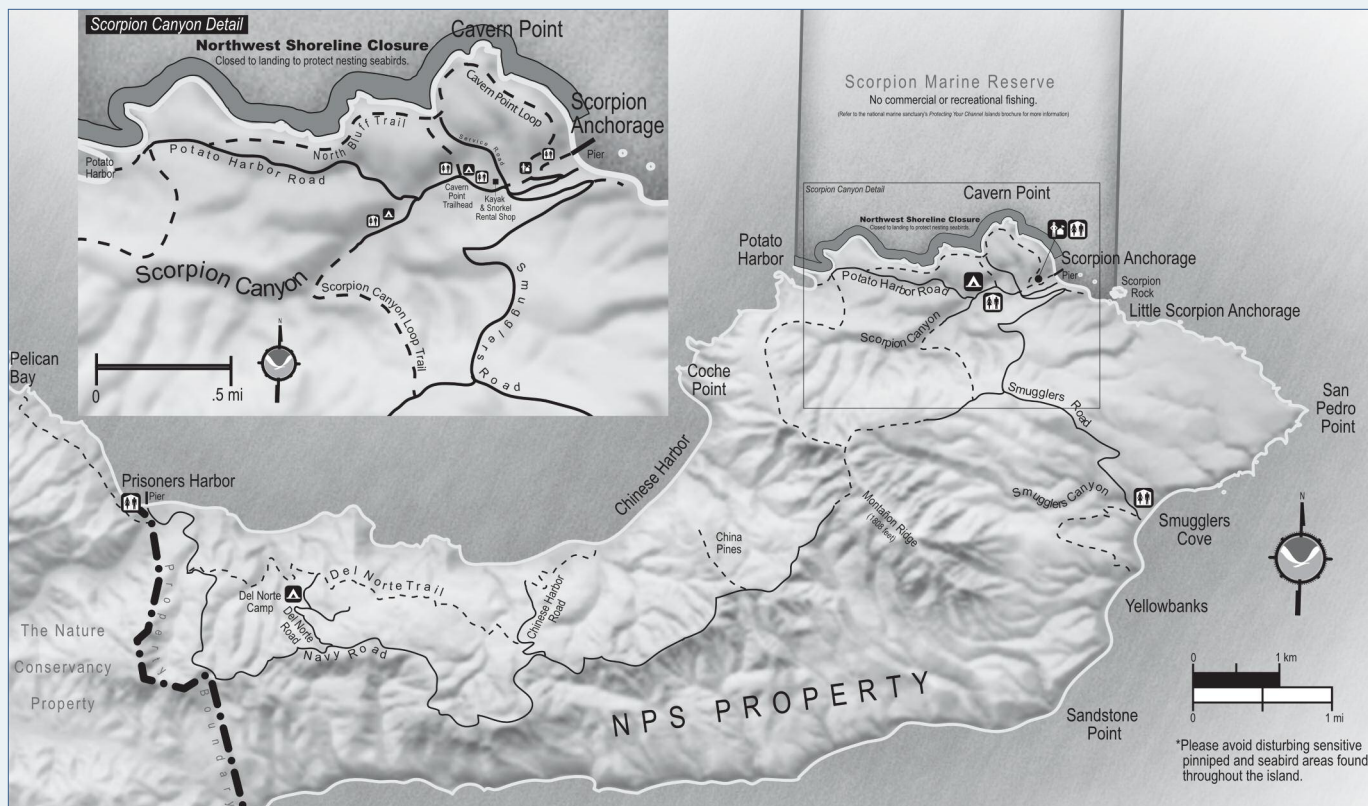
Santa Cruz Island looking to the SE

By Carol M. Highsmith, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Local Weather Conditions

You can experience very different weather conditions on the different sides of Santa Cruz. The north side and west end experience the weather as forecasted for the East Santa Barbara Channel, which can be blustery from the west or northwest, typically in the afternoon and early evening. But round San Pedro Point at the east end of the island heading southwest to Hungryman Glutch or Smugglers and you may well find a flat calm. In fact, there can be a light southeasterly onshore breeze in these anchorages in the morning even if the prevailing forecast for the East Santa Barbara Channel is westerly.

The south coast of Santa Cruz is similar, particularly east of, say, Gull Island: it can be windy on the north side but flat calm here. So, the anchorages on the south side can be very useful if you need shelter; but at the same time, the prospect of sailing the length of the south side can be disappointing because of fickle winds.



Source - National Park Service

Shore permits

The western portion of the island, west of Prisoners, is owned by The Nature Conservancy. To hike on this part of the island, you need a permit:

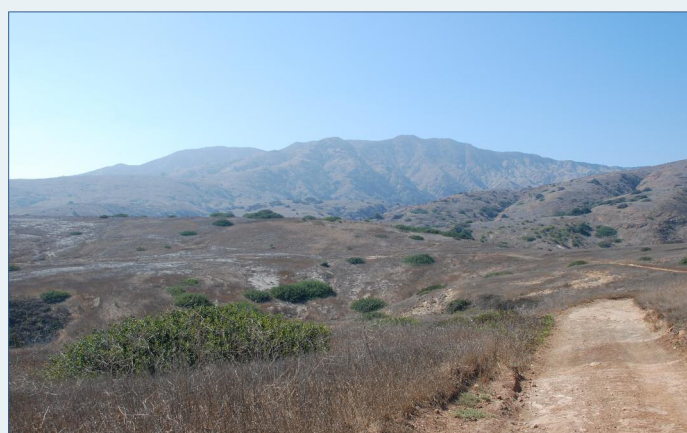
<https://preserve.nature.org/page/86523/donate/1>

You do not need a permit to walk on the eastern, National Park portion of Santa Cruz, but you should check the website for any current restrictions:

<https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/conditions.htm>

The National Park Service has good hiking information and a map:

<https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/upload/sci-hiking-2020b.pdf>



Montañon Ridge, view from Smugglers Road
By Adavyd/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0

- There is fire restricted hiking on the northeast corner of the island, meaning that you cannot go off-piste to the northeast of Smugglers Road between the Smugglers and Scorpion anchorages or hike inland from Little Scorpion anchorage; updates on this on the same link as above.

A recommended hike is up to Montañon Ridge, which overlooks Smugglers and Hungryman Glutch to the east and the Scorpions to the northeast. It is fairly steep with some sheer drops on either side in places, but it is not dangerous and the views in all directions are marvellous.

Depending on how speedy you are:

- Scorpion to the top of Montañon Ridge is about 2 hours one way
- Scorpion to Smugglers via Montañon Ridge is about 3 hours
- Smugglers to Scorpion is about 1.5 hours one way
- Smugglers – Montañon Ridge – Smugglers is about 2.5 hours (this route does not go all the way down into Scorpion).

You could do a wonderful, combined boat-and-hike from the Scorpions (or Smugglers) to Prisoners, with those not hiking moving the boat:

- Take the trail up towards Montañon Ridge
- 15 mins or so after you pass an old oil well, the trail to Prisoners is signed to the right, 10 miles.

East End Anchorages

Smugglers

34°01'.2N, 119°32'.4W

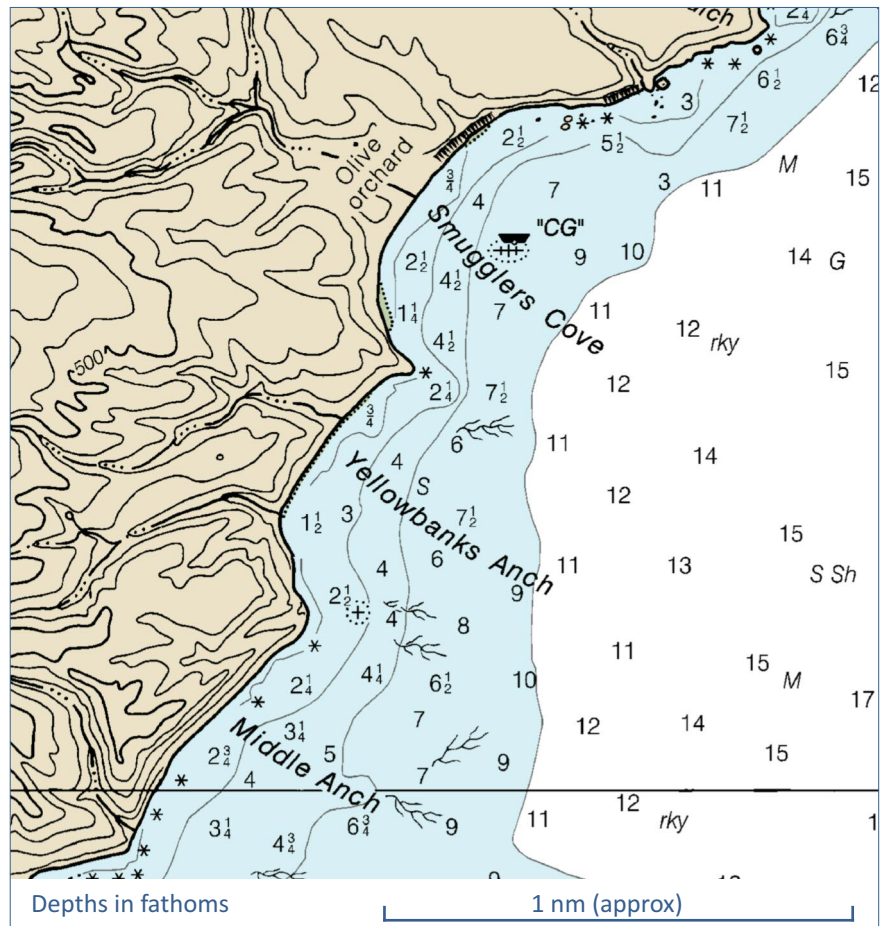
Yellowbanks

34°00'.7N, 119°32'.6W

The eastern end of the island is more crowded than the west end. The best-known anchorages at the extreme eastern end are the two rather open roadsteads: **Smugglers**, and about half a mile south, **Yellowbanks**. Both are easily accessible day and night and provide good shelter from westerly winds, but not such good protection from surge – the swell bends round the corners of the island and makes them roly.

Smugglers is perhaps the prettier of the two because it is a deeper bay and there is an attractive grove of olive trees that was just saved from the recent fire. Yellowbanks tends to be less crowded and it is pretty enough. Depths 8-10m. Surge tends to increase if you go shallower than 8m and there can be a strange counter-swell that bounces from the beach back out to sea.

You won't find solitude in these anchorages but they are useful and pleasant, especially if you can avoid weekends. Smugglers is a good starting point for hiking ashore, though landing can be wet if there is significant swell breaking on the beach.



Smugglers to the right, in front of the pale cliff, Yellowbanks to the left, seen from the NE

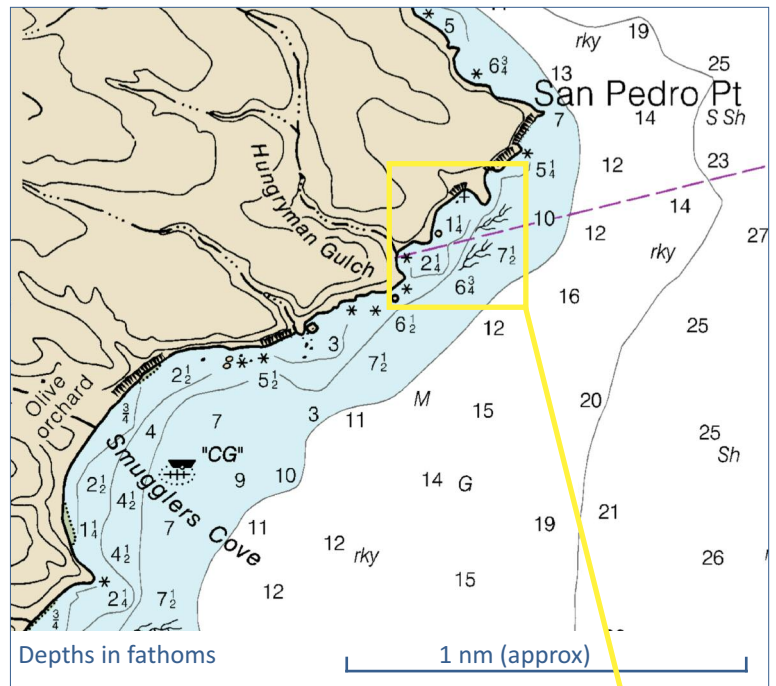
Hungryman Glutch

34°01'.8N, 119°31'.4W

A lovely anchorage on this part of the coast is Hungryman Glutch, between Smugglers and San Pedro Point. It is fairly easily identifiable as you approach because of a white guano-stained rock on the NE side of the anchorage.

Inside, it is snug – really only room for one boat if you are trying to tuck yourself in. Aim for a spot on a line between the outer end of the rocks at the northeast corner of the anchorage (bearing 035° magnetic) and the west end of a prominent rock to the southwest of the anchorage (bearing 215° or so magnetic, shown in the photo of Yellowbanks and Smugglers above), 328° to the awash rock in the center of the anchorage. Depths here are about 8-10m. The holding is good. The tide floods NE and the boat will likely swing to this, so you should avoid anchoring too close to the NE rocks.

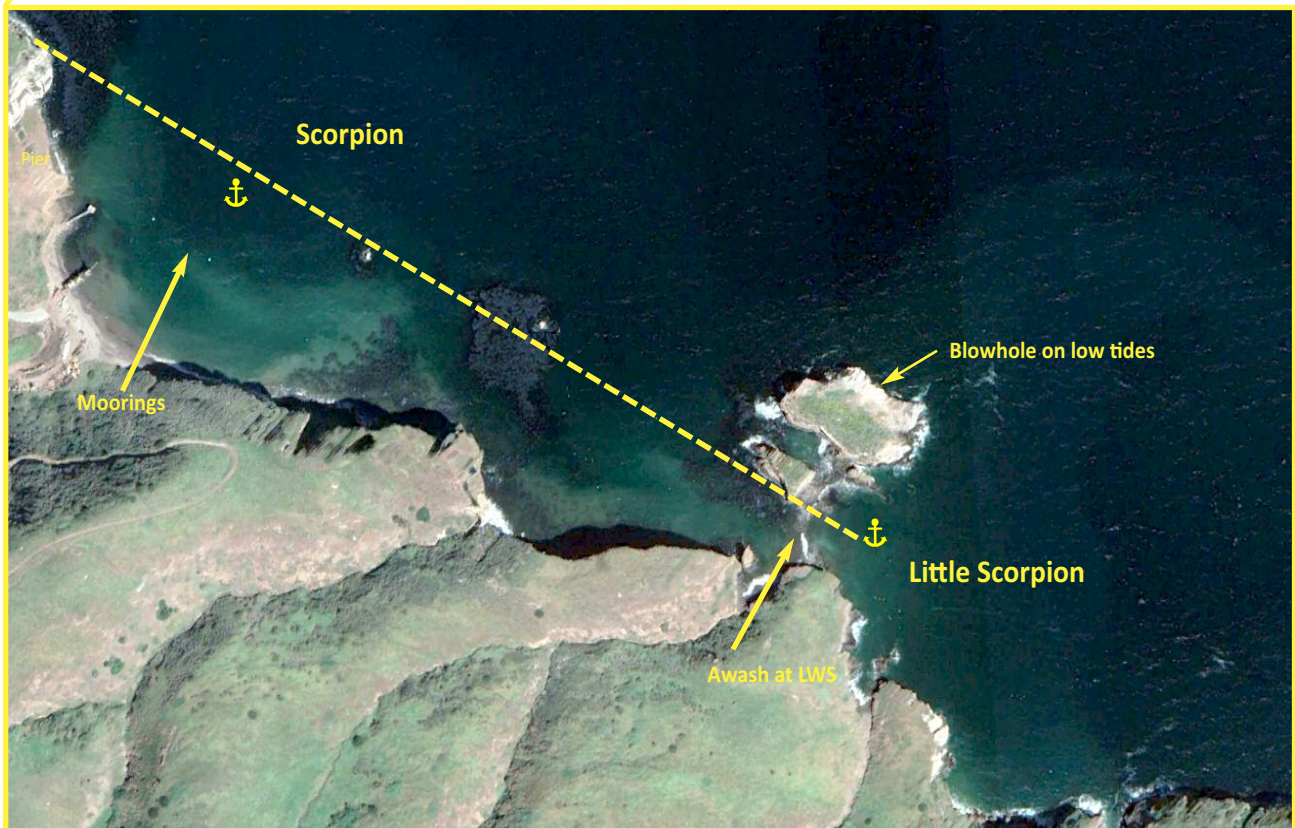
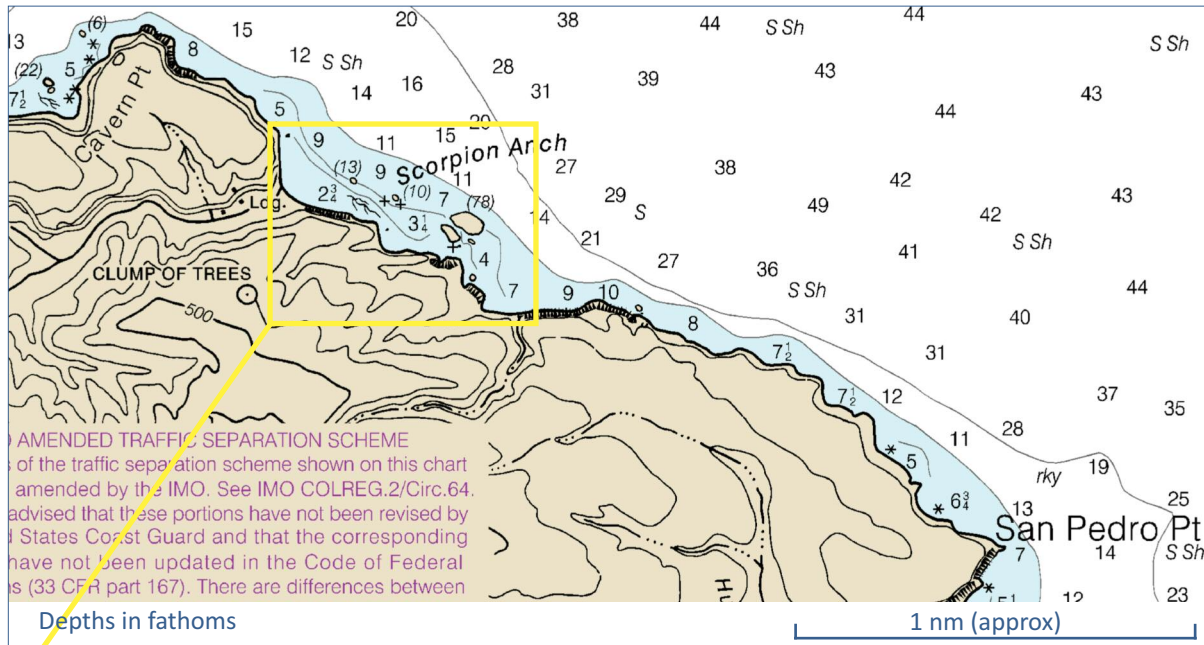
You can land on the beach if the swell is not breaking too much. If you hike from here, the ground is pretty rough until you reach Smugglers Road between Smugglers and Scorpion. This part of the island was off-limits to hiking in 2020 because of the fire.



Close approach to Hungryman Glutch

Little Scorpion

34° 02'.7N, 119° 32'.7W



Sailing west from San Pedro Point on the north side of Santa Cruz, the first anchorage is Little Scorpion. It tends to be very popular on weekends. The shelter is formed by a small island that separates the Little Scorpion anchorage from Scorpion anchorage to the west.

Tuck in as close to the western side of the bay as possible, typically in depths of less than 10.5m. If there are no other boats there and you can get in shallower than 9m the shelter is excellent.

If the anchorage is crowded you may find yourself in depths as much as 20m, where it will be more rolly. Stern anchors are useful here. Tide sets SE→NW on the flood.

There is sometimes a smell of pelican guano, though in 2020 this had diminished because the National Park Service has replanted areas formerly used by the pelicans.

Ashore

You can land in a little, partly-hidden cove near the head of the anchorage where there is a tiny beach and, fire restrictions permitting, access to hiking inland. It can be hard to see the entrance to this mini-cove from where you are anchored, but if you nose up the coast in your dinghy you will find that it opens up as you head west. It is rather a magical spot. In normal years you can hike from this cove, but not in 2020 because of the fire.

Scorpion

Scorpion Anchorage, half a mile to the west, is not so attractive. It is more open and not so well sheltered as its neighbour. But you can go ashore easily and it is used by daytrip boats from the mainland to bring in parties of kayakers. Anchor outside the pier and moorings in about 8-10m. Once the new pier is finished in 2021 the bay is likely to get busier with daytrip and National Park Service boats.

West of Scorpion, to Cavern Point, there are lovely sea caves in the cliffs, which is what the kayakers come for. They are pretty interesting and can be explored by dinghy from either of the Scorpion anchorages.

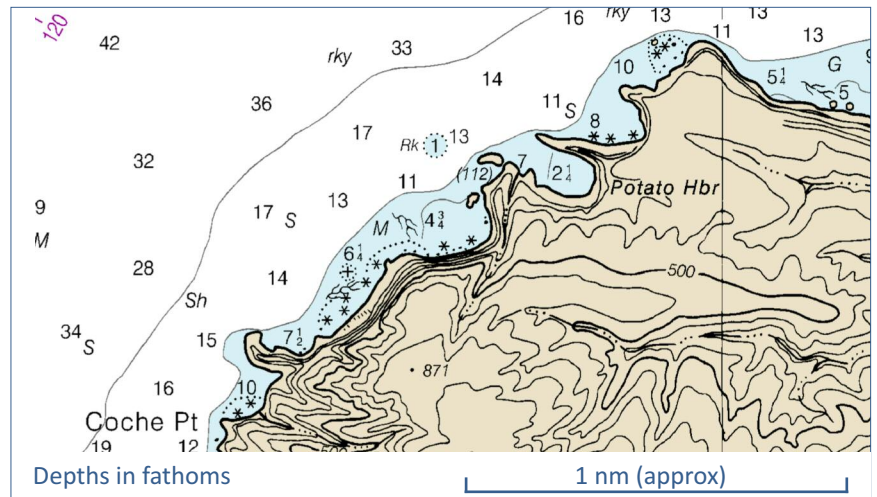


Scorpion Anchorage, view from the Western side

By Adavyd/Wikimedia Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0

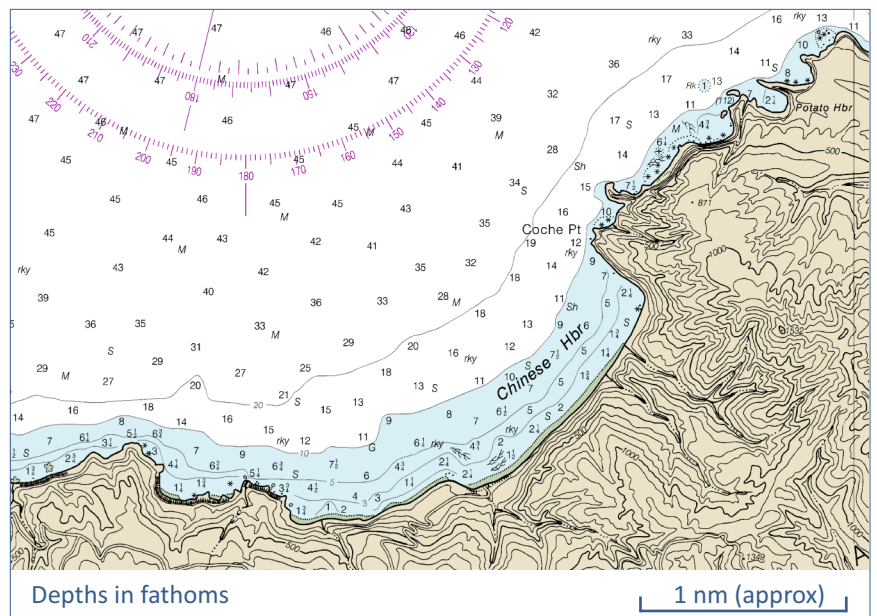
Potato Bay

West of Cavern Point is Potato Bay (or Harbor), an anchorage carved between cliffs, with a narrow entrance. It is open to the west, so is only an option in settled conditions. It is small, so if there are other boats there already it feels crowded. That said, it is an interesting place to visit, especially on a quiet weekday, and if the swell is slight and the weather is settled it would be a fun place to spend the night.



Chinese Harbor

West of Potato Bay is Chinese Harbor. Something of a misnomer as it is completely open and exposed in the normal westerly weather.



Prisoners

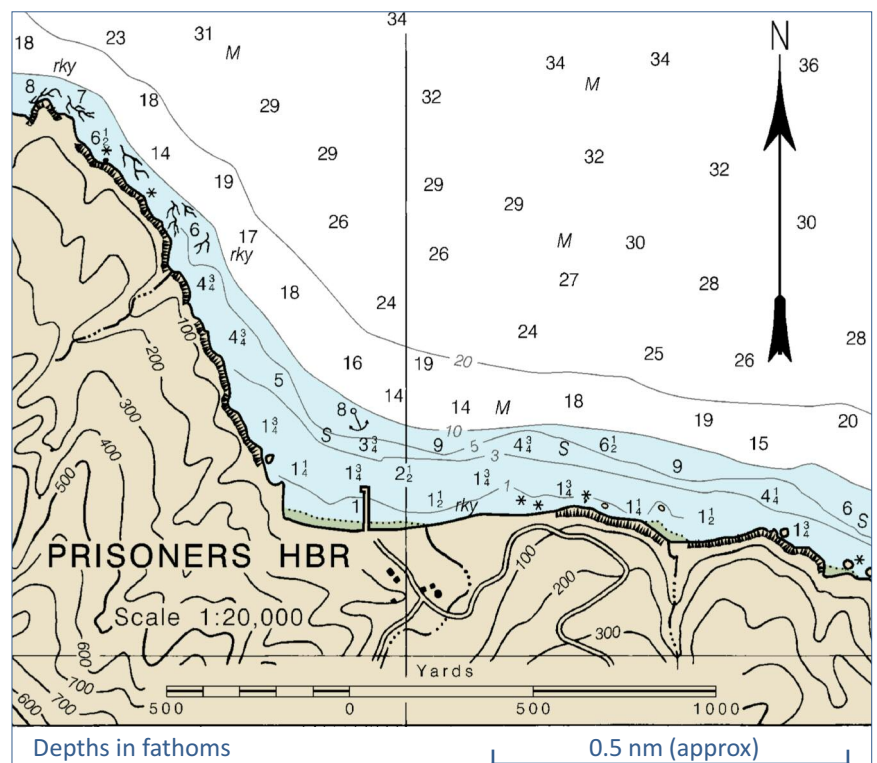
34° 01'.4N, 119° 41'.2W

Prisoners is at more or less the mid-point of the north side of Santa Cruz. It is not the prettiest, but it is a really useful anchorage with easy access day or night, reasonable depths of 8-10m, good holding in mud, and surprisingly good shelter from the west so long as it is not too breezy. You don't normally need a stern anchor unless it is crowded.

The area around the landing pier tends to get full if there are other boats, but there is a narrow anchoring shelf, in 9m or so, extending along the shore northwest of the pier. This can accommodate several more vessels in one or two lines.

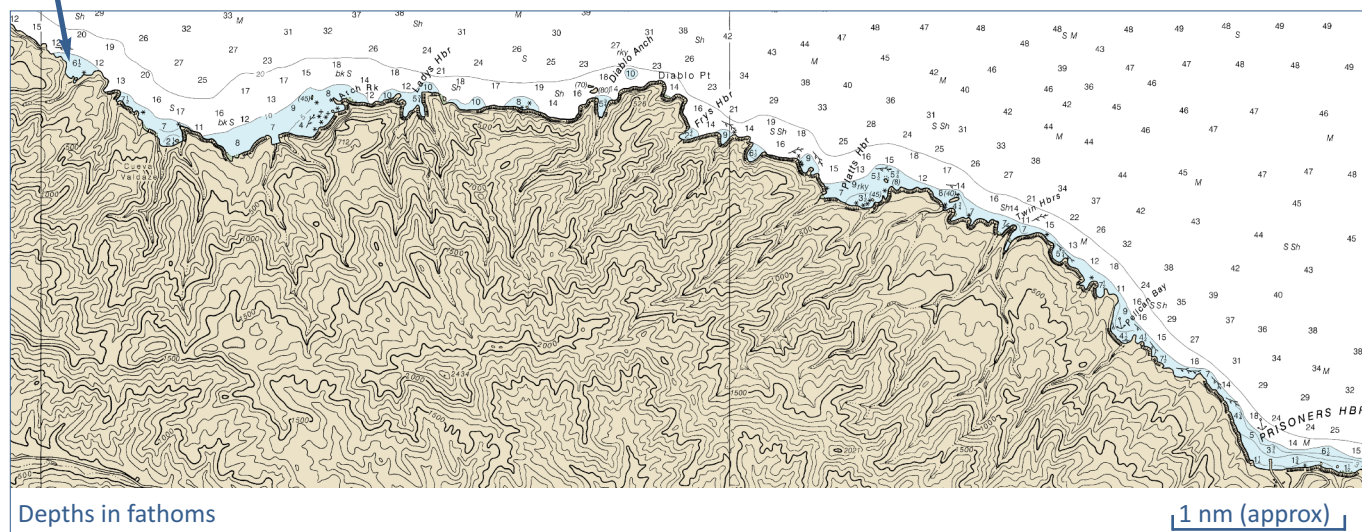
Ashore

Prisoners is the dividing point between National Park Service and Nature Conservancy land on Santa Cruz, so you can go ashore and hike to the east from Prisoners without restriction, or to the west if you have a Nature Conservancy permit.



West End - North Coast Anchorages

Hazards Anchorage



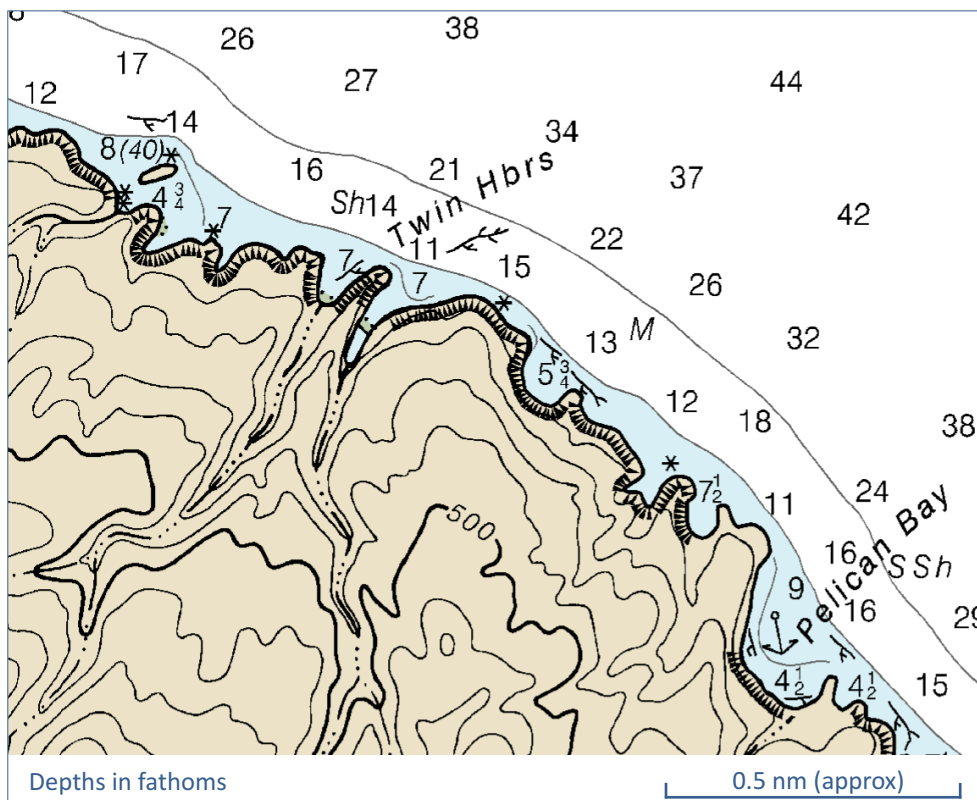
West of Prisoners there is a string of lovely anchorages, perhaps the best on Santa Cruz: Pelican Bay and Fry's are the best known, with Twin Harbors, Orizaba and Platt's in between. But they are small and there are always other boats there on weekends. You can't really count on them, but if you are lucky and you find them uncrowded, they are well worth a stop. They are well described in the cruising guides.

Twin Harbors

34° 02'.6N 119° 43'.0W

Twin Harbors is a pair of adjacent anchorages northwest of the heavily used Pelican. They are very snug and the guides are a bit negative, particularly about the western bay. However, in settled winds and a forecast W swell of less than 2m outside it is possible to find shelter here. Anchor to lie in the centre of the pool in 6-9m, with a second anchor to restrict your swing.

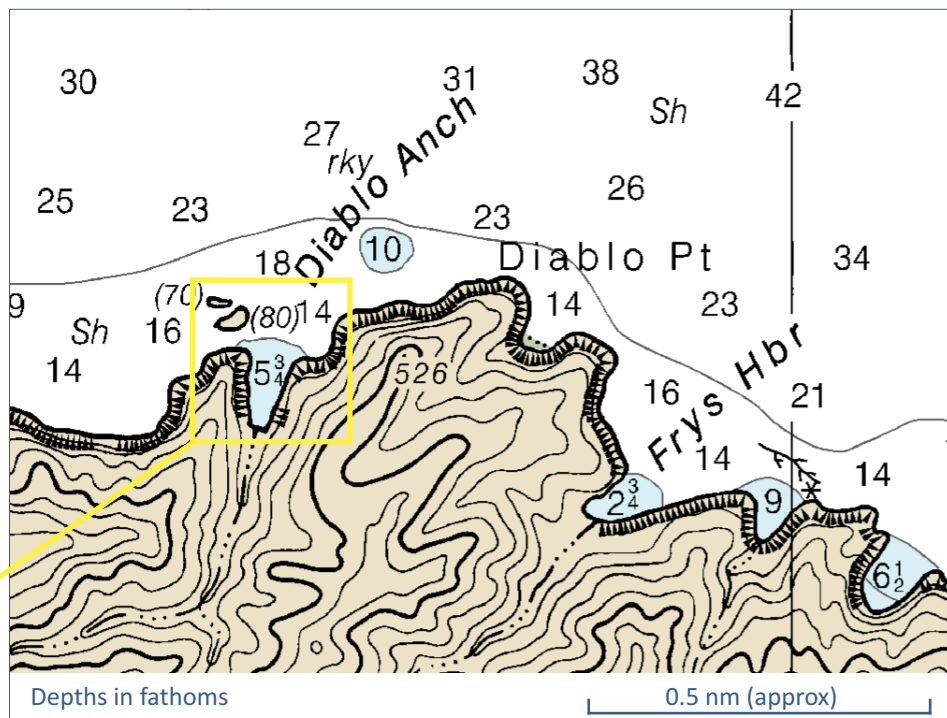
The east side of Twin Harbors is also very small, about one-boat size like its twin, but slightly more tucked in.



Diablo

34° 03'.4N 119° 45'.9W

West of Diablo Point there are far fewer boats and you start to find solitude and a special cruising ground. Immediately west of the point is Diablo anchorage. You enter east of an easily identifiable white rock (guano) and find yourself in a narrow slit of a canyon. There is really only room for one boat in the inner harbour, though a second can lie out towards the mouth. The shelter is excellent, except from due N, with little or no surge.



Fish Rock

Fish Rock



The beach at Diablo; the fish is visible on the right

A second anchor is a wise precaution, even when alone, because the cove is too narrow to swing. The W wind outside tends to bounce back off the eastern wall of the canyon and blows you towards the western side. Drop the anchor level with the cave on the west side and fall back level with a semi-detached tropical fish-like rock on the west rock face (you will see what I mean), in about 8m or a little further out, depths level with the cave are about 11m +/- tide.

The other way is to come down the east side of the anchorage, turn to starboard close to the beach, drop

your stern anchor first in about 5m and then set your bow anchor, facing out of the cove and settling out at the fish or the cave, whichever you prefer. The wind can blow down the canyon in some conditions, particularly at night, so you may find yourself lying to your stern anchor.

Great atmosphere, with interesting sea lions and pelicans to keep you company. 'Capt. Dan' ([Sail Channel Islands Guide](#)) notes that the wind can bounce off the side walls, putting strain at right angles to the line of the anchors.



Looking towards the Diablo entrance

Lady's and Little Lady's

34° 03'.3N 119° 47'.3W

Next along the rugged coast to the west is another pair of terrific anchorages. Lady's is rather like Diablo, snug with good shelter from W wind and swell. It is another tight fit and ideally you want it to yourself. Holding is satisfactory in 6-8m (20-25'), though there is kelp. Use a stern anchor as the wind also tends to bounce off the E cliff or even blow down the canyon from the S.

Little Lady's

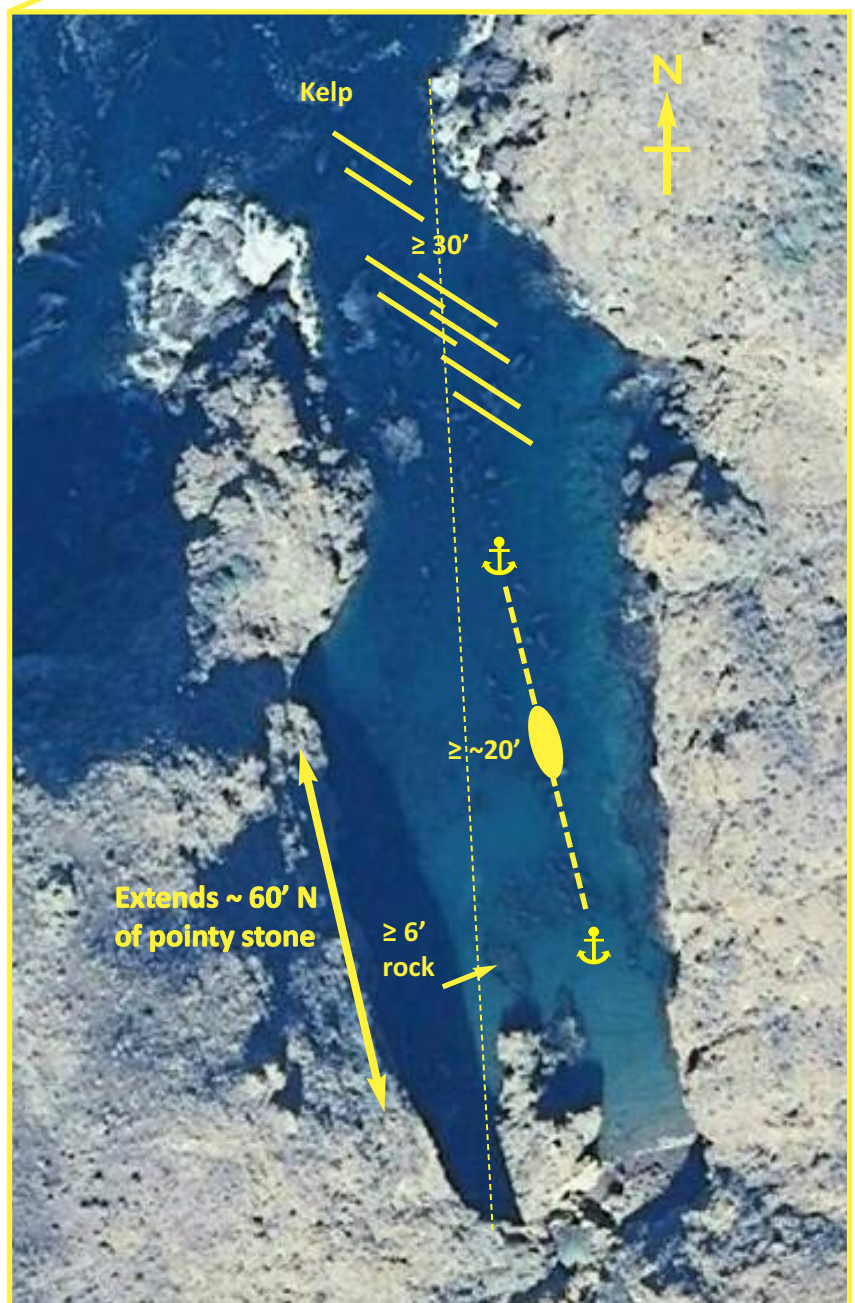
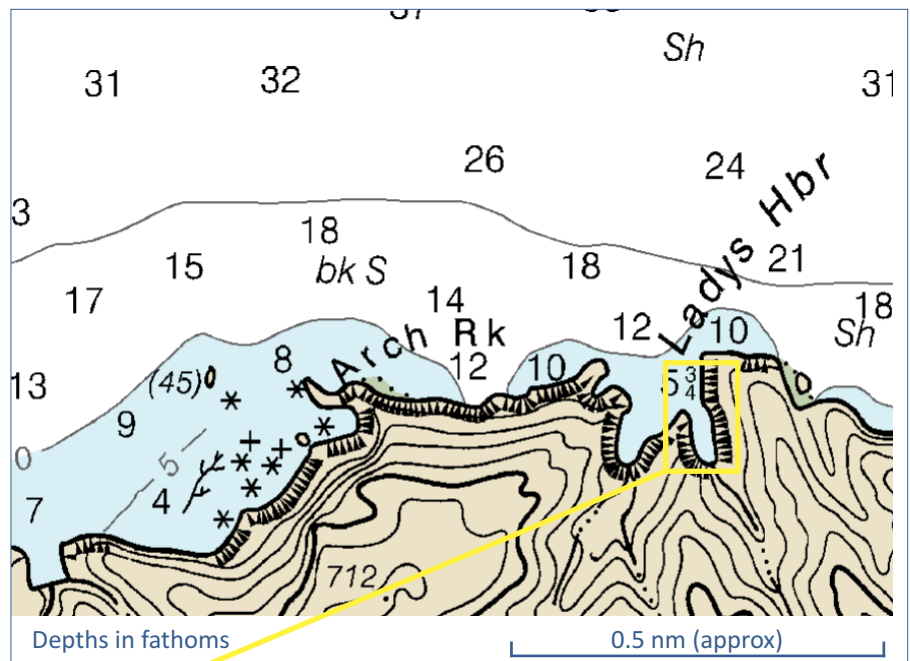
Just E off the entrance to Lady's there is another tiny anchorage, Little Lady's, running almost N-S. It is a very intriguing day anchorage, but you would want settled weather and little swell to risk it overnight. There is not enough room to turn if there is another boat inside.

The entrance is deep but encumbered with kelp; the W side is slightly better. The pool is well sheltered, with not much surge, at least in settled conditions. You would want to drop your anchor only just inside the entrance, to fall back into the middle of the pool.

Beware going too far S, and lay out a stern anchor down the E side of the pool to keep the boat away from a rock, minimum depth around 1.8m (6'), on the W side of the anchorage one to two boat lengths N of the shore in the SW corner. The rock lies on a line between the SW beach, E of the rock that splits the beach, and the point to the NE of the entrance.



Note this image from 2013 Google Earth showing relative lowness of tide and visible rocks.

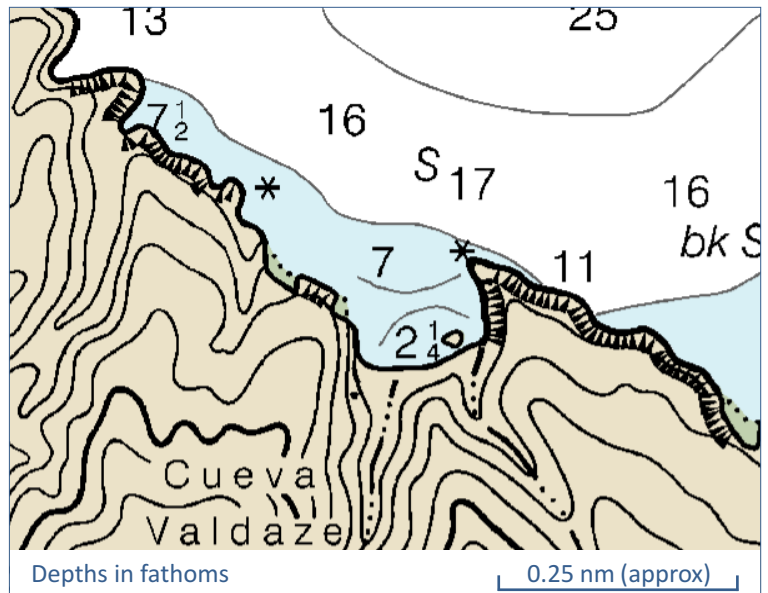


Cueva Valdaze

34° 03'.2N 119° 49'.1W

West of Lady's there are two other useable anchorages on the N coast of Santa Cruz. The first, Cueva Valdaze (often referred to as Valdez), is spacious and easy to access. You don't need a stern anchor if you are there alone. It is pleasant ashore, with a sandy beach with shingle at the top and interesting rock formations and caves. But it is roly! The W swell and wind curve so that they blow straight into the anchorage. It is tenable, though not very comfortable, in 15-20 knots of wind outside and less than 1m (2-3') swell, and it does calm down at night if/as the wind drops. It is best in fair weather and is not as good as Diablo or Lady's, but a useful alternative if they are full.

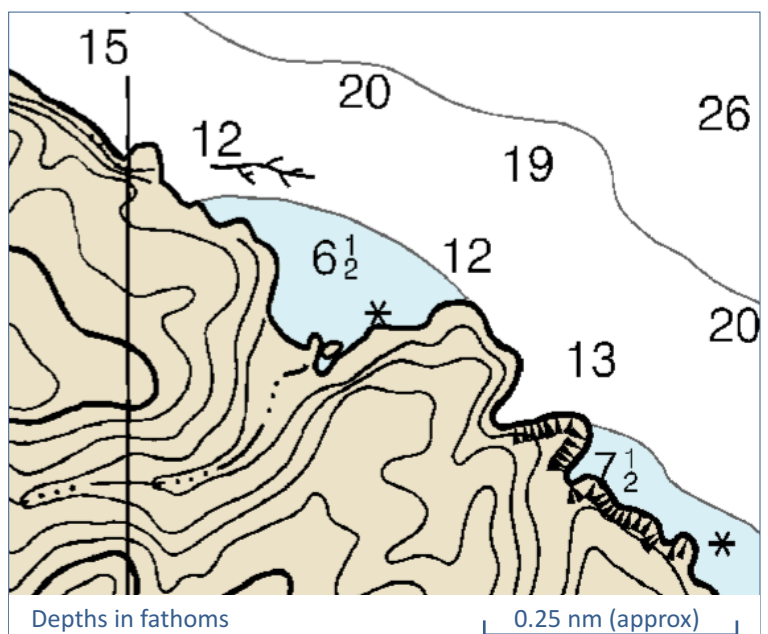
Fagan says: "...a huge rock (least depth 5 feet) ... lies just below the surface about 150 feet from the mouth of the cave approximately the same distance from the beach."



Hazard's

34° 03'.6N 119° 49'.8W

Despite its name, this pleasant anchorage has surprisingly good shelter from the W wind, though it too is roly. Good depths of 6-8m (20-25') and good holding, despite kelp.

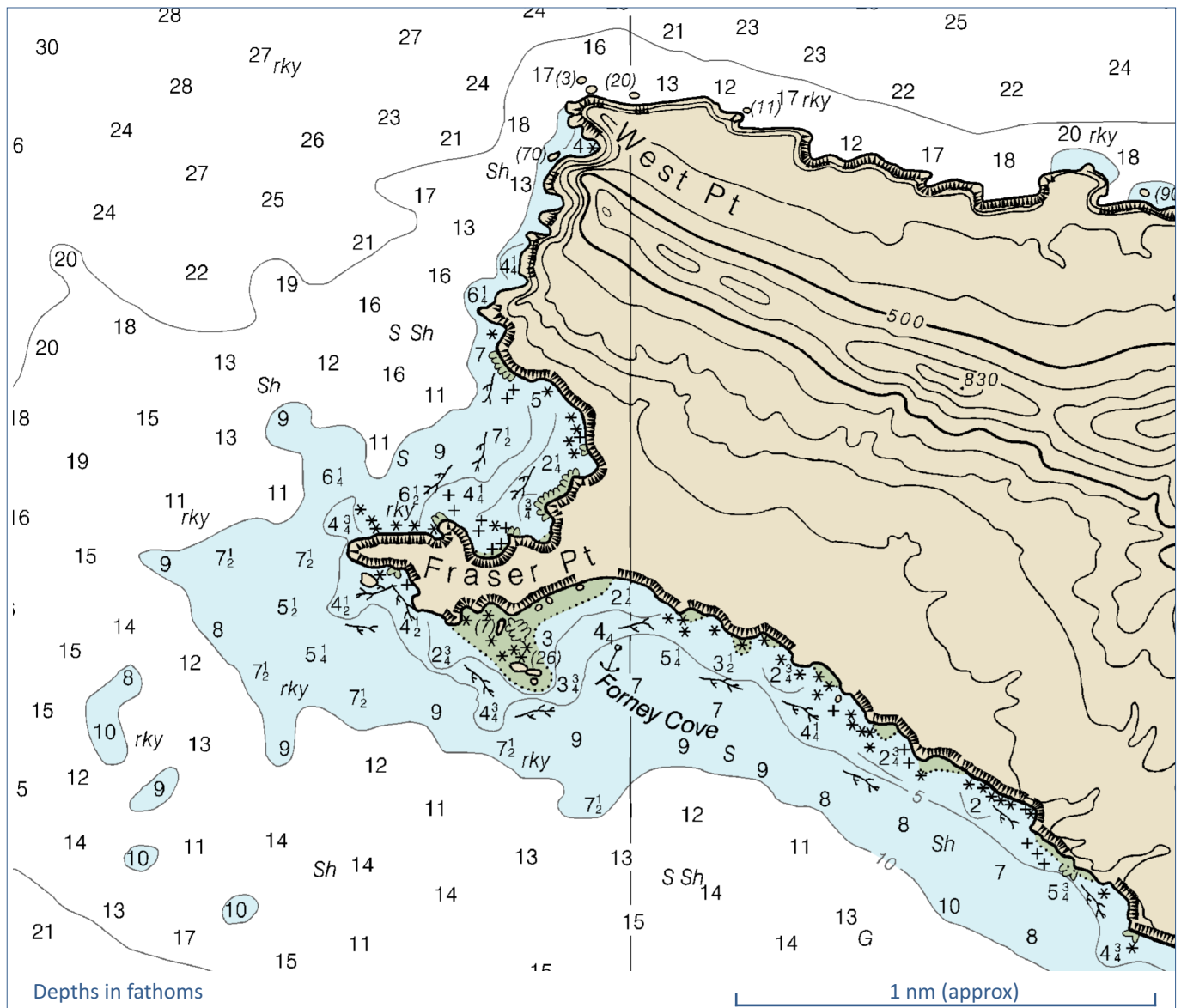


Forney's Cove

34° 03'.4N 119° 55'.1W

At the western tip of Santa Cruz, this anchorage is formed by a cluster of rocks, extending southwards from the headland, that break the swell from the west. If there is a very big swell running, it might not be well enough protected, but it is tenable in a 1-1.5m (3-5') W swell.

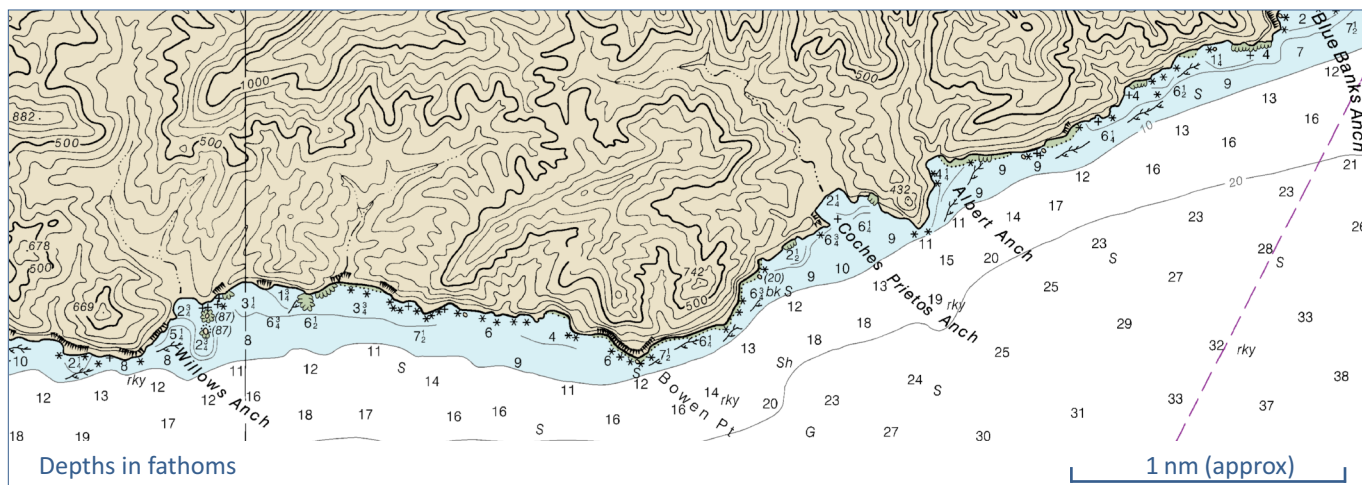
On the approach, beware of the Potato Patch, a shallow patch offshore from Fraser Point, well marked on the chart and tending to create short breaking seas. Entrance to Forney's itself is relatively straightforward. Head due north on 119° 55'W, picking your way through the kelp. Anchor in around 7-9m (25-30').



Santa Cruz Channel

Several areas in the Santa Cruz Channel between Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa can be rough when a stiff breeze is blowing against the current. It pays to keep an eye out for the less choppy areas and steer a course through those.

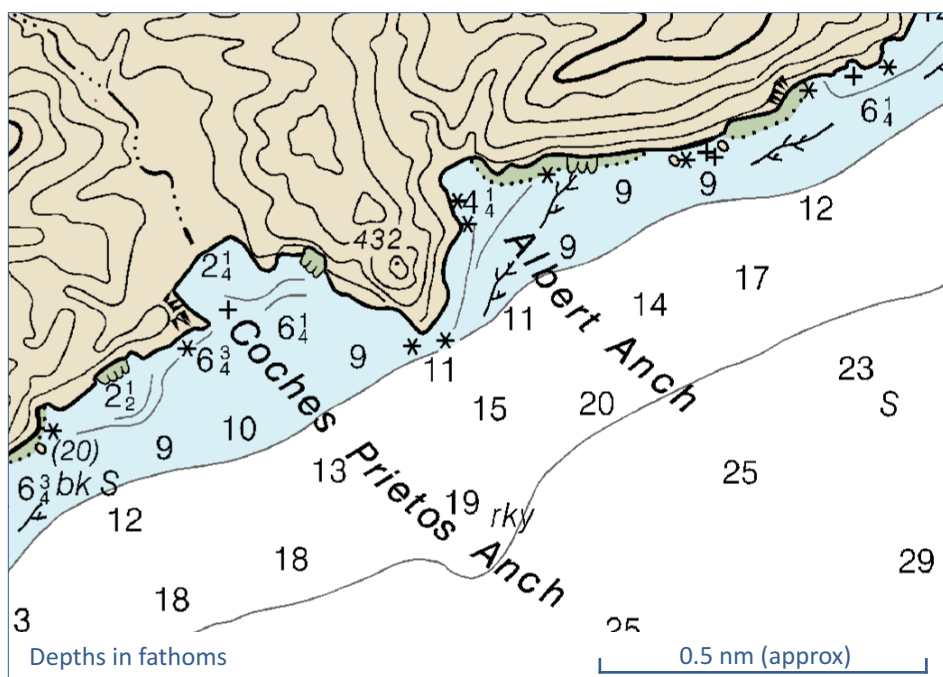
West End - South Coast Anchorages



The south coast of Santa Cruz has a rather different feel from the north. It is still rugged, but the anchorages lose the sun in the late afternoon, so by the time you are anchoring it can seem a bit gloomy. You would think that this side would give good protection, which it generally does from the wind, but the swell still curls along the south side and the anchorages can be roly.

Be aware that you may not be able to pick up weather forecasts on VHF on this side of the island and it is likely you will have no mobile phone signal.

Heading West along the south coast:



Albert's

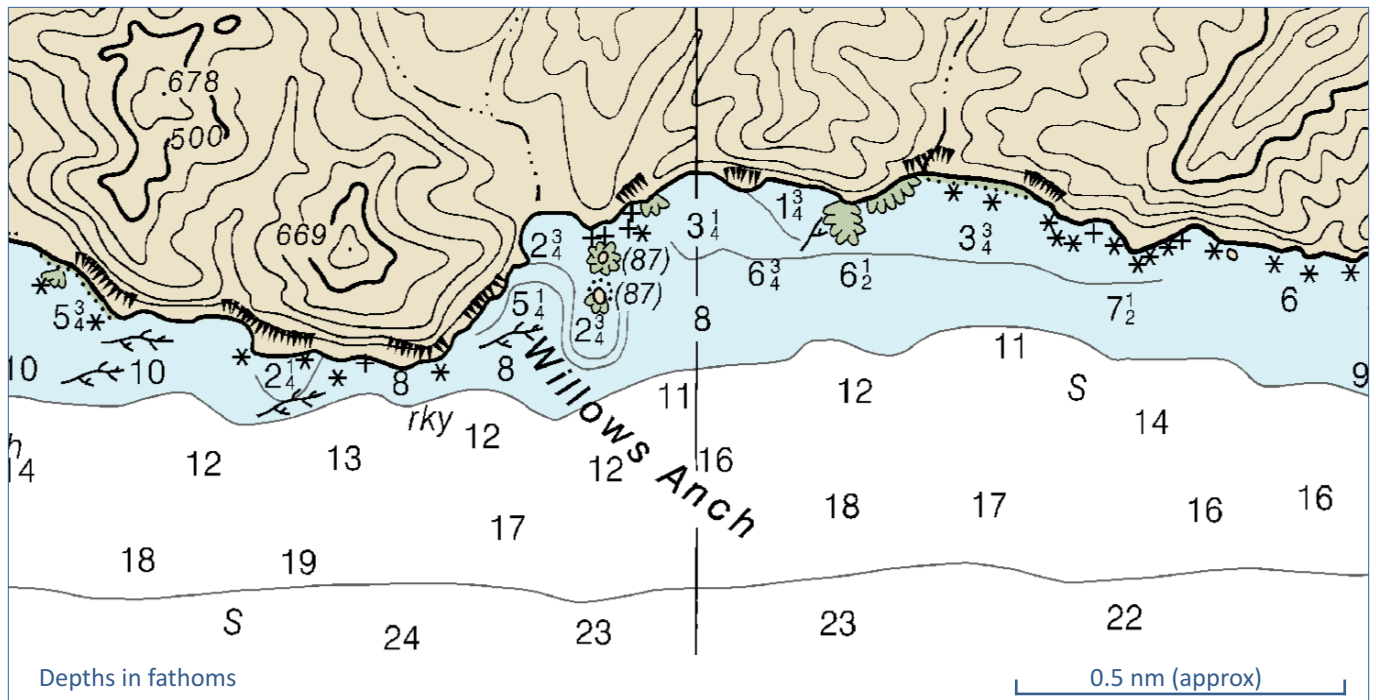
33° 58'.2N 119° 41'.9W

About 7M W of Sandstone Point is Albert's. This is likely to be less crowded and therefore preferable to the outer anchorage at Coches Prietos, next door, with less swell and better protection from SW. It is comfortable in gusty W-NW. Stay fairly deep (10m (35') plus) to stay out of the surge. The sun goes behind the hill early, but it is very pretty in the morning. You can land on the beach, which is sandy.

Coches Prietos

33° 57'.9N 119° 42'.6W

Just west of Albert's, Coches Prietos is the prettiest anchorage on the south coast and is popular enough to be off-putting, but it has a lovely inner pool. See Fagan for details. The pool gets crowded on the weekends and if you can get in you would definitely need a stern anchor. The outer anchorage is deep (~15m (50')) but surprisingly comfortable, and most boats use only a single anchor. Sheltered from W through NE or so. Note that there is an E stream on the flood.



Willow's

33° 57.7N 119° 45.1W

Less than 3M further west, the other well-known anchorage is Willow's. There are two central islands and you can anchor on either side of them. The west side is the prettier of the two, but both sides are attractive and the east side keeps the afternoon sun for a bit longer. East side depths are around 11m (35').



The rugged coastline on the south side of Santa Cruz Island

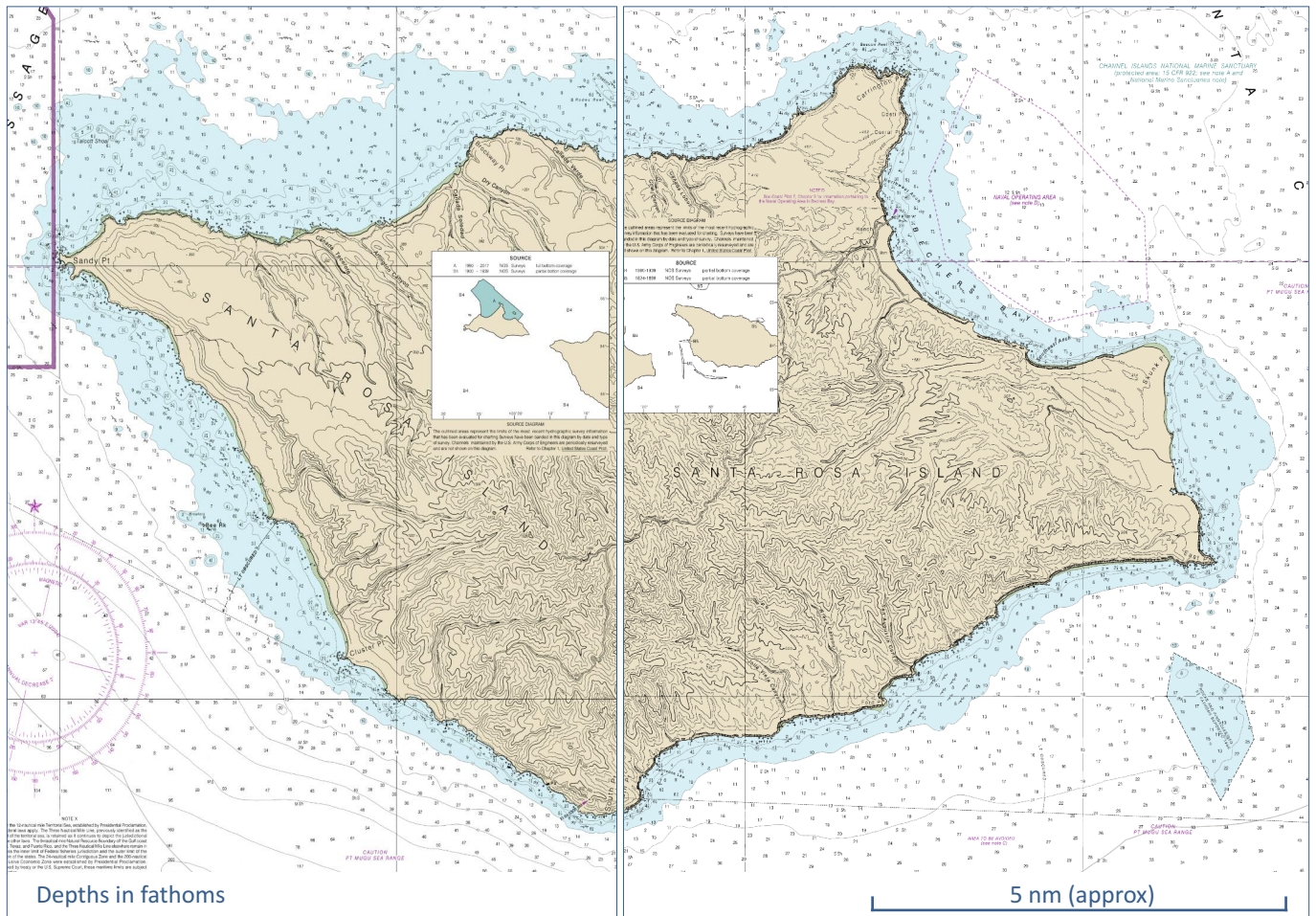
By Robert Schwemmer, CINMS, NOS, NOAA., Public domain/Wikimedia Commons

Santa Rosa Island

As you approach Santa Rosa, west of Santa Cruz Island the conditions become more rugged.
Santa Rosa is a National Park Service island.

<https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/things-to-do-santa-rosa-island.htm>

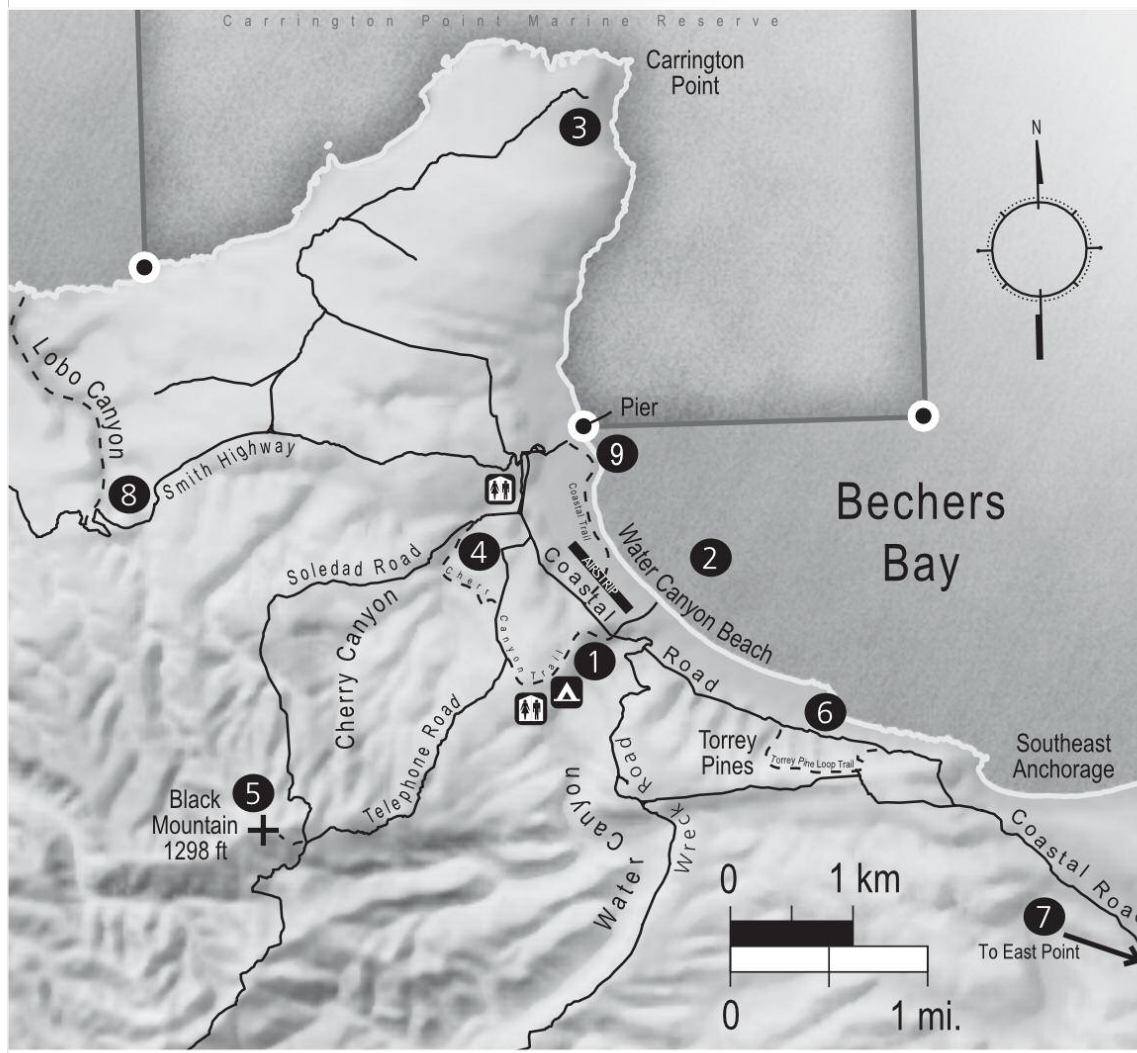
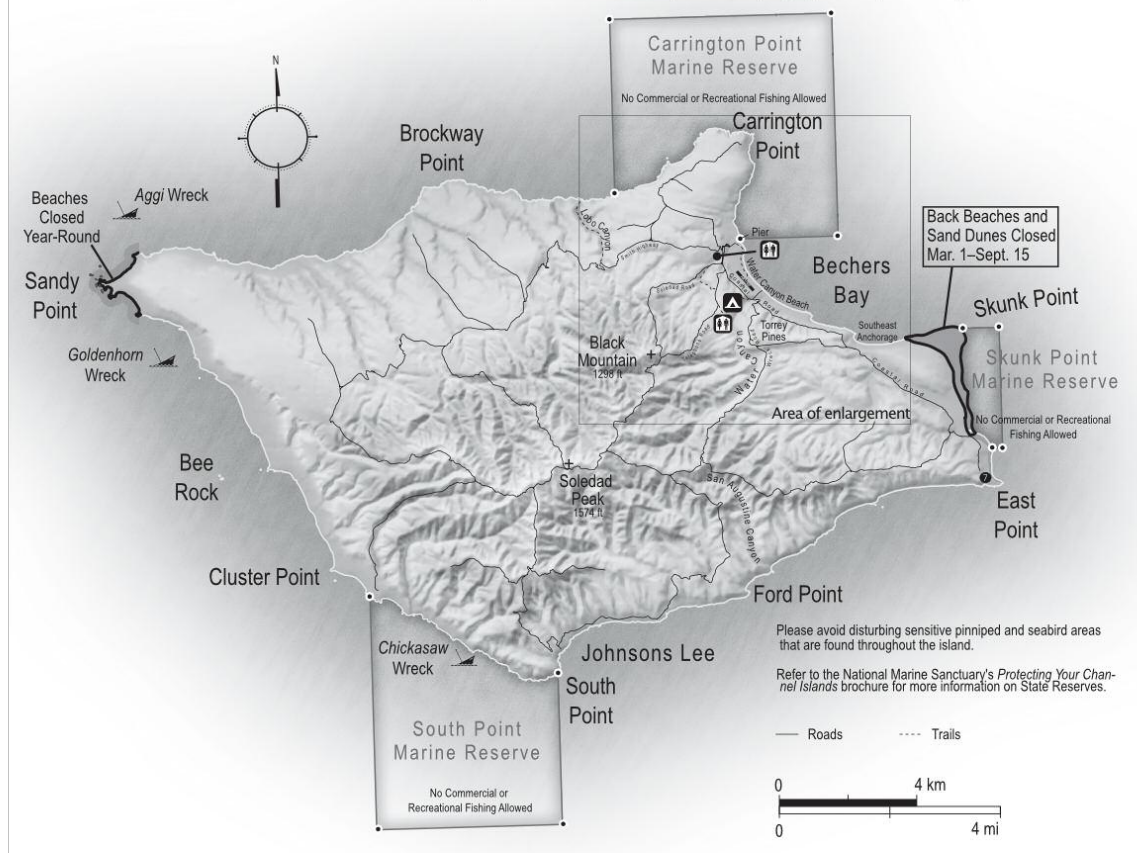
You can hike here: <https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/upload/sri-hiking-map-and-guide-24x36-2021-low-res-web.pdf>



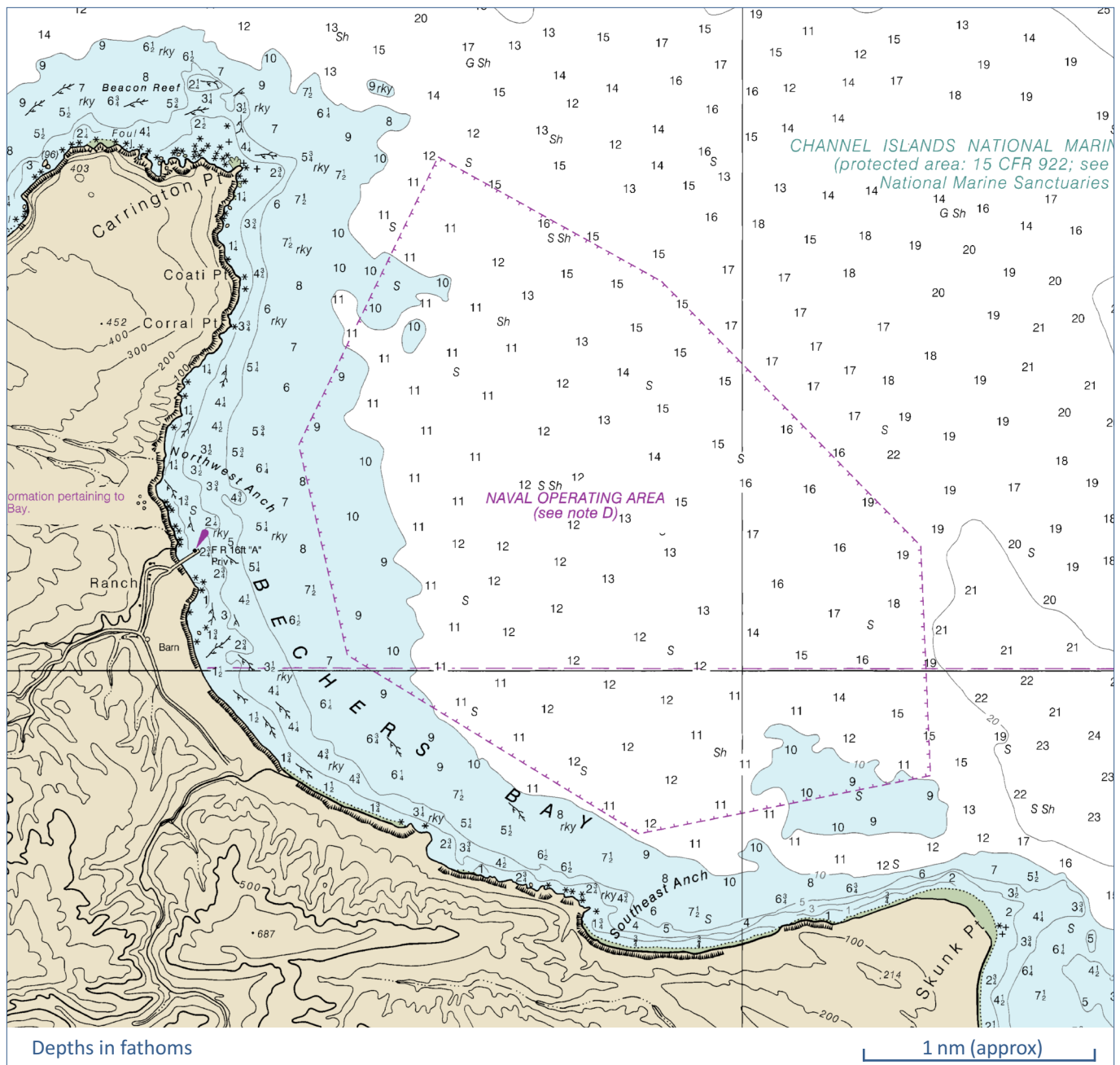
Bechers Bay -
Water Canyon Beach with
endemic Torrey Pines
(*Pinus torreyana* var.
insularis) on hills, and cliffs
with Coastal sage scrub
habitat

By Derek Lohuis, National
Park Service, Public
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Commons

MAPS ARE NOT FOR NAVIGATION: These maps are for reference only. Use a topographic map for navigation.



Source - National Park Service



Bechers Bay (Northwest Anchorage)

34° 00'.6N 120° 02'.7W

Bechers Bay is the main anchorage at the east end of the island. This is a long, open bay with a nice sandy shore. The Northwest Anchorage is quite good, with little swell. The wind may blow hard off the island, but the holding appears to be good in sand. Off the pier, amongst the kelp, is fine in about 7.5m (25'), but not very picturesque.

You could move further S along the beach and pick your spot pretty much anywhere, according to conditions.

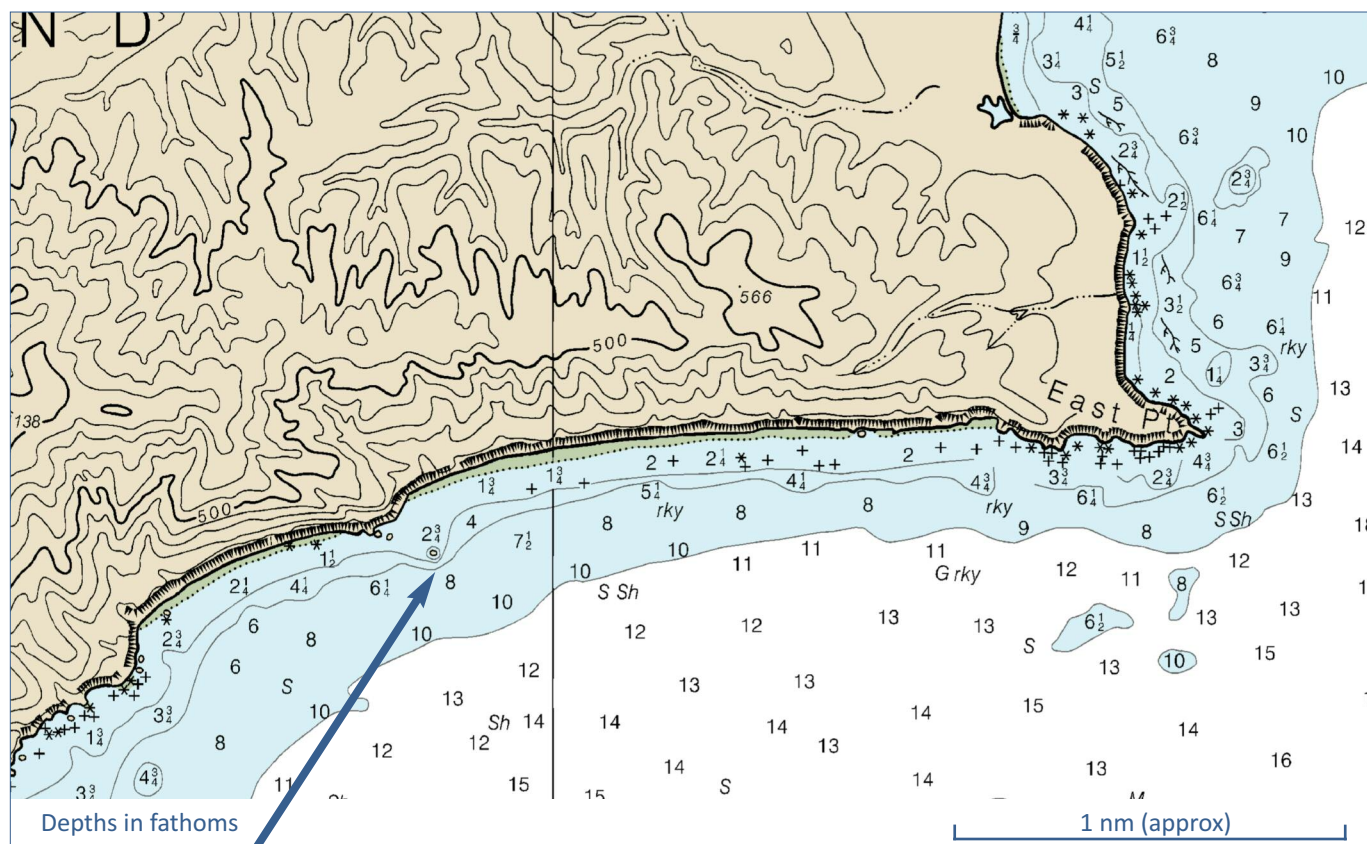
The Southeast Anchorage is a pretty corner of Bechers Bay – a little nick in the shoreline before it runs out eastwards to Skunk Point. But it is shallow, so you cannot tuck yourself very far in. In low swell conditions,

this is a good spot, but it is likely to be roly in any significant swell. More significantly, when it is breezy the wind bends parallel to the coast, turning a W or NW wind in the East Santa Barbara Channel into a N wind down the Santa Cruz Channel and into the anchorage, making it very exposed. So it is really only a lunch stop or for very settled conditions. Kelp extends SE from the northern point of the anchorage.

Capt. Dan has a good video about the anchorages in the southern half of Bechers Bay and hiking ashore to see the Torrey Pines:

<https://sailchannelislands.com/santa-rosa-southeast-anchorage/>

There are some anchorages on the south side of Santa Rosa, probably the best-known being Johnson's Lee. Fagan lists a temporary or fair weather anchorage just SE of Sandy Point at the W end of Santa Rosa and US chart 18727 shows a small anchorage in the bay immediately NW of this. But the whole area is encumbered with kelp from about the 30m (15 fathom) contour and looks subject to surge as well.



Eagle Rock

33° 56'.3N 120° 00'.3W

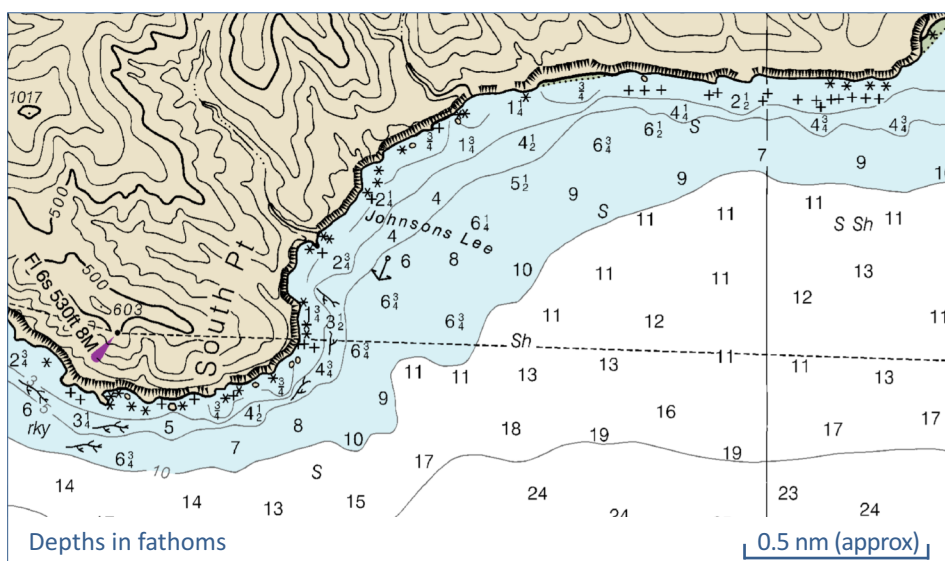
Eagle Rock is also sometimes listed as an anchorage, but it is more of a roadstead than a bay. Best for settled weather. Like anchorages on the south coast of Santa Cruz it is subject to surge, and there are substantial gusts off the cliffs in strong westerlies. Neither the bay nor Eagle Rock itself – low and white on top from guano – are very conspicuous as you approach, though there is another more conspicuously white rock close inshore.

Johnson's Lee

33° 54'.1N 120° 06'.2W

This is a better anchorage. The big, open bay is pleasant enough, but not spectacular, but it provides good shelter from wind and swell. There is only one building left onshore now and the pier has pretty much disappeared. A Coast Guard buoy is there sometimes but not always, in about 18m (60').

The problem here is kelp: Shelter from the wind seems better north of a line from the buoy (if it is there) to the building, but the kelp is thick in that area. There is an open pool south of this line, with the building bearing about 335° magnetic and the buoy 075° magnetic, +/- a few degrees. Here you are in front of the prominent, v-shaped mouth of a canyon, which could create a funnel effect in stronger offshore winds.



100%

y Southern California standards.

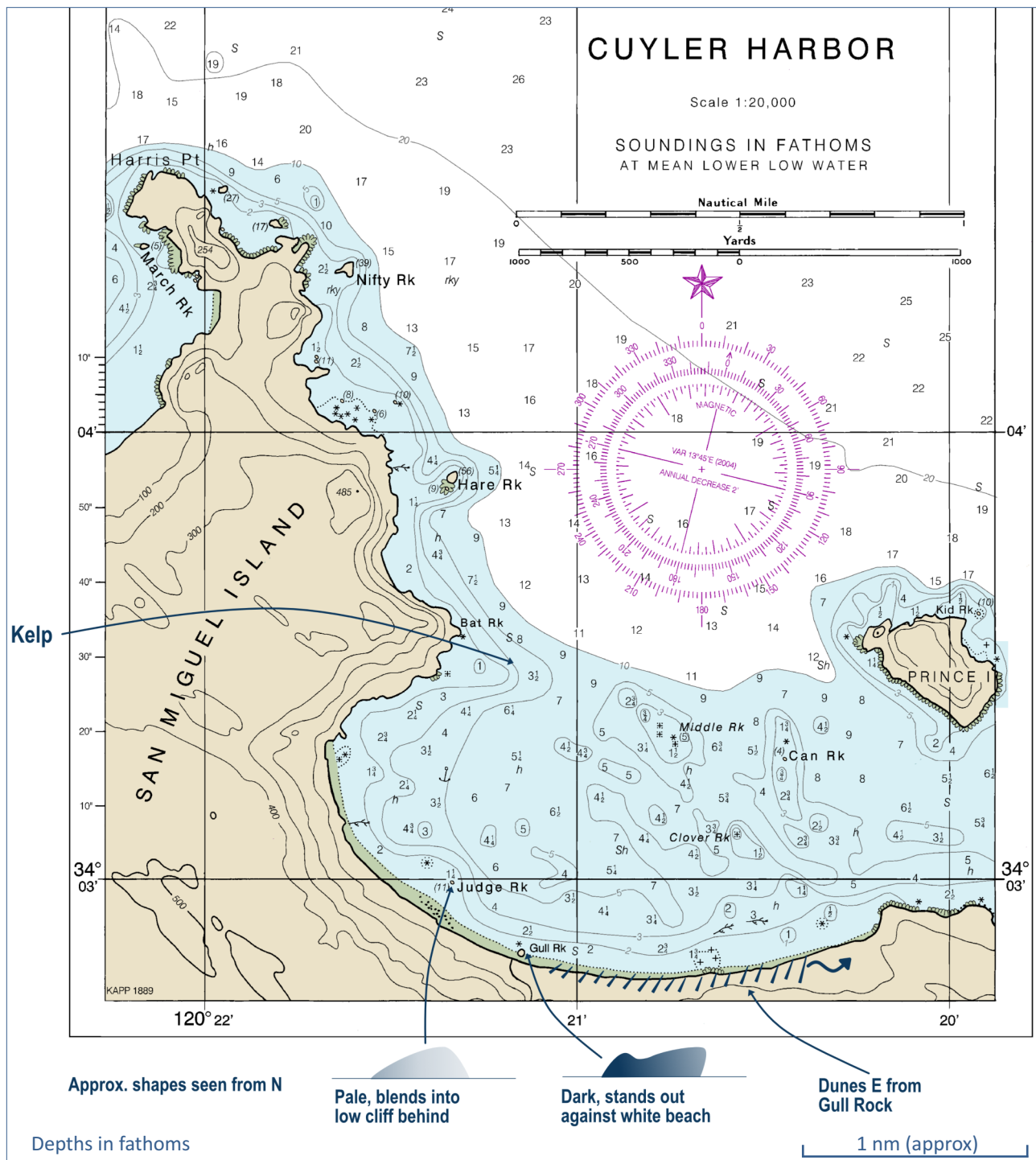


<https://www.nps.gov/common/utilities/sendmail/sendemail.cfm?o=68ADF288A2FFA0BB9DA807A6FA048BA3568E088853A0&r=/chis/planyourvisit/san-miguel-things-to-do.htm>
[this is an online form] prior to their mainland departure to arrange for an escorted hike by a ranger. Provide your name, phone number, vessel name, and dates of requested escorted hike. Park staff will then reply with available dates and instructions.

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This may all seem like a hassle, but it is worth it. The island is lovely, the rangers are interesting and knowledgeable and the information they share enriches the hike. There is a particularly good 15-mile hike to Point Bennett or, more accurately, the dunes looking down over Adams Cove at the W end of San Miguel, where elephant seals and sea lions breed. The island also has some small foxes, unique to San Miguel, which you may see on a hike.





Cuyler Harbor

34° 03'.3N 120° 21'.4W

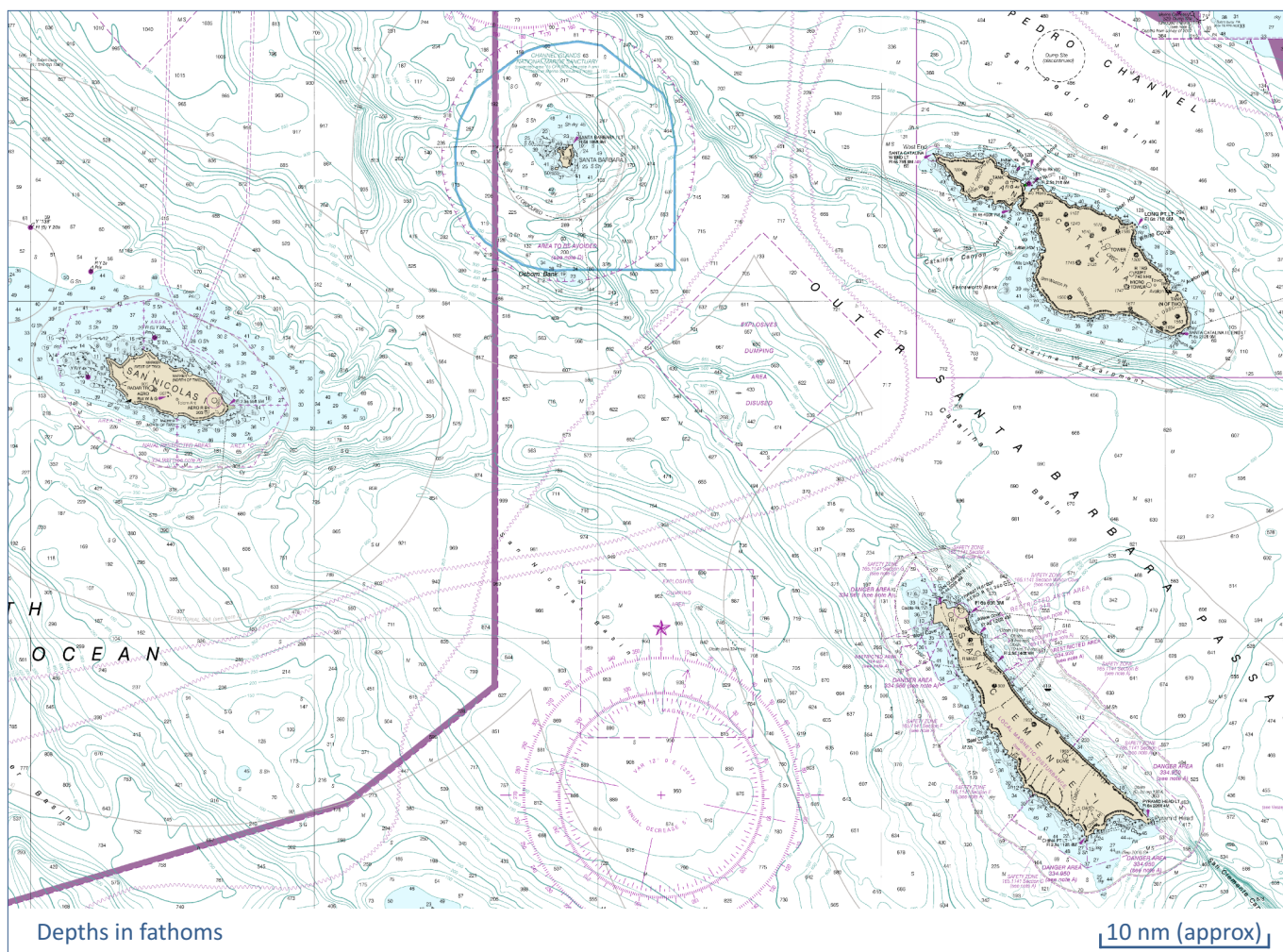
The main anchorage is Cuyler Harbor. It provides good shelter and very good holding in sand in 8-11m (25-35'). The bay can be entered day or night, steering due S on 120° 21'.0W. Kelp extends ESE from Bat Rock; turn W into the anchorage once you are clear S of this kelp, then tuck up into NW corner for an anchoring spot, along the beach N of the palm trees (NNW of the marked anchorage on the chart). At night, turn W at 34° 03'.3N.

On approach, in daylight, Gull Rock is dark against the white sand where the dunes begin, a slightly jagged, square-ish shape. Judge Rock is rounded in shape and pale; it tends to blend into the rocks on the beach and the pale, low cliff behind. See sketches on attached chart, extracted for NOAA chart 18727.

The wind tends to blow harder in the anchorage, down off the cliffs, than outside, but the bay does a good job of killing the swell. No need for a stern anchor.

Land on the beach near the two palm trees. If you walk S along the beach you will find a trail leading up the canyon to the plateau on top of the island. Forking left at the top of the steps takes you to the ranger station and the Cabrillo lookout point; the Portuguese explorer Cabrillo, sailing for Spain, is alleged to have died here in 1543.

Southern Group - Santa Barbara, Catalina, San Nicolas and San Clemente



The southern islands of note are the tiny Santa Barbara Island and its much larger neighbour, Santa Catalina Island.
NOTE: San Nicolas and San Clemente are closed to yachts.



The only dock on Santa Barbara Island

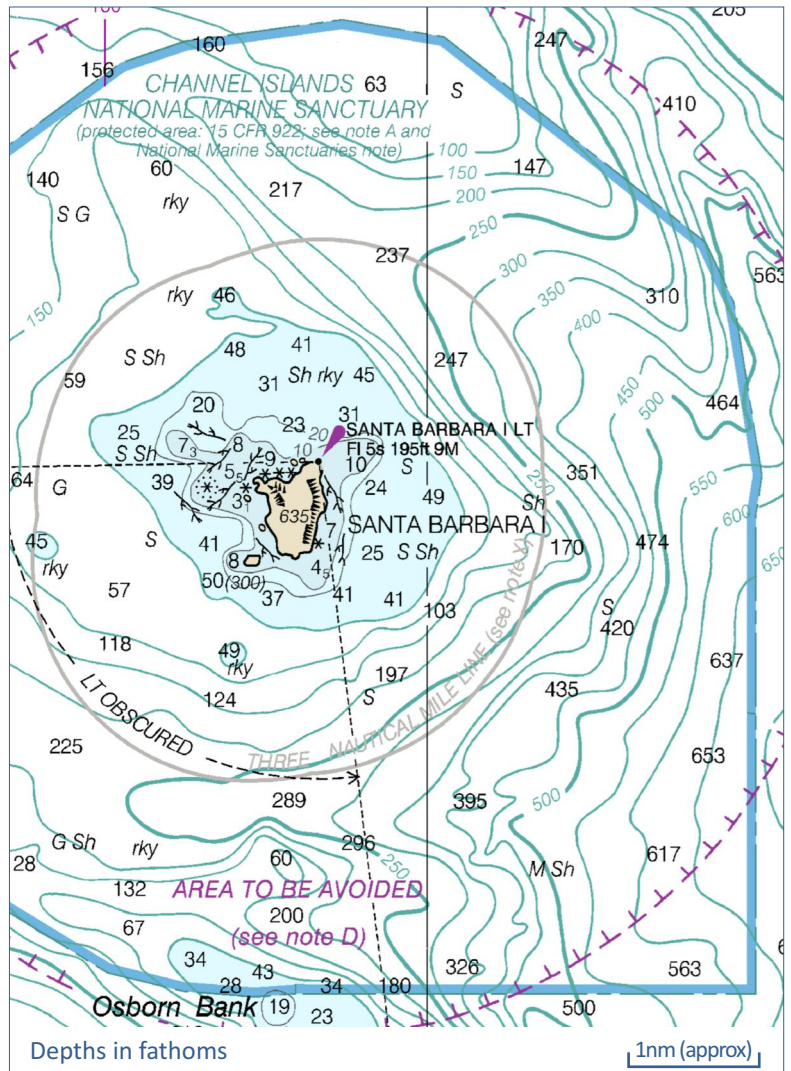
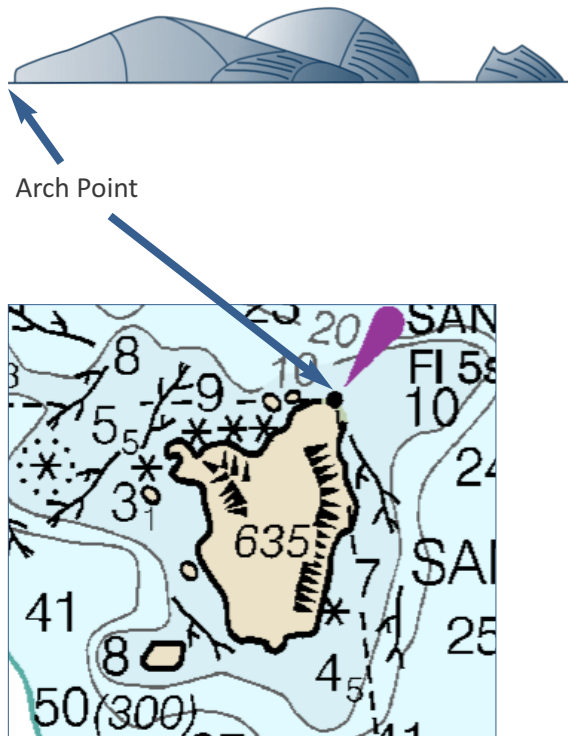
By Brian MacIntosh, Wikimedia
 Commons/CC BY-SA 4.0

Santa Barbara Island

This little gem is a National Park Service island. It gives the same remote feeling as San Miguel and Santa Rosa. There are lovely seabirds and a lot of very noisy sea lions.

<https://www.nps.gov/chis/planyourvisit/santa-barbara-island.htm>

Santa Barbara Island from NNW



Santa Barbara Island Anchorage

33° 29.1N 119° 01.6W

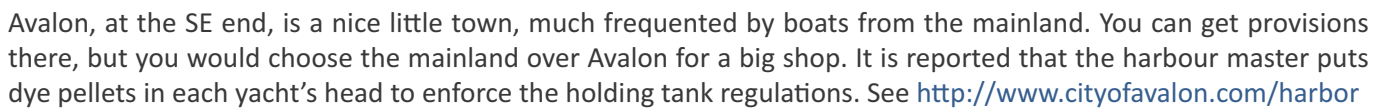
The anchorage is on the E side of the island. It is deep, in 9-15m (30-45') or more. Some swell comes round Arch Point, so the S end of the anchorage is more favourable. But it is a trade-off between comfort and the sea lion noise. It is quieter further N in the anchorage.



This photo shows the whole anchorage. The landing stage is towards the left under the arrow. Taken as a panorama, it does not appear as snug as it really is.

You can land by ladder (beware of the sea lions) and climb up to the top of the island where there is a ranger station.

<https://www.visitcalifornia.com/uk/destination/spotlight-santa-catalina-island>



Two Harbors

Two Harbors is the other main place to anchor. As the name implies it actually provides two anchorages, one to the northeast of the narrow isthmus that almost cuts Catalina in two, the other to the southwest. Either side you may be able to get a mooring from the harbour master; if not you just have to anchor as best you can.

The northern anchorage, called Isthmus Cove, gets very crowded and is roly.



Two Harbors Catalina Island by Don Ramey Logan.jpg - looking south

By Don Ramey Logan/Wikimedia Commons/CC-BY 4.0



Two Harbors Catalina north side of the island by Don Ramey Logan.jpg

- Isthmus Cove

By Don Ramey Logan
Wikimedia Commons
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Catalina Harbor (Cat Harbor)

33° 25'.7N 118° 30'.7W

The southern anchorage, known locally as Cat Harbor, can also be crowded but is the better of the two. The entrance can be hard to spot if you are coming from the W end of the island, but just as you begin to doubt it opens up between the cliffs in a rather exciting way. Anchor in the outer part.

It is a short walk from one side of the isthmus to the other. There is a bar and restaurant on the Isthmus Cove side. see <https://www.visitcatalinaisland.com/things-to-do/two-harbors/boating/>



Two Harbors Catalina south side of the island by Don Ramey Logan.jpg

By Don Ramey Logan/Wikimedia Commons/CC-BY 4.0