

**Exploring Santa Cruz Island  
With Anacapa Yacht Club  
Presented By Joe Underwood**

**Boaters information  
Santa Cruz Island**

Private boaters may land on the eastern 24% of Santa Cruz Island without a permit at any time. This area is owned by the National Park Service and is east of the property line between Prisoners Harbor on the north side and Valley Anchorage on the south side. Boaters may contact the Santa Cruz Island ranger via VHF Channel 16 for information prior to landing. A landing pier is available at Scorpion, but dingies are not to be left tied to the pier. Boaters should be prepared for beach landings at all other island locations. Due to surf and swell conditions, boaters should use extreme caution when making surf-landings at any beach, especially Smugglers Cove and those beaches facing south and southeast between San Pedro Point and Valley Anchorage. Buoys are reserved for the National Park Service and the U.S. Coast Guard.

A permit to land on the western 74% of Santa Cruz Island is required from The Nature Conservancy. A fee is charged and no overnight island use is permitted. It may take 10-12 days to process the request. Permit applications are available at the Channel Islands National Park Visitor Center or by contacting the Santa Cruz Island Preserve, P.O. Box 23259, Santa Barbara, CA 93121, 805-964-7839

Special fishing and closure regulations apply to several areas within Channel Islands National Park and Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. Please refer to the National Marine Sanctuary Program Synopsis of Regulations brochure, available at the Channel Islands National Park Visitor Center, for maps and specific information. To protect the island wildlife, including the island foxes from introduced disease and parasites dogs and other pets are not allowed ashore on any of the islands

The prices of landing permits are  
\$70 for an annual permit ending on December 31 no matter when you purchase the permit.  
\$30 for a one month permit.

From the source I received my information make sure that you get your permits at least two weeks before your trip if you are intending to go ashore.

## **A brief synopsis of Santa Cruz Island and the anchorages around the Island**

Santa Cruz Island, 20-something miles south of Santa Barbara, probably boasts more snug anchorages than any other island or section of the West Coast directly exposed to the sea. No matter what the weather conditions are, you can always find a welcome lee.

This is no small wonder: at 62,500 acres, Santa Cruz is the largest offshore island between Mexico and Canada. And with nearly 100 miles of shoreline, it is a cruiser's delight.

Santa Cruz Island is so big that it has several microclimates, which harbor distinctive flora and fauna. On the north shore, pines sometimes run to the edge of precipitous cliffs; on the south side, sharp-spined cactuses pepper the rolling hills. Inland, springs gurgle year-round in wooded canyons, often cascading into rocky pools fringed with ferns.

From the sea, the island has two faces: one craggy and rugged; the other soft and gentle. In a way, the island is also two destinations. The north shore is a popular stopover for coastal cruisers making their way south. It is also an ideal destination from Santa Barbara. From there, sailors often can approach on a beam reach. Boaters from Ventura and Oxnard can quarter across to the north shore -- or head around the east end into the huge lee at Smuggler's Cove, on the south side.

The south, or back side, of Santa Cruz Island is an ideal destination for island-hoppers approaching from the south. Cruisers often use this side as a steppingstone to other destinations.

The south side offers a long stretch of sheltered water at least as far as Gulf Island, off the southwest corner. From there, cruisers can cross between Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa islands or cut through the passage and quarter toward Point Conception, the gateway to Central California's cruising grounds. Boaters with less time can slip across the channel and spend a night in Santa Barbara.

Covering the dozens of anchorages at Santa Cruz Island could fill a book, so instead, we'll take a look at the most attractive ones. Some are popular, while others are little-used.

## **The North Shore**

Forney's Cove, at the island's northwest tip, is perhaps the wildest place to anchor at Santa Cruz. Since it lies just around the west end and can be a vital refuge for boaters cruising the north shore, it heads the list of anchorages -- even though it is a south side location.

Just offshore from Forney's, waves, winds and currents clash in what has been dubbed the Potato Patch. The sound of heavy surf often rumbles over the low peninsula, which forms the protective arm of the anchorage. But inside the cove, the water is usually surprisingly quiet.

With good timing, dinghy landings are easy, provided the surf is moderate. You must have a landing permit to go ashore on the western nine-tenths of the island, however. Permits are available through the Nature Conservancy at (805) 964-7839. They include a list of sensible rules.

Past West Point sprawls a spectacular stretch of coast, with dark, looming cliffs and intriguing caves.

Painted Cave is said to be the world's largest navigable sea cave. It is some 130 feet high at the entrance and extends back about 1,200 feet. The cave gets its name from the green algae and multicolored mineral deposits lining its walls.

Dinghies can be launched to explore the inner chamber of Painted Cave. Watch the cave for 15 minutes or so for surge. If a heavy mist hangs at the chamber's entrance, don't go in.

The mist is from heavy swells that occasionally explode in the narrow confines. A powerful flashlight is a must when exploring the chamber, because it is inky black inside and often is filled with bellowing sea lions.

While exploring this coast, watch the cliffs for star-shaped, jade-colored succulents with thick, pointed leaves. These are Santa Cruz Island liveforevers -- plants found nowhere else in the world.

You will also run into small groups of harbor seals in the pocket coves that line this rugged coast. Some of these coves make nice lunch stops -- but local knowledge is a must, because many are studded with submerged rocks.

East of Painted Cave lies Cueva Valdez, one of the most picturesque anchorages in the Channel Islands. This is a good spot in moderate weather, but it can get sloppy when the chop kicks up.

The best place to land is inside the cave at the west end. This cave has a small, sandy beach and two tunnels. One opens to the main beach at the anchorage; the other opens to a rocky shore frequented by harbor seals. The cave makes the landing great fun, especially if you're cruising with children.

Fry's Harbor, located almost in the middle of the island, is a cozy place. Here, rock was quarried out and barged over to the city of Santa Barbara to make the breakwater, which survives to this day. The remains of old cables, booms and other equipment can still be seen here.

Farther east lies Platt's Anchorage, a rather exposed spot that affords a decent lee in moderate conditions. Platt's boasts some of the best freshwater pools on the island -- far superior to the pools at Lady's Harbor, to the west. The pools at Platt's are a short hike up the canyon.

Orizaba, marked by an offshore rock inhabited by sea birds, makes a pleasant little anchorage.

Just east of this are the well-named Twin Harbors. If you look up the canyon from each of the harbors, you will see some tall, stately trees. These are Santa Cruz Island ironwoods, found only on Santa Cruz and in very isolated stands on Santa Rosa Island. The conifers nearby are Santa Cruz Island pines, also called Bishop pines by some authorities.

Pelican Bay is probably the most popular anchorage on the north shore, and with good reason. It is usually calm, even during turbulent northwesterlies, and it is fairly roomy.

At the apex of the cove lie the old foundations of a camp once operated by Ira Eaton, a rascally sea captain immortalized in the book, *Diary of a Sea Captain's Wife*.

Here, Eaton ran a camp frequented by movie stars of the silent screen. John Barrymore, Gloria Swanson and other celebrities once traipsed through the woods here. The silent screen versions of *Peter Pan*, *Mutiny on the Bounty* and numerous other early motion pictures were filmed at Santa Cruz.

East of Pelican Bay sprawls Prisoner's Harbor. According to Santa Barbara residents, it got its name during California's Spanish or Mexican days, when prisoners were taken there with everything they needed to start a self-sufficient colony.

As the story goes, the prisoners immediately built a raft and sailed to Ventura, where they later became leading citizens of the community. Folks in Ventura insist that the prisoners went to Santa Barbara instead and became prominent figures there.

Prisoner's Harbor is a fair anchorage in moderate conditions. It is also the gateway to the island's interior.

At the harbor's pier, supplies are off-loaded. A landing craft operated by the National Park Service under a cooperative agreement sometimes runs ashore with supplies for the Navy's radar installation on the ridge top.

Beyond spacious Chinese Harbor, where a few rocky points offer protection in settled conditions, lies Potato Harbor. With its barren, dusty cliffs, it looks more like a place to send convicts for hard labor than it does a desirable anchorage. Yet because of its high cliffs, Potato Harbor is arguably the best natural anchorage for southeasterlies in the Channel Islands.

Beyond Potato Harbor is Scorpion Bay, one of the original outstations on the island. A small ranch is nestled in the valley.

Now used as a private bed-and-breakfast inn by concessionaires, it is off-limits to the public. In fact, the entire eastern tenth of the island remains private property. The National Park Service owns three-quarters of this section, while Francis Gherini, a descendant of one of the original settlers, owns the other quarter.

The public can gain access to eastern Santa Cruz by going on organized trips offered by concessionaires. Island Packers Co. in Ventura offers one-day and overnight trips to Scorpion Ranch. The phone number is (805) 642-1393.

Aspen Helicopters and Heli Tours Inc. can fly passengers in and out of this area. Aspen can be reached at (805) 985-5416, while Heli Tours is at (805) 964-0684.

Toward the island's east end is Little Scorpion, a popular lee. An offshore rock, connected to the island by a very shallow reef, forms a sheltered anchorage.

## **The South Shore**

San Pedro Point, at the east end, is an area of dramatic contrast. Often, the sea is choppy

on the north side and glassy calm on the south.

West of the point, Smuggler's Cove is large enough to accommodate literally hundreds of boats. Parts of Smuggler's Ranch can be seen from the anchorage, along with a grove of old olive trees. Like Scorpion, Smuggler's was another island outstation and tours of the area are now available through the same concessionaires who work the Scorpion Ranch region.

Smuggler's is a great place for anglers to lay over. South of the anchorage lies an area washed by warm currents, frequented by everything from billfish to mako sharks and albacore tuna. Fishing can be outstanding during summer and fall.

Albert's Anchorage and Coches Prietos are second only to Smuggler's in popularity. These pleasant spots, although right next to one another, are quite different.

Albert's, with a high cliff on the west side, is very well protected. The small beach, brush-choked canyon and fairly steep hills are not too appealing to hikers, however. Also, because of the high cliff, the sun disappears very early.

Coches Prietos, although not as well protected, lies at the base of a broad canyon with much gentler terrain. The Nature Conservancy requires boaters to have a landing permit to go ashore there, or anywhere else on the south side.

Malva Real, one of the better south side anchorages, is often overlooked by boaters -- perhaps because it lacks dramatic cliffs or an intriguing canyon.

Although it seems like an open roadstead, the low point and rolling hills offer surprisingly good protection. The kelp beds flatten the chop, and since the sea floor tapers gradually to the beach, the waves do not reflect offshore as they do in many anchorages.

Malva Real is also a good place to stop before cutting across to Santa Rosa Island or up to Forney's Cove because the wind line often begins at Gull Island, just southwest of the anchorage.

With so many excellent anchorages from which to choose -- and so much to see on shore -- Santa Cruz Island truly is an idyllic option for a lazy fall weekend cruise. Please use the chart below to reference an approximate location of the anchorages above and please note that you should have the proper charts on board for the area that you plan to cruise in.

### [Santa Cruz Island Sea Caves Map](#)

This **Map** shows the southern end of **Santa Cruz Island** and the general locations of most of the **islands** sea caves in the Channel **Islands** National Park. ...[www.ccarto.com/santacruz/index.html](http://www.ccarto.com/santacruz/index.html) - 104k - [Cached](#)

This web page featured was great for learning the best spots to go exploring by kayak or dinghy and seeing the caves that are very predominate around the Island. It not only gives you the ability to see the location of the cave on a satellite map of the island but it also gives you the Latitude and Longitude of each cave...

### **Anchoring basic**

Proper ground tackle is essential as many of the islands anchorages are known to become rough when weather builds and can become quite dangerous when Santa Ana winds blow. With that said every boater should use caution when making the crossing to the island and anchoring should be at the discretion of the captain or owner of each vessel.

For the most part Anchoring at the Island is done in less that 30 ft of water and as a rule of thumb I suggest a scope of 7 to 1. For an over night stay and 5 to 1 for a lunch hook.

- Select an area that offers maximum shelter from wind, current, boat traffic etc.
- Pick a spot with swinging room in all directions. Should the wind change, your boat will swing bow to the wind or current, whichever is stronger.

- Determine depth and bottom conditions and calculate the amount of rode you will put out.
- If other boats are anchored in the area you select, ask the boat adjacent to the spot you select what scope they have out so that you can anchor in such a manner that you will not bump into the neighboring vessel.
- Anchor with the same method used by nearby boats. If they are anchored bow and stern, you should too. If they are anchored with a single anchor from the bow, do not anchor bow and stern. Never anchor from the stern alone, this could cause the boat to swamp or capsize.
- Rig the anchor and rode. Check shackles to make sure they are secured with wire tied to prevent the screw shaft from opening.
- Lay out the amount of rode you will need on deck in such a manner that it will follow the anchor into the water smoothly without tangling.
- Cleat off the anchor line at the point you want it to stop. (Don't forget or you'll be diving for your anchor.)
- Stop your boat and lower your anchor until it lies on the bottom. This should be done up-wind or up-current from the spot you have selected. Slowly start to motor back, letting out the anchor rode. Backing down slowly will assure that the chain will not foul the anchor and prevent it from digging into the bottom.
- When all the anchor line has been let out, back down on the anchor with engine in idle reverse to help set the anchor. (Be careful not to get the anchor line caught in your prop.)
- While reversing on a set anchor, keep a hand on the anchor line. A dragging anchor will telegraph itself as it bumps along the bottom. An anchor that is set will not shake the line.
- When the anchor is firmly set, look around for reference points in relation to the boat. You can sight over your compass to get the bearing of two different fixed points (house, rock, tower, etc. ) Over the next hour or so, make sure those reference points are in the same place. If not you're probably dragging anchor.
- Begin anchor watch. Everyone should check occasionally to make sure you're not drifting.

**So lets get out there and enjoy the adult playground we call the Channel Islands...**

**Any questions regarding the information above feel free to contact me  
by email: [robertjosephunderwood@yahoo.com](mailto:robertjosephunderwood@yahoo.com)**

