

The Boardwalk Story

Once upon a time . . . the Pacific Coast sported a string of boardwalks and seaside amusement facilities. Then, one by one, the Pike in Long Beach, Playland in San Francisco and parks in Venice and Portland all disappeared.

Some became housing developments or fell prey to the ravages of time and wear. The laughter of excited children, the smell of popcorn and cotton candy became memories.

Those memories are still being made, however, at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. The Boardwalk is now the only major seaside amusement park on the entire West Coast. A California Historic Landmark, the park is an example of true perseverance and dedication to a tradition of combining nostalgia with high tech fun.

Santa Cruz became a tourist attraction in 1865, when John Liebrandt built a public bathhouse near the mouth of the San Lorenzo River. Several more followed, and soon concessions sprang up nearby including restaurants, curio shops and photograph stands.

Toward the end of the century, Fred W. Swanton, considered one of the greatest local promoters of his time, laid plans for a casino and boardwalk. The Neptune Casino opened in 1904, but operated only 22 months; on June 22, 1906, the ornate but uninspired building was completely destroyed by a fire that started in the kitchen.

Legend has it that Swanton was on the phone before the last wisps of smoke disappeared, lining up financing and ordering materials to rebuild. By summer's end, famed architect William Weeks was drawing up plans; and in October a foundation was laid for the new Casino, complete with a grand ballroom, the Plunge indoor swimming pool, a pleasure pier and boardwalk, all of which opened June 15, 1907.

Later in the year, construction began on the Boardwalk's first thrill ride, the L.A. Thompson Scenic Railway, which opened in 1908. In 1911, renowned European woodcarver Charles I.D. Loeff delivered a new merry-go-round with three rows of hand-carved horses. The carousel is still operating today, accompanied by its original 342-pipe Ruth band organ, built in 1894.

It was Loeff's son, Arthur, who convinced the Boardwalk to replace the Scenic Railway ride with a "modern" wooden roller coaster. The Giant Dipper coaster opened in 1924 and soon became the park's most popular ride; it has carried more than 46 million riders and joins the carousel as a National Historic Landmark.

During the 1930s and 1940s, business at the Boardwalk tapered off due to the Depression and World War II, but the Coconut Grove ballroom was in its prime, featuring dancing with some of the biggest names of the big band era.

The Boardwalk and Coconut Grove continue to thrive as a major California destination. The park offers more than 30 rides, four arcades with both vintage machines and hundreds of modern video games, a game deck, 26 games of skill, 30 food vendors, an electronic shooting gallery, indoor miniature golf and over 15 gift shops with everything from beachwear to sunglasses and jewelry. The Coconut Grove complex hosts a variety of events: trade shows, conferences, dances, parties, conventions, banquets and wedding receptions.

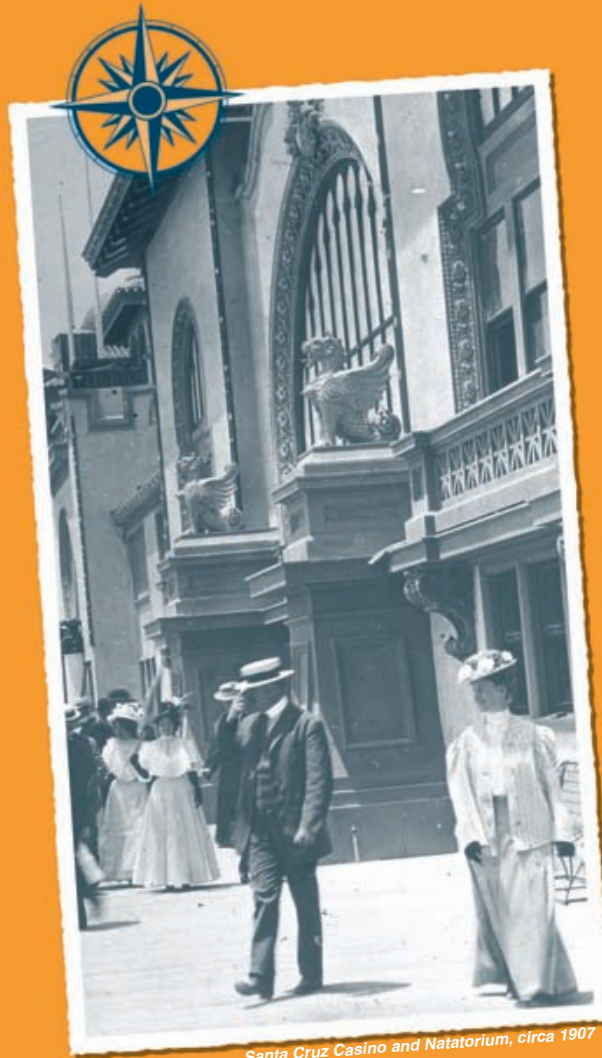
The historic park is fronted by a mile-long beach, cleaned and sifted during the year by Boardwalk staff—the same unique beach that launched Santa Cruz as a tourist attraction more than a century ago.

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is open daily Memorial Day to Labor Day and most weekends and holidays during the year. There is still no admission charge.

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Walking Tour of the Historic

SANTA CRUZ BEACH BOARDWALK



Santa Cruz Casino and Natatorium, circa 1907

Santa Cruz Beach
Boardwalk

Begin:

Neptune's Kingdom, Beach Street Entrance

1. Neptune's Kingdom

From 1907 to 1963 this building housed a large heated salt-water swimming pool known as the Natatorium or Plunge. Inside, the great steel arches of the original bathing plunge are still visible overhead. A magnificent plaster bas-relief of King Neptune once gazed down at bathers entering the building from the beach. Inside, a full-figured, larger than life-size statue of Neptune watched the pool from the balcony, attended by plaster water babies who played along the walls.



Santa Cruz Plunge—the Natatorium, 1946

Ladies were admitted free, when accompanied by a gentleman. Scratchy woolen bathing suits, towels and changing rooms were rented from uniformed attendants, or you could sit in the gallery and watch the fun while listening to a band.

Next, walk past the Smuggler's Arcade and turn to the left to see photographs of the famous salt-water Plunge, the scene of death-defying water carnival acts and record-setting swim competitions. For over 50 years, nearly every kid in Santa Cruz learned to swim here, until excessive repairs forced closure of the aging pool.

Take any stairway, or the Lighthouse elevator, to second floor Historium.

2. Historium

Take a walk through Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk history along the Historium on the second floor of Neptune's Kingdom. Bathers and fun-lovers have come to Santa Cruz Beach since the 1850s, although it's hard to see how they could have had much fun in heavy, itchy woolen bathing suits covering neck to knees! Bathhouses featuring heated salt-water pools, restaurants, shops and game rooms lined the beach through the turn of the century.

In 1904 a brash young promoter named Fred Swanton built the Neptune Casino, a wedding cake of a building decorated with onion domes and housing a theater, ballroom, laundry, penny arcade, ice-cream shop and telephone office—all topped with a sky full of fluttering flags.

He was undaunted when it burned to the ground two years later and by 1907 had replaced it with the buildings you see today. The Historium exhibit case commemorates the history of Fred Swanton's Natatorium (the Latin word for swimming pool), before it became Neptune's Kingdom.

Return to the Neptune's Kingdom Beach Street entrance for an outdoor walking tour.

3. Southern Pacific Railroad

Be sure to stay outside the painted yellow safety lines next to the railroad tracks—2500 tons of train still rumble by along Beach Street twice a day.

Turn left and follow the railroad tracks past Neptune's Kingdom toward the Casino Arcade, where train passengers boarded and departed. Until 1960, Boardwalk visitors stepped off the Suntan Special to the rousing strains of the Beach Band, which greeted each train with blazing brass. Today Roaring Camp Railroads still brings visitors to the Boardwalk through the redwoods from Felton during the summer.

Stop in front of Entrance B.

4. Casa del Rey Hotel

Across the street in the parking lot, a pair of graceful palms once marked the entrance to the Casa del Rey Hotel, a landmark three-story Mission Revival/Pueblo style building with sheltered formal gardens, erected in 1911 by the owners of the Boardwalk.

It enjoyed a long life as a beach convention hotel linked to the Casino by an overhead enclosed bridge, then became a residence hotel, a U.S. Navy hospital and finally a retirement home. The Casa del Rey was severely damaged during the October 17, 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and was demolished in November 1989.

From 1903 to 1907 the hotel site sported a colorful tent city operated by Fred Swanton, who replaced the multi-hued striped tents with tiny cottages after the new Casino was completed.

Several of the cottages were purchased and moved around town when the Casa del Rey Hotel was constructed, and some can still be spotted today. Your sharp eyes may find several at the corner of the main parking lot.

5. Cocoanut Grove, Entrance B

Beach promoter Fred Swanton hired architect William H. Weeks after the 1906 fire to replace the onion-domed Neptune Casino with a Moorish style seaside dance pavilion, shops and casino arcade. The lively Casino and the adjoining Mission Revival style Natatorium put Santa Cruz on the map as the "Coney Island of the West."

A 1953 modernization and 1980 remodel of the Casino saved eye-catching architectural elements of the original 1907 building, such as the round Moorish style window set in a Mission Revival style tower.

Entrance B opens for Cocoanut Grove guests heading up to the glass-roofed Sun Room overlooking Monterey Bay.



Arrival of the Suntan Special, 1941



Casa del Rey Hotel, 1911

6. Cocoanut Grove, Entrance A

Continue to the area outside Cocoanut Grove Entrance A, created in 1953, and look through the glass doors to see crystal chandeliers and the opulent staircase that leads to the grand ballroom. Just around the corner, a 1953 Modern style façade masks the original ballroom entrance, once a dazzling display of lights that drew thousands to dance to Benny Goodman, Paul Whiteman, Kay Kyser, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, and other top jazz and swing orchestras.



Cocoanut Grove ballroom, 1947

Step around the corner to the Aloha Terrace or West Entrance.

7. Aloha Terrace

From the Aloha Terrace at the Cocoanut Grove's west entrance there is a fine view of the municipal wharf, the last of four commercial shipping and fishing wharves on the Santa Cruz waterfront since 1853. Majestic Washingtonia robusta palms rise to the bay breezes here at the old Cocoanut Grove entrance and along Beach Street toward the wharf. Forty-two palms were planted as four-foot high specimens in 1962 by Santa Cruz Seaside Company President Laurence Canfield, who donated half of them to the City of Santa Cruz.

Across Beach Street is the tiled bell tower of La Bahia apartment complex, built in 1926. The buildings are clustered around two interior courtyards with fountains, designed to suggest a Mediterranean village. Down the street from La Bahia, a red tile roof rises over a line of arched windows that mark the 1916 seaside villa of Judge Marcel Cerf, now housing the Casablanca motel and restaurant. It stands on the site of the 1890 Sea Beach Hotel, which was totally consumed in a spectacular 3 a.m. fire in 1912.

An early seaside rooming house had been built on the same site in 1866 by an enterprising young widow, Elizabeth Liddell. Her Long Branch Bathhouse on the beach below, with 100 changing rooms, was modeled after a New Jersey resort and made history as the first commercial bathhouse on the west coast.

Return to Casino Arcade, main entrance.

8. Arcade

A neon CASINO sign marks both the original ornate 1907 Penny Arcade and its 1953 transformation to modern style. No gambling took place in the Casino, which housed displays, shops and games, but the enterprising Swanton anchored a large sailing schooner just off the beach where, it was said, adults could try their luck for the cost of a 10-cent



View through arcade and shops, 1907

water taxi ride.

Today, challengers match wits and skill with fast-paced electronic arcade games beneath the gracefully decorated original 1907 columns. Still operating among the modern games are pick-a-prize claw machines and a mysterious wax-figure fortune teller, all enjoyed by visitors nearly a century ago.

Walk through the Arcade, toward the beach.

9. Beach Casino

The rounded form of the Casino's rotunda now houses Fisherman's Galley downstairs and the Bay View Room upstairs in the Cocoanut Grove. Its shape was constructed to echo the lines of the original Neptune Casino built on this site in 1904.

An outrageous mixture of Turkish, Persian and Indian fantasy, festooned with domes and flags and built entirely of wood, the Neptune Casino housed the town's finest restaurant on its upper floor. The Casino burned to the ground in a fire that started in the Casino Restaurant on June 22, 1906.

Fred Swanton, often called the "P. T. Barnum" of Santa Cruz Beach, immediately began promoting a new Casino on the site, and crews began construction of the buildings you see today. The new Casino opened with a Grand Ball on June 15, 1907, a truly amazing feat and a tribute to the armies of craftsmen and construction crews of the day.

Take a few steps into the colonnade.

10. Marini's Candies

On this end of the colonnade, you'll see Marini's Candies. Their salt water taffy is a Santa Cruz seaside tradition. The shop has been open and operated by the Marini family since 1928, and the red and white taffy-wrapping machine behind the candy counter is original equipment. You'll often find candy makers at work in the windows.

11. Colonnade

The view along the arches of the old plunge building hasn't changed since the covered seaside promenade was added for strolling visitors in 1911. Above was the Palm Court Room of the Natatorium, fitted with wicker tables, chairs and potted palms. Here ladies enjoyed a quiet cup of tea overlooking the sea, while youngsters and spouses frolicked in the salty Plunge. Follow the sound of raucous laughter to a display featuring the famous Laughing Sal from Playland-at-the-Beach in San Francisco. An exhibit about seaside parks is located opposite Laughing Sal.

Stroll down the colonnade, past shops and the beachside Neptune's Kingdom entrance, to Cap'n Jack Flint's Pirate Ship, and begin a tour of the Boardwalk.



Neptune Casino fire, June 22, 1906

12. The Boardwalk

Many of the earliest rides on the Boardwalk were operated by itinerant concessionaires, who set up the rides here in the summer and moved them elsewhere in the winter. Now the Santa Cruz Seaside Company owns and operates all the Boardwalk rides, while some shops, games and food stops are leased by concessionaires.

13. Speed Bumps, Sky Glider

The first bumper car ride, Dodge-Ems, was installed in 1922, and the first rider drew lots of laughs when the spinning car failed to respond to his command of, "Whoa!" Dodge-Ems was replaced in 1940 with cars from the Treasure Island World's Fair and has been updated since. The latest renovation came in 1996 when the Boardwalk updated the ride, adding new cars from Italy and a new name: Speed Bumps.



Dodge-Ems, 1961

The 1000-foot-long Sky Glider was added in 1967, offering a bird's-eye view of the Boardwalk. The technology was developed in the ski lift industry, leading to a compact ride that fit the Boardwalk's limited space and offers visitors a relaxing ride over many of the park's colorful attractions.

14. Entrance 3, Historic Landmark Plaque

In 1989, the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk and Cocoanut Grove were declared a State Historic Landmark, in recognition of their continuous

contribution to the economy and industries of the State of California since 1907. A spirit of historic preservation guides company policy to preserve and maintain historic buildings and rides for future generations to enjoy.

15. Original Board Walk Samples

Originally, the Boardwalk was a walk made of boards, elevating fun seekers above the sandy beach. The last remains of the old boardwalk were replaced or covered with sturdy concrete decks over an engineered seawall in 1960.

16. Looff Carousel

The beautiful whirling Carousel has been the pride of the Boardwalk since it was installed new in 1911. The Carousel boasts hand-carved antique wooden horses and chariots created by the European wood-carver Charles I.D. Looff.



Looff Carousel, 1968

The Looff horses are identifiable by their jeweled saddles and bridles, elaborately carved flowing manes, slender prancing legs and by intricate carvings beneath the cantle of the saddle. Look for angels and cherubs, pomegranates and rabbits. Looff was the first carousel designer to add lights as decoration, dazzling the riders with his brilliant displays. The Looff horses are now very rare—none were made after 1918. The carousel even has a mechanical ring machine, one of only a handful left in the country. The carousel is a National Historic Landmark.

A Ruth und Sohn organ built in 1894 came to the Boardwalk with the carousel in 1911. A rare Wurlitzer 165 Band Organ was acquired in 2007.

The colorful Wurlitzer, built in 1918, came from San Francisco's Playland like Laughing Sal.

The first beach merry-go-round known as the Steam Flying Horses operated across the street from today's beach volleyball courts in 1889. It featured standing wooden horses bumping along a steam-powered circular track, with music provided by a banjo player attired in a black silk top hat.

17. Octopus' Garden

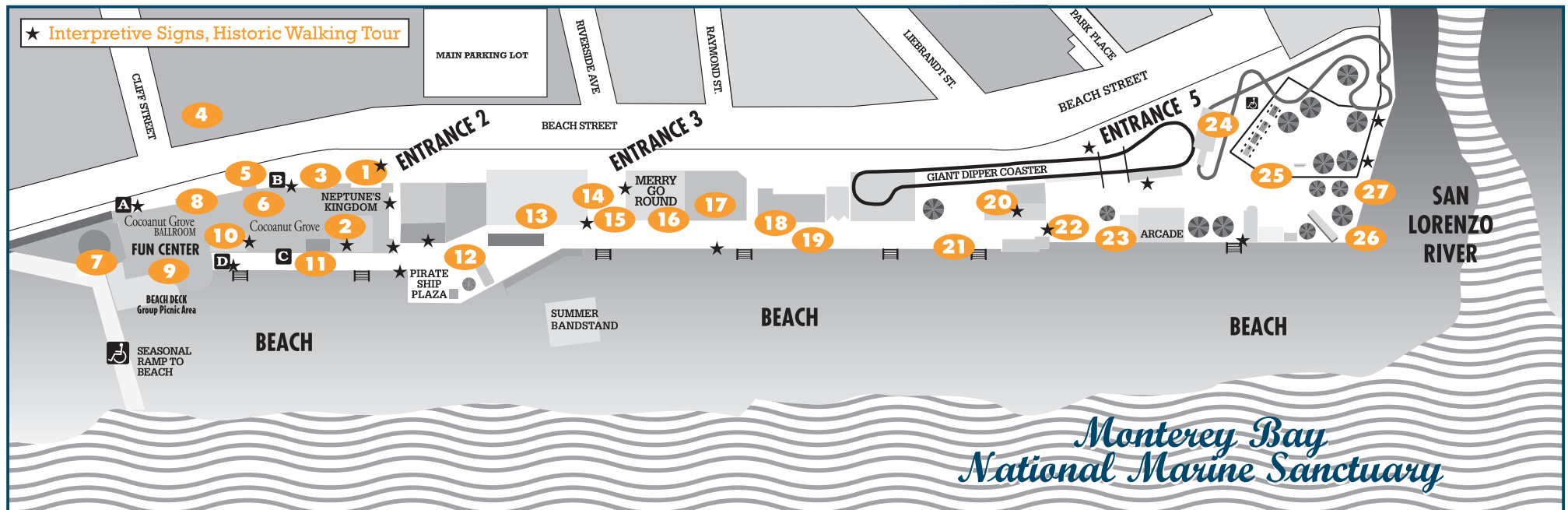
Continuing down the Boardwalk, you'll see an example of 1950s architecture dubbed Googie style after the Los Angeles restaurant that made it famous. Once dismissed as American bad taste, Googie has come into its own in architectural history. It features boomerang shapes, soaring lines that abruptly switch directions like a flying saucer in flight and pierced structural beams that highlight the inherent strength of modern building materials.

18. Haunted Castle

Dark rides are a feature of every boardwalk—places to be scared out of your wits, then come back out into the sunlight. This ride, which opened in 1980, replaced a 1931 Dante's Inferno, the 1934 Laff-Land and three pirate-themed dark rides.

19. Ice Cream Stand

Adjoining the Haunted Castle is a tiny ice cream stand boasting a black and white ceramic tile façade and chrome streamlined overhang. This very sanitary look was used heavily in food establishments from the 1930s into the 1950s. The Lane family opened four Frozen Custard stands on the Boardwalk in 1935 and ran them for three generations until 1954. This is the only original custard stand remaining.



20. Giant Dipper

The Giant Dipper opened to screams in 1924 and has been giving one of the world's best-rated rides ever since. Along with the 1911 Looff Carousel, it has been recognized as a National Historic Landmark, an honor awarded only to historic places that have contributed substantially to the engineering, architectural and cultural history of the nation. Coaster riders have been even more enthusiastic: the Giant Dipper consistently rates among the ten best coaster rides in the world!

The Giant Dipper was constructed at a cost of \$50,000 in 1924 and used 14 miles of lumber laid end to end, 862 gallons of paint and 3150 light bulbs. The train travels at speeds up to 55 miles per hour along 1/2 mile of track and that heart-stopping first hill is a 70-foot drop. The track is walked many times daily and inspected by a coaster mechanic. The braking system, track and cars have all been replaced with the latest in ride safety technology.

Still, most riders would agree with D.R. Kiff, who was among the first to ride it on May 17, 1924: "There were about three minutes of more thrills packed under our epidermis than we got out of the San Francisco earthquake. The missus had a strangle-hold on the rail in front, but after the first big dip she let go all holds and grabbed something more tangible which was me and hung on the rest of the way . . ."

Before you leave the Giant Dipper entrance area, walk over to the beach railing for more history.

21. Beach Overlook

The beach has been the scene of every kind of activity over the years, from hot-air balloon landings to soap opera star swoonings. The first private changing rooms were provided by an area landowner in the 1860s, and some were mounted on horse-drawn wagons. To enforce modesty and protect women bathers from view, the ladies bathed inside the wagons, which were pulled into the surf and returned to the beach with their shrieking wet contents.

Newspaper editors were outraged by the indecent Santa Cruz bathers, especially men whose "shaggy shanks" were visible below their long-john style bathing trousers. In later years, the Santa Cruz police chief arrested men who attempted to lounge on the beach without bathing shirts.

All that changed in the Roaring Twenties. The first Miss California Beauty Pageant took place right here in 1924 and continued into the 1970s. The Hollywood film industry has favored the Santa Cruz Beach as the setting for



Three Miss California contestants, 1925.
Miss Santa Cruz is Yetta Haber.



Routine Giant Dipper maintenance at the top, 1959

tales of romance, adventure, intrigue and comedy, and the site has been seen by millions on national television.

22. Sky Glider Entrance #1

This is the site of the L. A. Thompson Scenic Railway. This first thrill ride at the Boardwalk was built in 1908. L.A. Thompson's Scenic Railway carried passengers up and down a series of gentle hills on a one-mile track where they experienced four minutes of "scenic excitement." The Scenic Railway was removed in 1923 to make way for the Giant Dipper roller coaster—and riders who thought the Giant Dipper would be more of the same got the surprise of their lives!

23. Funland Arcade

The Funland Arcade marks a site of Fred Swanton's 1907 Bay Shore Limited, a scaled-down steam train that operated the length of the Boardwalk. In spite of its size, it required a licensed engineer and fireman to operate and was so powerful it was removed and leased to a logging company during the winter off-season. The popular train ride was replaced by the Sun Tan Jr. steam train, then the City of Santa Cruz streamliner, which ran from 1938 until the beginning of WWII.



Coastline Railroad, 1909,
later called Bay Shore Limited

24. Logger's Revenge

Water rides have been popular in amusement parks nationwide since the first "Shoot the Chutes" dumped folks in the drink in 1895 at Coney Island. Over the years the rides have become steeper and wetter. The Logger's Revenge was installed here in 1977. A "Chute the Chutes" water slide was a big hit near the river in the 1920s.



Logger's Revenge, 1977

25. Cave Train Overlook

On-track rides have been a fixture at the Boardwalk since former road-racing champion Major Earl Clipperly placed midget racers on an open racetrack at this location in 1938. The Autorama introduced a safer rail-guided ride in scaled-down sports cars in 1962, and Walt Disney came up to take a look at the design. The Great Auto Race followed, operating from



Midget Auto races on the Boardwalk, 1928

1985 to 1999.

The Cave Train to the Lost World opened with a prehistoric theme in 1961, built along with an extensive engineered seawall construction project. The Cave Train and the Great Auto Race were both influenced by high-tech rides introduced at Disneyland, the world's newest and most remarkable amusement park of the time. A major renovation project in 1998-99 was implemented to strengthen the location site and revamp and revitalize the Cave Train.

26. Ferris Wheel

Bridge engineer George W. G. Ferris amazed patrons of the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition with his 265-foot high revolving wheel, which carried 1440 passengers at a time in 36 trolley-like cars. The Santa Cruz Beach Ferris Wheel was built by the Eli Bridge Company and installed in 1963. George Ferris never patented the ride that bears his name and died penniless at the age of 37, unable to profit from the millions his invention made on the world's midways.

27. San Lorenzo River

Kiddie rides overlook the very beginnings of Santa Cruz Beach concessions. The view from here looks across the site of Stephen Washburn's boating concession near the San Lorenzo River railroad bridge, described in 1875 as "the most beautiful little rowboats ever seen here." Washburn's Moonlight Boating cruises were very popular in the 1890s, and his hand-built wooden boats were admired by all.

John Leibrandt erected a few changing houses in this area for his ocean-bathing friends in 1865, and the idea quickly developed into commercial bathhouses further down the beach.

The City's lifeguard corps began here in 1870, when Charles Arcan patrolled Leibrandt's bathing beach and later received a gold watch engraved, "From the grateful parents of Phillip Figel for saving his life from a watery grave at Santa Cruz, June 12, 1879."

A return by way of Entrance 5 will take you outside the Boardwalk to walk the length of the Giant Dipper. Follow the railroad tracks back towards Neptune's Kingdom where you can get an unobstructed view of the classic wooden structure.

For more information about Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk history:

- Interpretive signs are located throughout the park, see map for locations.
- *The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk – A Century by the Sea* 164 page book available at Under the Rainbow on the Colonnade.
- *100 Years, Millions of Memories* 90 minute DVD available at Under the Rainbow.



Stephen Washburn's rowboat concession above the railroad bridge, 1895