

SAN FRANCISCO

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San Francisco, we discovered last month, is a city of many faces and consuming interest. It was not at its best during our visit because of a five-week-old strike of public craft workers, a euphemism that included such "crafts" as bus driving, street sweeping and garbage collecting. Nevertheless, it managed to look respectable, and, if we ignored side streets and back alleys, fairly clean.

Our two previous visits to the Bay Area were in 1936 and 1948, on both occasions, short one-to-two-day stopovers while driving north by car. Trying to compare its change over the years was futile since our recollections of those earlier visits were disturbingly vague ones only of steep hilly streets and chilling fogs that obscured everything. On this visit, with a week of decent weather and time to spare after four days of medical meetings, we covered it pretty thoroughly.

We crossed the Golden Gate a couple of times to Sausalito and drove north up through Marin County to the Sonoma and Napa Valleys to visit wineries and learn about viniculture (the vines do best without irrigation or fertilization). We drove south along the coast to Half Moon Bay where roadside stands were selling artichokes twenty for a dollar and, on the way back, made a rest stop under the hilltop statue of Fra Junipero Serra, California's first real estate entrepreneur. We visited Chinatown, the Zoo, the Arboretum, and the Presidio. We wandered along the waterfront wharves, boarded the replica of Sir Francis Drake's Golden Hind, ate at the Cannery and caught a glimpse of the top of Betty Ford's head from a terrace in Ghirardelli Square. We got across the Bay Bridge to the Berkeley campus and to the elegant residential Piedmont section on the hillside above Oakland where the rhododendrons were in full bloom. We saw the spectacular Bay lights at night from a posh 38th-floor restaurant. We rode a cable car for three blocks the day after the strike ended.

San Francisco used to take pride in its conservative sedateness and look down its nose on Los Angeles, its sprawling kooky sister megalopolis to the south. As recently as the late Fifties, its men were dark suited and its women dressed up and wore hats to go downtown shopping. But the Repulsive Sixties, the campus radicals and the Mod Revolution have had their effects. And now the city offers a little bit of everything, including sidewalk freaks playing fifes, bagpipes and cellos for handouts; artsy crafty peddlers on the street corners, spaced out addicts, eccentric bums and derelicts, ageing hippies; and the greatest concentration of strolling prostitutes, gay bars, porno paper stands, topless nightclubs and massage parlors in the country. The residue of the past Haight-Asbury culture is everywhere in evidence, and even the med students at the

University of California look like they sleep in gutters and never bathe. But not even the human litter or the urban sprawl can detract from the beauty of the hills and mountains or the bay and sea. It remains a fascinating city with attractions for every taste.

If the San Andreas fault doesn't give way and dump everything into the Pacific in the interval, we may go back again in another twenty-eight years.

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