

A Brief Look at Beach Cities History

Overview

This ride is 14.4 miles long, and is mostly flat and takes us along the southern portion of what's known as the Santa Monica Bay. This ride starts in Manhattan Beach at one of the last remaining sand dunes in the area. It goes along the coast and ends in Palos Verdes, with the return trip taking you alongside what's known as the Hermosa Valley Greenbelt.

Ride Logistics

Link to self-guided route:

Link to Ride With GPS route: <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/34884287>

Cue sheet: see last page

Sand Dune Park



This ride begins at Sand Dune Park, located in a Manhattan Beach neighborhood. There are some unrestricted parking spaces next to the park, and there is also plenty of parking along Rosecrans Avenue nearby, with no parking allowed Tuesdays and Fridays from 12pm to 2pm.

This park is named after its main feature - one of the area's last remaining sand dunes. The geological forces in this part of LA County naturally created sand dunes over the course of time. [According to The Bay](#)

[Foundation](#) (an organization dedicated to restoring and enhancing the Santa Monica Bay) dunes are important for habitat and the ones that do exist in the area have kept native species from going extinct.

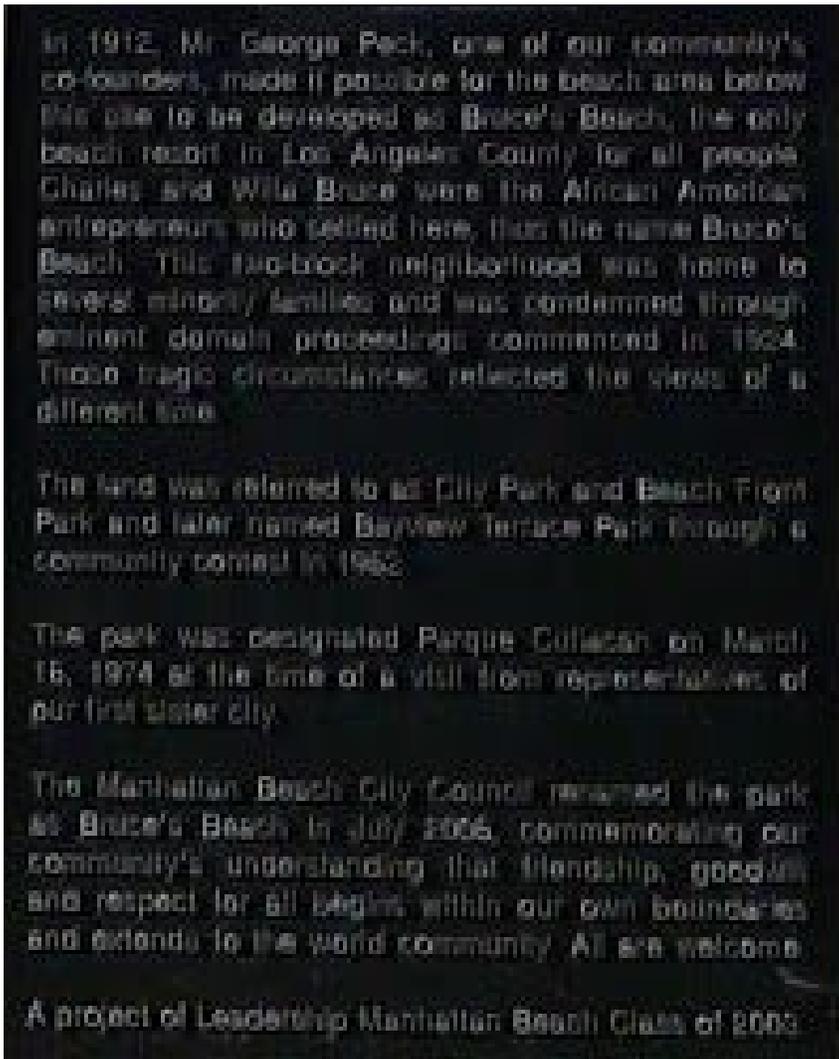
The dune at this park [is part of a sandy ridge that goes from Playa del Rey to Redondo Beach](#). That's about 9 miles. In 1921, most of the sandy ridge was leveled south of 15th St to make way for development.

[According to the Manhattan Beach Dune Restoration Project](#), “when dunes are allowed to form and create natural features, away from recreation areas, they provide a cost-effective buffer of protection from sea level rise and storm erosion.” The restoration project is set to restore existing dunes from 36th St to 23rd St for a total of 3 acres. Implementation of the restoration plan is set to begin in next fall, 2021.

Due to maintenance costs, the City of Manhattan Beach requires reservations to access the sand dune. You can make a reservation by going to this link: <https://www.cityymb.info/services/make-a-reservation>

Blocked by this 100 foot dune is the view of the beach right behind it to the west. Our ride is going to start by going south through this park along Bell Ave, then a right onto Marine Avenue followed by another right onto Highland. After a few blocks, we'll see a green terraced park with a view of the bay on the left side of the street. This is Bruce's Beach, our next stop.

Bruce's Beach



Bruce's Beach sits overlooking the ocean with a monument that provides some background on this site.

Several local historians have spent years looking deeper into the details of the story of what took place in this area. This site and the surrounding properties are part of a legacy of displacement and a testament to institutional racism in LA County.

Charles & Willa Bruce, an African-American couple, were the first to develop a building on this land. [They bought the land in 1912](#) and created a beach resort where Black people and families could relax and enjoy the beach, as other beaches in LA County were segregated and didn't allow entry to Black people. The area featured an overnight lodge, a cafe, and a room for dancing.

The Bruce's and other Black families that bought and developed properties nearby faced years of harassment, [including slashed tires, blocked access to the beach by White residents](#). The Ku Klux Klan also attempted setting fire to the resort by lighting a mattress under their porch.

[In 1921, neighborhood resident George Lindsey petitioned the board of trustees to take measures to keep Black people from living in the city.](#) When that didn't work, he circulated a petition in 1923 to condemn the blocks where Black families lived under eminent domain by arguing a need for a public park. The city condemned the properties in 1924. [The buildings were razed in 1927.](#)



The properties remained vacant for more than 30 years until the 1960's when the city finally built that park. Since then this green space has gone by many names, until 2006 when the city council renamed it to Bruce's Beach. This is thanks in large part to people who have brought attention to this history, [such as local historians](#) and the [city's first Black elected official, councilmember Mitch Ward](#).

[Reports of racial harassment](#) for area residents [continue to this day](#). The current market value for the properties that were once part of Bruce's Beach is \$75 million. As you stand atop and look out towards the ocean, you'll see a lifeguard station below this park. That lifeguard station is part of the original site of Bruce's Beach.

Some residents feel the current plaque doesn't capture the full history of Bruce's Beach and is [circulating a petition](#) to the Manhattan Beach City Council to change that. To see some historical photos of the area, [check out this piece by LA Mag](#).

From here, you can head west along 27th St until you hit The Strand. Continuing further west, towards the beach, you'll see some stairs leading down onto a bike path. I couldn't find a ramp to go down there, so just carry that bike down there and start heading south, to your left, so that the beach is on your right hand side. This bike path will become Hermosa Ave, and you can make a right at 26th St to join The Strand and rejoin the bike path, but watch out because the posted speed limit is 8MPH and there are signs posted letting cyclists know that they have to walk their bike when lights are flashing.



A Resourceful Place



Our next stop is the site of what's now the AES Plant. Before becoming a power plant in 1897, this site was a natural salt lake that the Tongva used to mine salt for their diet. When non-indigenous people started settling the area, the site was used for salt production and by 1854 was said to be [200 by 600 yards in size](#).

In 1897 someone named GJ Lindsey created the first power plant at this site. I wondered if this was the same person as George Lindsey mentioned in the Bruce's Beach section above. I couldn't find any definitive info.

[Many power plants followed](#) and except for a closure during The Great Depression, this site was ideal for power plants because freshwater can be pumped in to cool the system, while nearby oil fields provide fuel. Recently, state regulations would have banned the use of ocean water to cool power plants by the end of 2020, but the California State Water Resources Control Board [granted an extension](#) in September 2020 to continue operation until the end of 2021.



[Many residents and advocates have been pushing for a park at this site for 20 years.](#) With the recent extension granted to continue as a power plant, the future of this site remains unclear.

The amazing mural you see along the walls of this building as you ride down Harbor Drive was done by [Robert Wyland and dedicated in 1991.](#)

Continue on this protected bike lane, which takes you through the Redondo Beach Pier area, where posted signs ask you to walk your bike for a portion, until hopping back onto a bike trail on the other side. You'll continue on this path until it ends with a view of Malaga Cove in 3 miles, our next stop.

Malaga Cove



Our turnaround point is the literal end of the line for this bike path that runs along Santa Monica Bay. To the south, looking towards where the path would be if it continued straight ahead, you'll see a part of the Palos Verdes Peninsula jutting out into the ocean. This creates the area of Malaga Cove that we see in the distance. This was an important food source for the [Chowigna Tonvga Village that used to sit atop the bluffs.](#) A historical marker by Malaga Cove School reads:

“The bluff above Malaga Cove is a large and important archaeological site. For a period of perhaps 8,000 years, native peoples set up camps among the sand dunes, the seashore dwellers left no visible monuments. They did leave numerous hearths, and scores of their dead to attest to their continued presence and activity. Four levels of Indian occupancy have been discovered, each characterized by tools, implements, and weapons.”

An archaeological dig in 1936 by USC and the Southwest Museum found many artifacts. [There's indications](#) that people lived here at least 7,000 years ago and that the peninsula was home to around 70 village sites.

From here, you can turn around and head back along the path until hitting the AES plant, where our path will take us along the Hermosa Valley Greenbelt. If you want to practice your road skills along a route that has a bike lane, bike route and a downhill, follow the path until the Avenue C ramp. Posted signs say to walk your bike along this ramp (it's

very steep!). Once there, a cross walk will take you to the other side of Esplanade and then head north, along the streets that will circumvent the area of Redondo Beach Pier and take you back onto the protected bike lane on Harbor.

Before the protected bike lane along Harbor transitions back into the beach bike path, we're going to exit the bike infrastructure at Herondo St. Use the crosswalk to head East onto Herondo and then a left onto Monterey. Then make a right onto 2nd St and then a left onto Valley Drive. You are now riding alongside the Hermosa Valley Greenbelt.

Hermosa Valley Greenbelt



The Hermosa Valley Greenbelt is a sliver of green space where a railroad used to be. Advocacy efforts in the 1980s by residents of Hermosa and Manhattan Beach [kept the space from being developed by the Santa Fe Railroad](#). Activists, such as the Open Space People's Action Committee (OSPAC) formed by Rosamond Fogg, supported a ballot measure to set money aside to purchase the land and succeeded in 1988. In 1989, the Greenbelt got its name.

This unexpected stretch of green is a real treat to ride beside. The path's wood chips and choppy block by block connections don't make it an ideal bike path. But I took a chance to pull into the green space at one point and just check it out, and I highly recommend you do so as well. I was greeted by many monarch butterflies flying about and enjoying the sunny day. It's worth a little break.

The route continues along the Greenbelt as we make our way towards Sand Dune Park. This is the last stop on our ride.



Cue Sheet

14.4 miles

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Leg	Dir	Type	Notes	Total
	↑	Straight	Continue onto Bell Avenue	0.3
0.1	↑	Straight	Continue onto Blanche Road	0.4
0.1	→	Sharp Right	Turn sharp right onto Marine Avenue	0.5
0.3	→	Right	Turn right onto North Highland Avenue	0.8
0.2	←	Left	Turn left onto 27th Street	1.0
0.1	→	Right	Turn right onto Ocean Drive	1.1
0.0	←	Left	Turn left onto 28th Street	1.1
0.0	←	Left	Turn left onto South Bay Bike Path	1.2
3.2	→	Right	Turn right	4.4
0.0	←	Left	Turn left onto Yacht Club Way	4.4
0.0	→	Right	Turn right onto North Harbor Drive	4.4
0.2	→	Right	Turn right onto Marina Way	4.6
0.0	←	Left	Turn left	4.6
0.5	→	Slight Right	Keep right	5.1
1.3	↑	Straight	Continue onto International Boardwalk	6.4
0.3	↑	Straight	Continue onto International Boardwalk	6.8
0.4	↑	Straight	Continue onto International Boardwalk	7.1
0.2	↑	Straight	Continue onto International Boardwalk	7.4
0.0	←	Slight Left	Keep left onto International Boardwalk	7.4
0.1	↑	Straight	Continue onto International Boardwalk	7.5
0.8	→	Sharp Right	Turn sharp right	8.3
0.1	→	Right	Turn right	8.4
0.0	→	Right	Turn right onto Esplanade	8.4
0.0	←	Sharp Left	Turn sharp left onto Esplanade	8.4
0.0	→	Slight Right	Keep right onto Esplanade	8.4
0.1	←	Sharp Left	Turn sharp left onto Esplanade	8.5

0.8	←	Left	Turn left onto South Catalina Avenue	9.2
0.7	←	Sharp Left	Turn sharp left onto Beryl Street	10.0
0.1	→	Right	Turn right onto North Harbor Drive	10.1
0.1	→	Slight Right	Keep right onto North Harbor Drive	10.2
0.1	→	Sharp Right	Turn sharp right onto North Harbor Drive	10.2
0.4	←	Left	Turn left onto Monterey Boulevard	10.7
0.2	→	Right	Turn right onto 2nd Street	10.8
0.1	←	Left	Turn left onto Valley Drive	10.9
1.8	→	Right	Turn right onto 2nd Street	12.7
0.0	↑	Straight	Continue onto 2nd Street	12.7
0.0	←	Slight Left	Keep left onto North Ardmore Avenue	12.7
0.7	←	Slight Left	Keep left	13.4
0.1	↑	Straight	Continue onto North Valley Drive	13.5
0.3	←	Sharp Left	Turn sharp left onto Blanche Road	13.8
0.2	→	Slight Right	Keep right onto Blanche Road	14.0
0.3	←	Left	Turn left onto 31st Street	14.2
0.1	→	Right	Turn right onto Bell Avenue	14.4