

Karen Telleen-Lawton: Joining the Channel Islands All 8 Club No Easy Feat

By Karen Telleen-Lawton, Noozhawk Columnist | Published on 02.25.2013 6:12 p.m.



There isn't a secret handshake. Instead, there's a red and blue burgee with eight white stars plus a certificate granting membership into what the **Santa Cruz Island Foundation** calls "the most exclusive recognized geographic club in the world, with membership in the low 100s." The **All 8 Club** includes all who can document walking on all eight **Channel Islands**.

You might think this isn't difficult. But three of the islands take some planning and fortitude. You can reach **San Miguel Island** on the Channel Islands Park concessionaire boats. But its distance from shore, open ocean conditions and water landing can make the visit gnarly.

The **San Clemente** and **San Nicolas** islands are **Navy**-owned, so getting permission to visit is even more challenging. I visited San Clemente in the fall of 2011, pulling tons of iceplant with 18 other volunteers on a Channel Islands Restoration (CIR) work trip.

The adventure was well worth my sore back and hands, and increased my determination to "bag" my eighth island. That chance didn't come for more than a year, when the Navy hired CIR to restore heavily eroded slopes at Thousand Springs.

Of the nearly dozen workers on the December 2012 trip, five of us were completing our all-island tour. Molly Hanna caught the island bug from her friend Marla Daily, Channel Islands author and research historian. George Burtness was "all-6" for decades until a recent burst of activity. Two were co-founders of **Channel Islands Outfitters**: Fraser Kersey and Garrett Kababik.

Once arriving by Navy plane, our charge was to repair a slope deeply eroded by a dirt road cut down to the water. The previous spring, CIR had gathered native seed from the immediate area and raised plants in a small on-island nursery.

We transplanted four species into the gullies: coastal goldenbush (*Isocoma menzii menzii*), southern island silver lotus (*Lotus argophylus argenteus*), alkali grass (*distichilus spicata*) and California saltbush (*atriplex californica*).



The All 8 Club hat, burgee and certificate. (Karen Telleen-Lawton / Noozhawk photo)

We worked in blustery wet weather much of the time. The benefit was that each day we could examine whether the plants held through the rain. We made a few adjustments, but mostly the baby plants held their ground.

Late on the last afternoon, having provided a new home to more than 500 plants and repaired deteriorating nursery screens, we were rewarded with an island tour courtesy of Grace Smith, the Navy's San Nicolas Island biologist since the 1980s.

We traversed the 22-acre island in a couple of vans. Our first stop was Sand Spit, where an enormous male elephant seal guarded a harem of around 15 females, many with pups less than a week old. We watched from the wide concrete pier of a nearby barge landing.

We passed the island's utilities: a small reverse osmosis water plant with flat, pool-like membranes, and an area for offloading JP fuel. A couple of curves later, we were climbing to 907-foot Jackson Hill — the highest point on the island. The wind and cold seemed Arctic, but the view down the stark, steep cliffs to the south shore was tremendous.

Our last stops, at the northwest shore's Rock Crusher, Redeye Beach and Blue Whale Beach, each offered their own rugged beauty and history. The Lone Woman's purported cave was off-limits, but we were thrilled just to be close by. Dr. Smith's enthusiasm in describing the wonderments of her longtime home would have made even the most jaded island hopper thirst for more.

But what more is there? I'm All-8 No. 132.

— Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of observations spanning sustainability from the environment to finance, economics and justice issues. She is a fee-only financial advisor (www.DecisivePath.com) and a freelance writer (www.CanyonVoices.com). [Click here to read previous columns](#). The opinions expressed are her own.