

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA
by local award-winning author, [Brad Herzog](#)



PRESIDENTIAL PACIFIC GROVE

More than a quarter-century ago, while attending the National Ocean Conference in Monterey, President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore spent nearly an hour at Hopkins Marine Station in Pacific Grove. They huddled with researchers and hopped along tidepools, trying to understand what the tiny creatures in the tidal zone can reveal about the effects of global warming.

I remember this well. I had just moved to PG a year earlier. Still gobsmacked by the beauty of the region, I recall thinking something along the lines of: *Presidents must come here often.*

But really, they don't.

Sure, because this is such a vacation paradise, a number of former presidents have made their way to the Monterey Peninsula. In 2013, Clinton, George W. Bush and Jimmy Carter made a joint five-hour visit as part of a fundraiser for a charitable cause. Bush has visited multiple times. His father played in the Pebble Beach Pro-Am golf tournament on a few occasions. Barack Obama made a brief stop in 2018 and a longer one, including a stroll through Point Lobos, in 2022. But sitting presidents? It got me wondering.

Best I can tell, only two other chief executives have made their way specifically to Pacific Grove. The remarkable thing is this: It was a LONG time ago, when it took a REALLY LONG time to make your way across the country.

Only a quarter-century after the Civil War, in the spring of 1891, President Benjamin Harrison became just the second U.S. president to visit the West Coast. Rutherford B. Hayes had made the trip 11 years earlier, actually spending one night in Monterey, but he never seems to have made the short trip to Pacific Grove. In 1891, Harrison arrived by railroad during a one-month cross-country tour of the nation. His only extended stay

anywhere was a weeklong stop in the San Francisco and Monterey area. In fact, he worked out of what was then the fancy Hotel Del Monte in Monterey, which was referred to as his "Western White House." Many years later, a man named George Harper, who served as one of his guards on horseback as Harrison made his way by surrey to the tip of the peninsula, recalled that the president particularly enjoyed "the woods of Pacific Grove."

A decade later, William McKinley stayed at the same hotel and stopped in PG, which was elaborately decorated with flags and bunting for the occasion. McKinley visited the Methodist Church and gave a speech to veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic in which he said, "Having saved the Union, it is the duty of all to keep it saved." Only a few months later, he was assassinated in Buffalo. The man who filled McKinley's shoes, Theodore Roosevelt, had visited the Peninsula five years earlier - before he was vice-president - and rose horseback through Pacific Grove.

So presidential visits are a rarity in PG, but it turns out that the most influential visit from a White House resident, at least in terms of its impact on the town, was an appearance by a First Lady. In 1968, Lady Bird Johnson visited and was welcomed by a bevy of butterflies (local kids in Monarch costumes). It was during this appearance that the First Lady proclaimed Pacific Grove... "Butterfly Town, USA."

*The Great
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