

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

ODES TO ASILOMAR

April 1, 2026



If ever there were a place about which to wax poetic it may be the magnificent mile-long stretch of sand and surf alongside 26 acres of dunes at the western edge of Pacific Grove. A walk along Asilomar State Beach, past footprints and feather boa kelp and frolicking dogs, is like strolling into a contented sigh. A sunset at Asilomar State Beach is a golden orb descending into a symphony of colors, a farewell painted on a twilight canvas, a magical meeting of day and night at the horizon.

Okay... maybe I should leave it to the poets. And I will, especially because April happens to be National Poetry Month. I took my own stroll along Asilomar - via a scouring of the internet - and I discovered a handful of poems penned over the years by visitors captivated by the coastal scene.



So I'll hand it over to a half-dozen versifiers, each with their own expressive perspective. First, a poem in rhyme by Marie Tello Phillips, an American poet, novelist, songwriter, and essayist who lived mainly in Pittsburgh. Born in 1874, she published a poem about Asilomar in a 1922 collection:

"Asilomar"

The flowers around Asilomar
Are blooming all the year,
Blue fields of lupine match the sky,
While golden stars grow near.
Wild lilacs deck the bending cliff
Where the rollers leap with a roar,
And the wind whistles in the tall pine-trees
On the old Pacific shore.

The sun sets over dunes and sea
As the waters bathe the sand,
The fog-bells ring a mournful dirge
For the wreckage on the strand;
We gather around a great bonfire,
In the old moon's lambent rays,
And we sing sweet songs of long ago
As we dream of other days.

Asilomar amid the drifting dunes
Where the rollers leap with a roar,
And the wind whistles in the tall pine-trees
On the old Pacific shore.

Next, a poem of the same name written by Maridee Sands (appropriately) in 1951:

"Asilomar"

The hours cling together here,
Like pearls along the slender hand
That binds each lovely bit of luster
Into one matchless perfect strand.

Moments of gaiety, time for dreams,
With friends both old and new,
Building a string of memories
Into a dream come true.

Walks by a sea like a grey gull's wing
Smooth and shining with white tips edging,
Where rock and sand and sea all sing
Of dreams that our hearts are pledging.

We carry the light to far places
Away from this lovely sea retreat.
See it again in the children's faces
Uplifted, listening at our feet.

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Batting third, a brief bit of eloquence by 21st-century poet Andrena Zawinski, another Pittsburgh native (strangely enough) who later founded the San Francisco Bay Area Women's Poetry Salon:

"Meditation at the Dunes of Asilomar"

Trumpets of desert sand verbena
and leafy coastal sagewort nestle in
with paintbrush and seaside daisies,
ageless blooms at home in the dunes
inside the whip of wind and weight of fog,
facing the rocky cove's icy tides and surf.
Beneath a sky a spray of constellations,
lovers pass by snuggling into each other,
their windswept laughter a night song
drifting past plumes of pampas grass.

In 2005, at the age of 77, Doug Minnis eloquently captured memories of a stroll on the beach. Here's a snippet:

"One More Walk on Asilomar Beach"

My new running shoes,
 now used for slow walking,
 leave a beautiful print in the beach sand.
But as fast as I leave my mark,
 the fussy housewife follows
 with a crashing scolding
 and scrubs out memories of my stroll.
Old friend, all the prints
 we left in our many walks here,
 have long returned to
 smoothed clean sand.
Our voices of old,
 so full of our attempted
 solemn wisdom,
 have long been silenced
 by crashing waves.
The sunrises we admired
 and the deer and seals
 we spotted have
 long since disappeared.
There is no record of our
 ever having been here.



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Poet Carolyn Rice, in her 2015 collection *Flesh & Earth: Poems from the Left Coast*, focused on...

"Asilomar Sand"

Most coastal
dune sands
come from river sediment flowing
toward the ocean, then settling
on the beach.
But not at Asilomar.
Asilomar's white, luxurious powder
comes from offshore rocks, Santa Lucia granodiorite —
quartz and feldspar —
our surf
batters and grinds rocks into fine white granules
that waves wash
up and onto us.

Finally, I'll offer an abridged version of a recent bit of verse penned by San Francisco poet D.A. Wilson:

"Asilomar Beach Meditations"

Flying eyeball wings across the sky.
The bleached blue sky of April
Off-set against the white sand.
I walk upon this beach
In the slow lopping gate
Of many miles to go before
I rest my weary bones.
I hear the rhythm in the waves
Just listening without analyzing
Not particularly going anywhere.
Understand this is a miracle.
Ain't it good to be alive?

