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THE NOT-TOO-MAGIC-CARPET TO SAN DIEGO

Not long ago I received a letter from a man who lives at Port Stanley, in the Falkland Islands, away down in the South Atlantic, just around the corner from Cape Horn. It took that letter ^{only} eight days to make it, which is just a hint as to how things have improved since the days of the Cape Horn windjammers.

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For ~~many~~ centuries now, the sea and its trade-routes have been of great importance to San Diego, and for the first century at least, about the only way to get here was aboard ship, if you expected to make it in even a reasonable facsimile of comfort. Even up to some thirty-odd years ago, ocean transportation for passengers as well as cargo was an important phase of American life -- and I wonder how many of you who can still remember the Yale and the Harvard, and back beyond them to the Governor and the Santa Rosa and the Queen, ever stopped to realize that once such travel had been accompanied by tiny and ill-ventillated staterooms, vile food and rigidly rationed drinking-water.

In its earliest times, sea travel to California was slow, dangerous and miserable. The ships were small and leaky, they were clumsy and hard to manage, and what they laughingly called navigation was so crude and uncertain that it's a wonder that any of them ever found their way home. It took Cabrillo three months to get here from down around San Blas, and when he left a few days later and headed up the coast, he was delighted when he picked up Santa Catalina Island, because he thought it was China. But don't be too harsh on poor old Cabrillo; as of 1542 there were neither sextant nor chronometer nor nautical almanac. The sun's altitude was taken with a crude device called a cross-staff, and it's to his credit that his latitude was off by only a hundred miles or so. Longitude was purely guess-work. As longitude is a function of time,

