

STANDARD OIL AND ESTERO BAY

Standard Oil, now known as the Chevron Corporation in California, held a major presence in Estero Bay for decades. Stretching from Montana de Oro to Cayucos, the bay provides a sheltered environment and deep water close to shore, making it an excellent location for loading oil tankers. The company transported crude oil originally piped from the valley, then taken from the bay to refineries down in Los Angeles.¹



Figure 1: Early on in Standard Oil's use of Estero Bay for loading oil tankers, this steel pier was used for docking them and pipelines ran the length of it. It was deconstructed in the 1980s after being replaced by underwater pipelines years before.

Operations began in 1929 with the completion of the 2,200-acre Chevron Estero Bay Marine Terminal off the beach just north of Morro Rock.² The terminal originally consisted of a large steel dock with pipelines running along it. This was later replaced by underwater pipelines and removed in the 80s.³ The scope of the whole industry was impressive. Sixteen storage tanks located in the hills just beyond the beach stored crude oil received by pipeline from nearly 100 miles away in Kern County.⁴ From these tanks, oil was pumped through two underwater pipelines to oil tankers offshore at the marine terminal. Once loaded, these tankers made the journey down to Los Angeles

¹ Johnston, Kathy. "Say Goodbye to the Chevron Marine Terminal." *New Times San Luis Obispo*, 28 Apr. 2019, www.newtimeslo.com/sanluisobispo/say-goodbye-to-the-chevron-marine-terminal/Content?oid=2944553.

² Sneed, David. "Oil Cleanup Project Underway at Morro Bay Terminal." *San Luis Obispo Tribune*, 26 May 2010, www.sanluisobispo.com/news/local/article39125988.html.

³ "City of Morro Bay Coastal Land Use Plan." *Solar Energy Program: Chapter from the Energy and Environmental Division Annual Report 1980, 1981*, doi:10.2172/894951.

⁴ Johnston.

where the oil was offloaded to refineries. At its height the system transported up to 90,000 b/d – over 3.7 million gallons a day.⁵

During WWII, a Japanese submarine began targeting ships just off the coast. It attempted to sink the Standard Oil Company H.M. Story, which escaped with the help of U.S. aircraft.⁶ However, another ship was not so lucky. The S.S. Montebello, loaded with 3 million gallons of oil from Santa Maria, was torpedoed and proceeded to sink just 6 miles off the coast of Cambria. "It was dark when we got hit," says Richard Quincy, the last living crew member of the S.S. Montebello.⁷ "It went so fast. It was hard to keep track of time. We were anxious to get off because we figured it was going to catch fire."⁸ Thanks to the help of two tugboats, the S.S. Estero and the S.S. Alma from Morro Bay, the whole crew was safely rescued.⁹ The restored Alma can now be visited at the Morro Bay Maritime Museum.



Figure 2: For decades tankers such as this one were frequently seen off the coast of Morro Bay, loading oil before heading south to refineries.

Source:
<http://yourbaynews.com/wp->

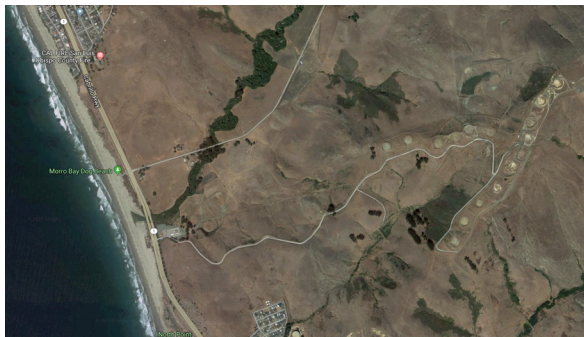


Figure 3: This current aerial view of Estero Bay shows the 16 circular indents of what were once storage tanks for oil. Other facilities including the pump house are visible in the small lot just to the

The use of the marine terminal came to an end with the creation of the Pacific Pipeline in 1999, which carries crude oil directly to Los Angeles refineries through overland pipelines.¹⁰ According to environmental writer David Sneed, as part of the terminal's decommissioning plan, the Chevron Pipeline Co. reached an agreement with state water officials in 2002 to clean up the oil spills that occurred

⁵ "City".

⁶ Krieger, Dan. "TUGBOAT THAT RESCUED CREW - OF S.S. MONTEBELLO RESTORED." *NewsBank*, The Tribune (San Luis Obispo), 5 June 2016,

⁷ Jaffe, Ina. "Six Miles Offshore: The Wreck Of Montebello." *NPR*, NPR, 19 Oct. 2011, www.npr.org/2011/10/18/141453907/oiafter-the-wreck-of-montebello.

⁸ Jaffe.

⁹ Krieger.

¹⁰ Johnston.

during its years of operation.¹¹ The oil spills resulted in the contamination of roughly 8100 cubic yards of land east of Highway 1. Surrounding the complete removal of the terminal pipelines in 2011 other various environmental concerns were addressed. Today, very little contamination remains in Estero Bay from the decades of use by Standard Oil. Because much of the oil transportation occurred underground or underwater, this part of Morro Bay's history is indeed hidden. Only the sixteen circular indents from the storage tanks are still visible on the hills, along with a small lot with a few buildings just off Highway 1.



Figure 4: This map outlines exactly where these pipelines ran, stretching under the

¹¹ Sneed.

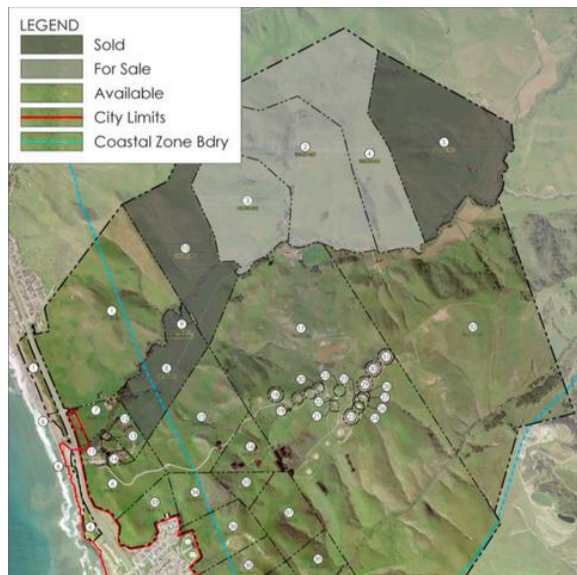


Figure 5: The land owned by Chevron has been split up into various plots to be sold, which are outlined in this map. The plots on the far left are those wished to be

The marine terminal pipelines were fully deconstructed in 2011 by the Chevron Environmental Management Company.¹² The nearly 2,200 acres owned by Chevron remain undeveloped and have been divided into several plots to be sold.¹³ Current plans are underway by The Trust of Public Lands to purchase the Toro Creek Ranch plot — 283 acres composed of coastal grasslands and beach where the marine terminal's oil pipelines and storage tanks were located. Plans include an off-leash dog beach and a coastal trail leading from Morro Bay to Cayucos, all centered on conserving the beautiful lands for public enjoyment. The project is exciting to district Supervisor Bruce Gibson, since it is closely aligned with the county's goals of conservation, maintaining public beach access, and protecting the open space between Morro

Bay and Cayucos. "It's the start of potentially more conservation opportunities as Chevron works cooperatively with the land trusts and public agencies," Gibson said. The deal is set to go through as early as 2020 and is hopefully just the start of reclaiming this land.

¹² Johnston.

¹³ Vaughan, Monica. "Milestone Reached to Buy 'Dog Beach' near Morro Bay from Chevron for Open Space." *San Luis Obispo Tribune*, 8 Dec. 2018, www.sanluisobispo.com/news/local/environment/article222773055.html.

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