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# ZOOM IN ON THE USA

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## THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE

Whoever said: "The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco" didn't say it without reason. Though a gross exaggeration - it hardly ever gets colder than 15° Celsius and it never snows throughout the year - the quote pinpoints the true nature of San Francisco summers. They are simply chilly, especially around the Bay. The summer time fog rolls in from the Pacific and envelops San Francisco Bay and one of the most famous landmarks of the city, the Golden Gate Bridge, in dense and humid patches of white (see the picture below). If you are planning a boat cruise of the Bay or a walk along the 2,737 m long bridge, make sure you have a warm jacket in your backpack!

The Golden Gate Bridge was built between 1933-37 when the

rest of the United States was submerged in a serious economic crisis known as the Great Depression. A group of renowned engineers and bridge designers (Joseph Strauss, Irving Murrow, Charles Alton Ellis, and others) joined forces and designed a light and graceful Art Deco suspension bridge to connect San Francisco to Marin County. The bridge is part of U.S. Route 101 and California Route 1. Its 6 lanes are arranged in such a way that when the traffic is heavier towards the city - on weekday mornings - the four lanes run southbound. On weekday afternoons it is the other way around. In addition to cars, the bridge is open to bicyclists and to pedestrians, but the latter can cross only during daylight.



*Photo © AP Images*

**In This Issue: San Francisco**

**Zoom in on the USA**

# THE STREETS OF SAN FRANCISCO



There is a famous street in London called Lombard Street. It is home to many banks and financial institutions. There is also a famous Lombard Street in San Francisco. It winds down a steep hill with many hairpin turns and is nicknamed America's "most crooked street" (see the middle photo above). Streets rarely make a tourist attraction, but this street is apparently a must see for all visitors to San Francisco. Beautiful Victorian mansions line the street and flowerbeds flank its sharp curves. The crooked part of Lombard Street is a treat for the eye in daytime when it sparkles with colors. A taxi ride down this street at night is said to be an unforgettable experience and an adrenaline booster.

Though one of the steepest streets in San Francisco, Lombard Street is not the city's only street running along a steep hill. Indeed, the number of hills within the city boundaries exceeds 50. Some parts of San Francisco are named after them; for example, Nob Hill, Russian Hill, and Pacific Heights. This has an influence on traffic and transportation. Parking cars at 90 degrees is required on some steeper streets (see top left photo). The famous San Francisco cable car - the first mechanical vehicle that could ascend and descend the city's streets - is a story in itself.

Behind this story is Andrew Smith Hallidie who was born in 1836 in London to Scottish parents and then immigrated to California in search of gold in 1852. Hallidie was a born engineer. He constructed his first electrical machine at the age of 10. He was not a very successful gold miner and had several very close shaves with death while looking for gold, such as a landslide, a forest fire, and a premature explosion in a shaft. Amidst hard work that was by no means limited to gold digging, but also included servicing mining equipment and even running a restaurant, he used his engineering skills to construct a suspension bridge and to improve the cars that delivered rocks to a quartz mill. When he gave up mining, he returned to San Fran-

cisco and started manufacturing wire rope. Among the many patents that Hallidie registered was the "Hallidie Ropeway (or Tramway)", a transportation device operating on a line that could be used in mountainous and hilly areas. Constantly working on improving his invention, he developed a steel cable. He soon improved it even more by installing propelling cables underground. From there, he was but one step from developing the cable car. In a report to the Mechanics' Institute he explains his motives for working so hard on the project:

*I was largely induced to think over the matter from seeing the difficulty and pain the horses experienced in hauling the cars up Jackson Street, on which street four or five horses were needed for the purpose [...].* (<http://www.sfmuseum.net/bio/hallidie.html>)

However, the road to implementing his ingenious invention was long and difficult. Hallidie had to overcome very strong opposition from those who did not believe the cable car could work. Had he not been so determined and had he not invested all his savings (\$20,000) in carrying out his project, San Francisco horses may have had to haul heavy cars up steep streets a lot longer. Fortunately, his will prevailed. The first test run was performed on August 2, 1873. Most accounts report that when the driver (called a grip man) looked down the hill he refused to operate the car. However, Hallidie took the grip in his hand and ran the car down the street safely. Later, cable cars were introduced in other American cities and Hallidie finally got due recognition.

Today the San Francisco cable car system is an icon of the city. It is operated manually just like in past centuries. Two routes connect downtown to Fisherman's Wharf and one runs along California Street. Needless to say, most passengers are tourists and the most desirable place is not a seat inside, but the boarding step outside the car.

Text by AIRC Krakow



# IN & OUT OF THE CITY



Sea lions at Pier 39  
Photo © AP Images



San Francisco seen from the Bay  
Photo © Bożena Grzebień



Fisherman's Wharf  
Photo © Bożena Grzebień



At Fisherman's Wharf  
Photo © Bożena Grzebień



Muir Woods  
Photo © AP Images

## Fisherman's Wharf

San Francisco natives prefer to stay away from this very crowded spot, but that does not change the fact that Fisherman's Wharf (in the middle photo above) is one of San Francisco's top-rated tourist attractions. Complete with a fishing pier, stalls selling fresh crab, restaurants, a shopping mall, and the take-off point for Alcatraz rides and San Francisco Bay cruises, it is also a wildlife habitat. Yes, huge numbers of sea lions recline on wooden boards which float off the side of the most popular mall on Fisherman's Wharf called Pier 39. The sea lions' barking and roaring mingle with tourists' delighted "Ohs" and "Ahs," creating a truly unusual atmosphere.

The Wharf's ticket offices quickly sell out Alcatraz tours, but the lucky ticket holders, who prudently bought them in advance on the Internet, line up patiently in long coiling lines to get aboard the boats. Others must satisfy themselves with Bay cruises, which offer great views of the city shoreline, a close look at the Golden Gate Bridge from below, and as many circles around the island of Alcatraz as it takes for the passengers to listen to a recording about the prison's history and most notorious inmates (for more stories about Alcatraz see the September 2008 issue of *Zoom*.)

After returning from their tours, the tourists visit the multitude of shops, stalls, and stands on the Wharf to buy souvenirs. Striped metal prison mugs, key holders, and wooden cable cars are among the most popular souvenirs. Warm sweaters and jackets are also popular items for those tourists who did not know about San Francisco's cool summer mists and fog. Ice cream stands, open-air fruit markets, and candy stands offer sweat treats, while those who prefer a more nourishing meal are tempted to try the city's famed clam chowder which is served in a bread bowl.

## Golden Gate Park

Nature lovers can find an excellent refuge from the hustle and bustle of the city in a very special city park. With its 4.1 km<sup>2</sup>, San Francisco Golden Gate Park is just a little bigger than New York's Central Park and resembles it in its rectangular shape. Established in a difficult terrain consisting mainly of dunes, it posed quite a challenge for its founders, who - as history has proven - managed to permanently

transform the sandy area into an oasis full of lush vegetation. William Hammond Hall and John McLaren founded the park at the beginning of the 1870s and 1880s. McLaren, who was Scottish by birth and learned gardening in Scotland, was the Park's superintendent for 53 years. This record tenure was the result of a special privilege for the superintendent who - in recognition of his merits - was given a lifetime job (!) at a time when the mandatory retirement age was 70. Both men favored natural landscapes and introduced wildlife to the park instead of sculptures and statues (a small herd of bison was introduced to the park in the 1890s). Nevertheless, many statues of famous people can be seen in the park today, including ones depicting Robert Burns, Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, and Verdi. There are also buildings showcasing several architectural styles: mission revival, classical, and Victorian. Water was originally pumped to the park with the use of two windmills. There is a Japanese tea garden, a botanical garden, and a lake in the park which is popular with yacht sailors. The biggest and most spectacular areas include the music concourse area, where numerous performances are staged, the De Young Museum featuring fine arts, and the California Academy of Sciences - one of the largest natural history museums in the world.

## Muir Woods

Those who feel like leaving the city for a day to relax have a great option less than 20 km north of San Francisco - Muir Woods. The area, which in 1908 was declared a national monument by President Theodore Roosevelt, was named after the great Scottish-born American naturalist and conservationist John Muir, who played an important role in preserving Yosemite and Sequoia National Park. There are 3 walks in Muir Woods that can take from half an hour to 1.5 hours, but there are also longer hikes. The forest park is paved so that it is easily accessible for people in wheelchairs and mothers with strollers. The main attraction of Muir Woods is the Coast Redwood, a relative of the Giant Sequoia. The average age of the redwoods is between 500 and 800 years and there is a tree in Muir Woods that is 1,200 years old. The tallest tree in Muir Woods is nearly 80 m tall. It is a unique experience to walk by the tallest living things on earth; trees that can live 10 times longer than man!

Text by AIRC Krakow



# ACTIVITY PAGE

## Win a Prize!

### May 2009 CONTEST

When was a great earthquake and fire that severely damaged San Francisco?

Send the answer (with your home address) to: [madridIRC@state.gov](mailto:madridIRC@state.gov)

Deadline: June 30

## Win a Prize!

The answer in the April 2009 Contest:

E.g. the New York Yankees, the New York Mets

Thank you for participating

# ZOOM

IN ON THE USA

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■ Exercise 1 Comprehension. Decide whether these sentences are true or false:

1. The fog that appears in the Bay Area in summer is the result of the proximity of the Pacific.
2. There is always an equal number of lanes going south and north across the Golden Gate Bridge.
3. Pedestrians are not allowed on the Bridge at any time.
4. Lombard Street in London is the most crooked street in England.
5. Nearly all streets in San Francisco are flat.
6. Andrew Hallidie was a gold miner, an engineer, and an inventor.
7. It was easy for Hallidie to convince San Franciscans that his cable car would solve the problem of transportation on steep streets.
8. The cable car system is going to be discontinued.
9. You can see sea lions on the side of one of the piers in Fisherman's Wharf.
10. Clam chowder soup is usually served in china cups.
11. You can sail a yacht on a lake in Golden Gate Park.
12. Muir Woods were named after a famous pianist.

■ Exercise 2 Find out the following information:

1. San Francisco was named for ..... (give the name of the person),
2. One of the nicknames of San Francisco is .....
3. The population of San Francisco is a/ over 1 million, b/ less than one million
4. The city's motto: *Oro en Paz, Fierro en Guerra* means: "Gold in Peace, Iron in ....."

■ Exercise 3 Look at the photos below and say where in San Francisco they were taken. All these places were mentioned in articles on p. 2 and 3.

What helped you decide?

## Glossary (in the order of appearance)

pinpoint - find or locate exactly  
submerge - cause to be under water  
suspension bridge - a bridge in which the weight is supported by vertical cables suspended from other cables that run between towers  
steep - rising or falling sharply  
hairpin - U-shaped pin for hair  
close shave with death - a dangerous situation which may lead to death  
induce - succeed in persuading  
haul - pull or drag with effort  
pier - a platform on pillars  
tenure - a period of holding an office

(on the basis of *The New Oxford American Dictionary*)



Photos © Bożena Grzebień