

# Humphrey the Wayward Whale

By Noel O'Brien

History was made on the Rio Vista waterfront when Humphrey the humpback whale paid us a visit. On his way from Mexico to Alaska, his migration took a detour of sorts and he wandered upriver to spend some time in the Delta. Who'd have thought we'd see whales in Rio Vista. Humphrey got a lot of attention as he journeyed upriver to arrive at the Rio Vista Bridge (Helen Madere Bridge) on October 10, 1985. He journeyed further upriver and wound up 70 miles from the Pacific Ocean. The Delta was much more a freshwater environment back then.

Trouble was that Humphrey was in a jam and needed to get back to sea in order to revive and continue on his original journey. Numerous attempts to get Humphrey back downriver were ineffective and the whale began to show signs of weakness. Finally, whale researcher Louis Herman collaborating with Dr. Bernie Krause, an acoustics expert, played recordings downriver of humpback whale feeding songs to coax Humphrey back out to the ocean. A coordinated effort guided by the two men, included the Coast Guard, numerous local boaters and the Naval Post Graduate Underwater Acoustics Research Laboratory, made it an outstanding success. A private yacht, *Boot Legger*, was loaned by a local, carried the acoustic transducers supplied by the Navy and the journey back out to sea began. There was great fanfare and excitement throughout the Delta as Humphrey's downriver progress was tracked on a daily basis.

Then, on November 4, 1985 Humphrey approached the San Francisco Bay and headed in the right direction – out to sea! His behavior changed and he began to frolic as excitement took over and he was back on track to his world. Humphrey shared our world for a few weeks, but remained in our memories for much longer. As a memory of record, Rio Vista erected a granite marker to commemorate the surprising and incredible event of Humphrey the wayward humpback whale.



<http://oceanlink.info/wot/images>

