

Student discovers floating tsunami dock on video one year later.

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Oregon State University graduate student Cheryl Horton was meticulously scanning year-old video of a bird colony off Yaquina Head near Newport, Ore., last month when she noticed a strange object drifting by in the background.

Closer examination confirmed that the grainy, distant floating object captured on her research camera was the dock that washed ashore at Agate Beach in early June of 2012, some 15 months after a [devastating earthquake](#) and tsunami ripped it loose from its mooring in Misawa, Japan. In the weeks after it landed on the Oregon beach, the cement dock became a tourist attraction and drew attention from news media worldwide.

Her discovery came one year almost to the day that the dock landed on Agate Beach, bringing mystique – and potentially invasive species – to Oregon from Japan. It is the only known video of the dock during its trans-Pacific Ocean journey.

"We've been behind analyzing our footage and had gone through video of common murre colonies at Cape Meares in the north and Coquille Point in the south," said Horton, a master's candidate in fisheries and wildlife at OSU. "But we got so busy that we didn't get around to looking at the central coast data until this June. Then it was, 'whoa – what is that?'"

"That" was the dock, which measured seven feet tall, was some 19 feet

wide by 66 feet long, and weighed an estimated 188 tons. On camera, floating in the water, it looks much smaller – almost like a log. It takes about three minutes for the concrete dock to drift past the camera, slowly riding the current from north to south.

The discovery is more of a curiosity than anything, though OSU researchers have examined the video for clues that may tell them a bit more about the direction and speed the dock may have traveled – at least in the days before it beached.

Horton is sharing the video with others and is again focusing on her research on common murrelets, a species that increasingly is being preyed upon by [bald eagles](#) along the Oregon coast, as well as by "secondary" predators including gulls and pelicans.

"It was kind of fun to discover the dock [video](#) and share it with others," she said. "Everyone has been pretty excited about it."

A portion of the dock is on display at OSU's Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport, where Horton and major professor Rob Suryan are based. Horton also is mentored by Katie Dugger, another fisheries and wildlife faculty member on the OSU campus.

Horton is the second fisheries and wildlife student in recent years to make an accidental scientific discovery via camera. In 2008, graduate student Katie Moriarty captured an image of a rare wolverine on camera in the Tahoe National Forest. It was the first sighting of a wolverine in California in nearly 75 years.

Provided by Oregon State University

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