

Technology V12/S2: Glass Beach

Glass Beach is a protected state park located in Northern California. It is famous for its beautifully colored sea glass. Almost a thousand people visit Glass Beach daily. One might be surprised to hear that the site was once used as a trash dump.



From 1949-1967, Glass Beach was a water dump site for companies. They threw items that contained metal and glass into the water. Sometimes, the trash piles were set on fire to create more space. Glass Beach is both natural and manmade. Clean up efforts greatly reduced the amount of trash on the beach. Waves and sea salt caused erosion to other items. Erosion is when something becomes smooth by rubbing against something else. This process left behind millions of beautifully colored glass in the sand.

The amount of glass on the beach has reduced over time, again due to natural and manmade reasons. Even though it is against the law, some tourists have taken pieces of the sea glass home. Waves are constantly hitting the remaining pieces of glass, continuing the process of erosion. There is a push to replace the glass because of the benefits of glass reefs to dying ecosystems. As the glass erodes, it releases important nutrients into the water. What was once ugly and harmful to the ecosystem is now beautiful and helpful.