



angle points

Smoots and Anchors

I enjoy the use of the English language, especially with regards to writing and communication. As Land Surveyors, we employ a broad range of terms, some common and some not so much. Indeed, one of my greatest pleasures is reworking words and phrases into a tangible way of communicating. This sentiment brings me to a recent conversation I had with a good friend, one of the brightest Land Surveyors I know, Mr. Lee McComb. Besides being friends, Lee and I enjoy a special relationship owing to our mutual friendship with the late Curtis M. Brown.

Lee had just returned from Boston. It is where I began my surveying career in the early 70's. Lee had been walking around the city along one of my favorite routes, from Harvard Square, south, past MIT, down Massachusetts Avenue, over the 364.4 smoots long Harvard Bridge, a magnificent structure that spans the Charles River. Lee made mention of the smoots and I estimated him to be 1.15 smoots long. We both enjoyed that.

The "smoot" was created in October 1958 after Oliver R. Smoot, a 5-foot, 7-inch tall MIT pledge decided to measure the length of the bridge with his body. After repeatedly laying himself down, over and over, to see how long the bridge was, he grew exhausted whereupon his fraternity brothers carried him the balance of the way. In 2011, the unique unit of measurement, the product of a quintessential MIT student prank, was entered as one of the 10,000 new words to the fifth edition of the American Heritage Dictionary.

Smoot graduated from MIT with the class of 1962, became a lawyer, and later became chairman of the American National



There are many ways to measure a piece of land. It is always important to use the correct units. Anchors the way!

Standards Institute (ANSI, 2001–02) and then, president of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO, 2003–04), a fitting recognition for his unique brand of humor.

This story of the smoot brings me to a recent conversation I had with my grandson, Bostyn. A few weeks before Halloween, my wife and I took him and our grandnephews hunting for pumpkins, an annual family tradition. Needless to say, my grandson always wants to find the biggest possible pumpkin to eventually be carved up into a jack-o-lantern.

I should mention that Bostyn loves to ride motorcycles and when he's not riding on something with wheels, he likes watching videos of motorcyclists. As we drove along the tree lined road leading to the pumpkin farm, Bostyn started mumbling something about "anchors"—"nice anchors." I kept looking out the window, trying to figure out what he was talking about, while he went on about all the "nice anchors." I finally gave in and asked him, "Hey buddy, what are you talking about? What's out there? What are you looking at?"

"Anchors," he replied. "Look at all those nice anchors."

"Anchors?" I asked him, "What anchors? What are you talking about?" He pointed across the road again. "Where are they?"

"Over there," he said, pointing. "All over. Look at those great anchors!"

I shook my head, confused, looking for power lines and power poles, thinking he must be referring to guy wires or something. There certainly weren't any boats out there. After we passed another rolling field, I watched him wave his finger up and down, tracing the hills.

It suddenly dawned on me! "Acres?" Is that what you mean?"

"Yeah Poppy," he replied, glad I was on the same page with him. "That's it. Acres!"

I nodded my head. I got it, in spite of the fact that I'd come to like the anchor as a unit of measurement. ■

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