

Google's* magical mystery barge (a Halloween photo-essay)

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Just in time for Halloween, Silicon Valley is all aflutter with the discovery that Google apparently is assembling a mystery barge at a pier on San Francisco's Treasure Island. Curious, we drove by and to take a look. Here are a few pictures:



Figure 1: The mystery barge on Treasure Island

Speculation is that it could be anything from a ocean-going server farm (seawater is a great coolant), to a showroom for Google Glass. We think it is a mug's game to even begin to try and figure out what it is for, but we note that if Larry Ellison can have an America's Cup catamaran, then perhaps the Google founder's have decided they need the mother of all houseboats?. Noting San Francisco's soaring home prices, maybe it is waterfront housing for Google employees. We really have no idea.

But we were amused that the security is the tightest we have seen for a barge on the bay since the HMB-1 (Howard Hughes' top-secret barge originally built to recover a lost Soviet sub) was moored in Redwood City in the 1990s and used to hide the Navy *Sea Shadow*, a \$172 million prototype stealth ship.



Figure 2: Hughes HMB-1 and the Sea Stealth. Source: Wikipedia, and NBS Bay Area

Continued...

* Allegedly Google's barge – we really have no idea.
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The HMB-1 was the object of no end of conspiracy theories before it was finally towed to the scrap heap, and judging by the buzz already building, it is a safe bet that Google's barge is likely to become a magnet for mystery connoisseurs as well. When we drove past, there were three TV crews parked by the water, taking video of the moored barge. None of them seemed to notice that whoever is building the barge has also occupied the old aircraft hangar 100 yards away.

We watched as three 18-wheeler trucks entered the hangar in a carefully choreographed routing calculated to hide the interior from prying eyes. The truck would roll right up to the doors, honk and pause while the doors were rolled back just long enough for the truck to enter and then close promptly behind it. It had a cinematic hush-hush touch that struck us as something straight out of the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, further reinforced by the myriad warning signs on the hangar door.



Figure 3: signs on the adjoining hangar, and truck entering hangar.

Adding to the cinematic quality of this scene is the fact that the old air terminal two buildings over starred as the Nazi-era Flughafen in one of the Indiana Jones films. For all we know, perhaps Indiana Jones ark of the covenant or the good professor's golden skull is hidden inside?



Figure 4: security station and barge in the background

So, as we stated at the start, we haven't a clue about what is happening on Treasure Island. And we haven't a clue whether it is significant to Google or anyone else. But things have gotten just a bit dull and predictable here in Silicon Valley of late, so a nice mystery right in our backyard is a welcome break from the usual dull routine of social media startups and quirky billionaires with plans to save the world. Even if we don't get invited to tonight's Halloween party aboard the Google barge, we are happy to have the distraction to take our mind off the Twitter IPO and more serious news elsewhere on the planet.

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