

VOL. 11 ISSUE 2

APRIL - JUNE 2017

PIEDRAS BLANCAS DECLARED A NATIONAL MONUMENT

On January 12, 2017, Barack Obama, in one of his last acts as President, expanded the California Coastal National Monument (CCNM) to include the Piedras Blancas Light Station and surrounding Outstanding Natural Area. Launched as a local citizens' effort in September, 2014, the expansion was endorsed by the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and Friends of the Elephant Seal. Soon afterwards, over 60 San Luis Obispo County service organizations passed resolutions of support, while hundreds of local residents wrote letters, testified at public hearings, and signed petitions. Former Senator Barbara Boxer and now-retired Congresswoman Lois Capps were key allies in the effort.

In addition to Piedras Blancas, five other onshore gateways to the California Coastal National Monument were named in President Obama's proclamation. They include three coastal properties in Humboldt County, a 5,780 acre coastal terrace in Santa Cruz County, and a small cluster of rocks and islands off the coast of Orange County. Like Piedras Blancas, all of these sites are areas of great natural beauty.



They are also ecologically-critical research areas that provide important habitat for seabirds, marine mammals, and other plant and animal life, including several endangered species.

National monument designation confers the highest level of protection for these coastal gems strung along the California shoreline. It also ensures that future generations can explore and experience the wonders of the Piedras Blancas Unit of the California Coastal National Monument, undisturbed in its pristine condition, just as we enjoy, preserve, and protect it today.



Photo by Gary O'Neill



The Beacon is a joint publication of the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and the Bureau of Land Management. The PBLSA is a non-profit partner of the BLM and provides support for the restoration, conservation, interpretation, and stewardship of the unique natural, historical, and cultural resources at the Piedras Blancas Light Station. © Copyright 2017



ANNUAL GREY WHALE COW/CALF STUDY BEGINS AT PBL



The annual grey whale cow/calf study performed by NOAA biologists began Monday, March 27th. This is a 10 week count of the newborn calves and their mothers as they travel north to Alaska from Mexico. Though the eastern population of grey whales is no longer on the endangered species list (the western population lives in the waters around Russia and Japan), scientists continue to study the grey whales' population numbers, particularly their birth rates, to quantify the general health of the population as a whole. Part of this study includes aerial photography taken from a hexacopter (drone). The hexacopter is piloted by biologists with permits from NOAA and the FAA, as well as permission from the Bureau of Land Management. This is the only time drones are allowed at the light station. Last year's cow/calf count was the highest it has been in decades. We look forward to seeing these amazing creatures as they travel past.

BLACK OYSTERCATCHER SURVEYS



The black oystercatcher is a large shorebird known for its bright red beak, yellow eyes, light pink legs and loud chirping vocalizations. It is fairly widespread along the Pacific Coast, inhabiting rocky intertidal zones and mudflats. The habitat of the Black Oystercatcher is considered endangered. Population surveys are important to observe the effects of pollution, climate change, and human disturbance on rocky intertidal species like the Black Oystercatcher. The Piedras Blancas Light Station will be partnering with California State Parks, The Audubon Society, and Point Blue conservation organization to conduct spring surveys for Black Oystercatcher fledglings (newly hatched birds) in hopes of increasing our knowledge of these birds.

We are looking for volunteers for this effort. Please contact Jodie Nelson at jnelson@blm.gov if you would like to help with this study.

HAVE YOU SEEN OUR WEBCAM?

Since it was installed last year, many visitors have written to say how much they enjoy the live 270 degree view from the light station. Depending on the time of year, you may see elephant seals lounging on the beach, waves crashing on rocks, flowers in bloom, and beautiful sunsets.

www.piedrasblancas.org/webcam

INTERTIDAL ZONE RESEARCH AT PIEDRAS BLANCAS



Researchers from UC Santa Cruz were at Piedras Blancas in March as they studied marine life among the intertidal zone below the light station. They have been doing long-term monitoring surveys not only at Piedras Blancas, but up and down the California Coastline since 1997. The researchers use fixed plots to document changes in coverage, or abundance of targeted species or how they are gathered. This fixed-plot approach allows the dynamics of rocky intertidal species to be monitored with reasonable sampling effort and provides sufficient statistics to detect changes over space or time. They target the following species: *Chthamalus/Balanus* (Acorn Barnacles), *Mytilus* (California Mussel), *Silvetia* (Golden Rockweed), *Mastocarpus* (Turkish Washcloth), and *Pisaster* (Ochre Star).

If you would like to learn more about their findings at Piedras Blancas please go to their website-
<http://www.eeb.ucsc.edu/pacificrockyintertidal/sitepages/piedrasblancas.html>

Above: Researchers use a grid pattern over the tidelands.



MEET OUR NEIGHBOR: CARRIZO PLAIN NATIONAL MONUMENT

Carrizo Plain National Monument is one of the best kept secrets in California. Just a few hours from Los Angeles, the Carrizo Plain offers visitors a rare chance to be alone with nature. The plain is home to diverse communities of wildlife and plant species including several listed as threatened or endangered and is an area culturally important to Native Americans. Some visitors say you can “hear the silence.”

This remote monument is traversed by the San Andreas Fault. Prominent features on the monument include the white alkali flats of Soda Lake, colorful Painted Rock, vast open grasslands and a broad plain rimmed by mountains. When conditions are right, numerous wildflowers carpet the valley floor.

Soda Lake, normally a dry lake bed, is one of the dominant geographic features of the Carrizo Plain. It is the largest remaining natural alkali wetland in Southern California and the only closed basin within the coastal mountains. As its name suggests, Soda Lake concentrates salts as water evaporates, leaving white deposits of sulfates and carbonates that look like baking soda.

Carrizo Plain National Monument can be accessed via Soda Lake Road, from Hwy 58 or Hwy 166. Keep in mind, all roads on the monument are dirt except for 16 miles of Soda Lake Road. Also, it is a remote location and there are no services available (gas, food, water); ensure you bring plenty of water for your visit and have a full tank of gas. Enjoy hiking, camping and an education center.

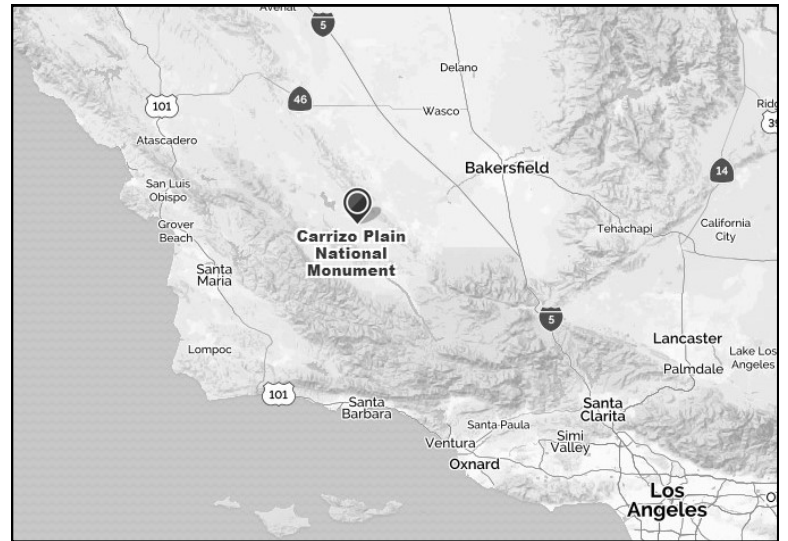
The education center on the monument is open 9:00 am – 4:00 pm, Thursday – Sunday during the months of December – May. If you would like to visit Painted Rock, there are guided tours on Saturdays in March – May and self-guided tours July 16 – February 28. Reservations are required for either tour and can be made at www.recreation.gov.

INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT AT PIEDRAS BLANCAS OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREA

The Bureau of Land Management and California State Parks have been working together for over a decade to eradicate invasive plants from the Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area. This winter's rains will bring us huge blooms of native wildflowers, but also an influx of invasive non-native plants. While our volunteers and interns do the work on the ground removing invasives, BLM intern, Alexandra Kookootsedes, is working on a calendar for invasive vegetative growth, bloom, and seeding time, as well as best management practices for eradicating each invasive species. This will be her senior project at Cal Poly as well as a great tool for management at the light station.



Above: View northwest, by Karl Geurs



Carrizo Plain is about 100 miles northwest of Los Angeles and about 50 miles east of San Luis Obispo.



When conditions are right, blooms carpet the plain.

For updates on wildflower blooms in Carrizo Plain and throughout Southern California, call the Theodore Payne Foundation Wildflower Hotline: (818) 768-1802, ext. 2

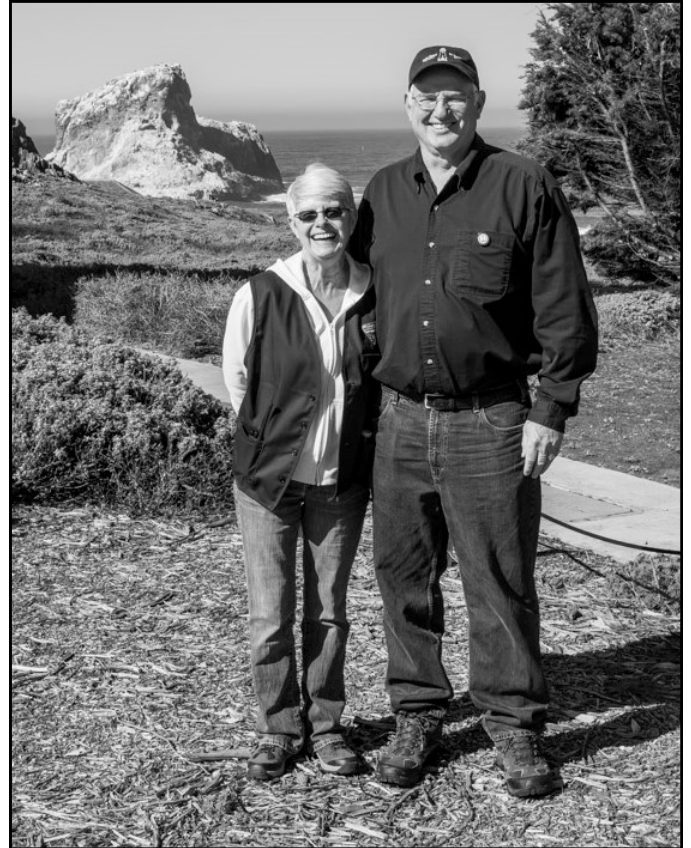
HIKE-IN OPEN HOUSE EVERY WEDNESDAY, MAY - AUGUST FROM 10AM - 2PM

On the last Wednesday of the summer months, Piedras Blancas Light Station will be open to hikers. We encourage people to begin their hike at the parking area for the Elephant Seal viewing area, 1 ½ miles south of the light station. This short stretch of the California Coastal Trail offers views of pocket coves and a variety of wildlife such as sea otters, shorebirds, elephant seals, harbor seals and beautiful wildflowers. A small picnic area at the light station is available during the open house.

Docents can answer questions about the history, ecology, and wildlife surrounding Piedras Blancas Light Station. Our gift shop will be open for folks interested in souvenirs. We hope you will join us for this unique experience.

WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST VOLUNTEERS: CATHY AND ROGER SHIPP

The Shipp's first moved to the Central Coast in 2000. They both worked for the County of San Luis Obispo until retiring in 2016. Their shared enjoyment of lighthouses has led them to volunteering at the Piedras Blancas Light Station. Cathy and Roger's ultimate goal is to visit every lighthouse on the Pacific Coast of the United States. Cathy and Roger have three children and four grandchildren who they visit in the Midwest whenever they have the chance. Welcome aboard, Cathy and Roger!



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

We continue to look for volunteers for a variety of work at the Piedras Blancas Light Station. Our volunteers learn about the history and ecology of the light station as well as our resident and transitory wildlife.

Volunteers can lead tours and help with tour logistics, work in our gift shop, perform trail work, remove invasive plants, and help us with maintenance of the buildings and grounds of the light station. We have an incredible crew of volunteers at Piedras Blancas, but there is always space for more!

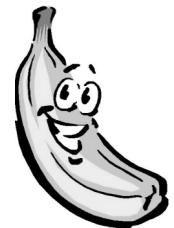
If you are interested in volunteering at the Piedras Blancas Light Station, please contact Jodie Nelson, BLM Outdoor Recreation Planner, at jrnelson@blm.gov.

COOKING AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

"Being so isolated was an inconvenience, but the major drawback about living at the lighthouse was the weather and climate. Those cold northwesterly winds blowing most days of the year often made staying indoors preferable to enjoying the beautiful out-of-doors. The salty, damp air rusted everything made of metal, indoors and out, and some of the closets in my house smelled of mold and mildew (yuck)." - Susan Wright, Administrative Assistant in the office of wildlife research at Piedras Blancas from 1983-2002. Susan would drive to Cambria once a week for groceries, but her bananas would never last through the week. Here is one of her favorite ways to use overripe bananas.

Banana Nut Tea Bread

1 3/4 C sifted flour	1/2 C coarsely chopped nuts
2 3/4 tsp baking powder	1 C mashed, ripe bananas (2-3 bananas)
1/3 C shortening	1/2 tsp salt
2 eggs, well beaten	2/3 C sugar



Sift together flour, baking powder, and salt. Beat shortening until creamy in mixing bowl. Add sugar gradually to shortening and continue beating until light and fluffy. Add eggs and beat well. Add flour mixture alternately with bananas, a small amount at a time, mixing well after each addition only enough to moisten dry ingredients. Turn into a greased bread loaf pan and bake in a moderate oven (350 degrees) about 1 hour and 10 minutes or until bread is done.

Excerpted with permission from Beverly Praver's cookbook "Dinner at the Lighthouse"

HISTORY OF ENTRANCE GATES AT PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION

1876: FIRST BOUNDARY FENCE AND GATES

On January 2, 1876, Principal Keeper Stephen Morse was directed by Lt. Col. R.S. Williamson, 12th district Engineer, to build the reservation boundary fence. Work was to be done by the Keeper and his assistants. They were to "proceed immediately", but the work was not to interfere with their regular duties. The reservation boundaries were indicated with stone monuments, which are still in place today. The fence was to run between stone monuments and to be five boards high. The posts were to be set about 8 feet apart and there were to be two gates, one large and one small.

On February 8, 1876 Morse received instructions that the fifth board was to be a "cap" board. On March 20, 1876, Morse was asked to whitewash all wood structures with common whitewash, made with lime and water. A letter from Williamson dated May 7, 1898, asks whether the fence has been whitewashed yet, and if not, that it be done without delay.



The stone boundary monuments were placed by the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment. The USCG benchmark was added later.

THE 1911 BOUNDARY FENCE AND GATE



A photo taken around 1910 shows the wood boundary fence in dilapidated condition.

On April 28, 1911, Mr. Thomas Brown, construction contractor, was instructed to rebuild the reservation fence and gate: "The reservation line fence to be rebuilt using concrete posts and standard gate erected. For this work the sum of \$250 has been allotted. Blue prints showing construction of fence posts and of gate are enclosed herewith."

In June of 1911, Thomas Brown reported that "work beginning on May 8, 1911, and ending on June 28, 1911, included completion of 62 reinforced concrete posts that were 7 feet long with 3 equal sides, 6 inches in diameter each sides. Two concrete gate posts were also made 12 feet long by 8 inches diameter each side,

reinforced with four 7/8 inch steel rods fastened length ways and crossed over every 12 inches with 1/2 inch rods fastened with wire. A new gate was built for the reservation fence."

The cost of rebuilding the reservation fence and installing a new gate was: \$154 labor; \$68.28 material; and \$51 room and board of the construction workers, for a total of \$273.28.



Remnants of the concrete posts.

LIGHTHOUSE NEIGHBORS

Point San Luis Lighthouse

(58 miles south of PBLS)

Located in Avila Beach. For a complete listing of guided tours and to reserve a ride on the shuttle, visit: sanluislighthouse.com or call 805-540-5771

Point Sur Lightstation

(65 miles north of PBLS)

From November through March, tours are offered at 10 AM on Saturdays and Sundays and at 1 PM on Wednesdays. During the summer, there are additional days and times. For a complete listing of tours: pointsur.org or call 831-625-4419

Point Pinos Lighthouse

(90 miles north of PBLS)

Located in Pacific Grove, open Thursday through Monday, 1 PM - 4 PM. For more information: ci.pg.ca.us/lighthouse

PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION TOURS

Tours are offered year-round on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. From June 15 through August 31, tours are offered daily except Wednesdays and Sundays. There are no tours on federal holidays. Tours last about 2 hours and include the historic Piedras Blancas lighthouse and support buildings along with a half mile interpretive trail that provides spectacular ocean views and opportunities to view wildlife. Meet at the former Piedras Blancas Motel located 1.5 miles north of the light station at 9:45 AM.

Please do not wait at the gate to the light station!

For information, email piedrasblancastours@gmail.com
or call 805-927-7361

Groups of 10 or more
please make advance
arrangements.

\$10 for adults, \$5 ages
6-17, no fee for children
5 and under.

Tours may be
cancelled on the day
of the tour due to
inclement weather.



Dress warmly and wear comfortable
walking shoes. Sorry, no pets!

PBLS Association

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membership.pblsa@gmail.com



All memberships include our quarterly newsletter. Your dues help with the maintenance and restoration of the Piedras Blancas Light Station.

- ___ \$50 Friend of the Lighthouse
(1 complimentary tour)
- ___ \$100 Acting Keeper
(2 complimentary tours)
- ___ \$250 Assistant Keeper
(4 complimentary tours)
- ___ \$500 Principal Keeper
(engraved brick)
- ___ \$1000 Superintendent of Lights
(engraved brick & private tour for up to 6)

***Help restore
and preserve
Piedras Blancas
Light Station
by joining
PBLSA***

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Please make check payable to PBLSA
You may also join online at piedrasblancas.org

Thank you for your support!

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