

The Beacon

PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION OUTSTANDING NATURAL AREA ~PART OF THE CALIFORNIA COASTAL NATIONAL MONUMENT~

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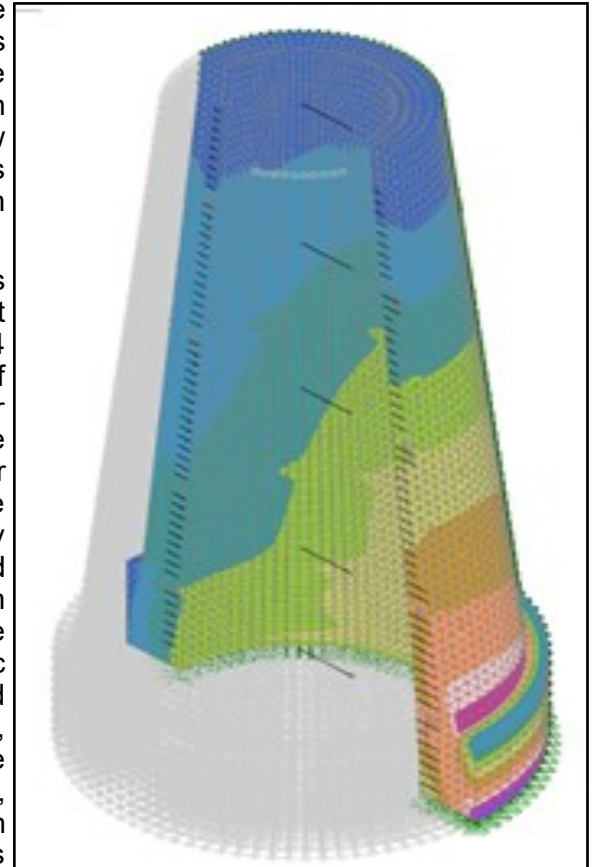
THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT FOR PIEDRAS BLANCAS

A unique part of our light station history involves the missing “top” of the tower. Due to structural damage from an earthquake on New Year’s Eve 1948, the upper three floors of the lighthouse were deemed unsafe and were removed in 1949. The lighthouse was capped, and a 36-inch aero beacon replaced the first order Fresnel lens. The lens found a new home on Main Street in Cambria as a result of the efforts of the Lions Club. In 2002, management of the light station was transferred from the Coast Guard to the Bureau of Land Management.

Between 2005 - 2008 there were many studies and engineering reports on the restoration of the tower. One document estimated the cost of restoration to be \$6.7 million to \$7.5 million. Fast forward to 2014 when our non-profit association contracted with Bruce Elster of Shoreline Engineering in Morro Bay to perform a study of tower condition, develop a 3-D computer model of the tower, stabilize the tower, and replace the top three levels. Based on the 3-D computer model, the first of several design approaches was proposed to stabilize the tower. In 2015, Drs. Cole McDaniel and Peter Laursen, Cal Poly architectural engineering professors, performed Ultra-Low Forced Vibration Testing (UL-FVT) on the lighthouse tower in order to confirm the accuracy of the finite element models created by Shoreline Engineering. In 2016, Bruce Elster delivered a report on seismic evaluation and was given the go ahead to stabilize the tower and provide a design so that the top three levels can be replicated. In 2018, “Experimental/Computational Exploration of Retrofit Strategies for the Piedras Blancas Light Station” by Cole McDaniel, Peter Laursen, Graham Archer, and Bruce Elster was presented at the 16th European Conference on Earthquake Engineering. Bruce Elster continued his work on the engineering analysis and design of the restored tower as part of a second phase of his contract work.

In December 2019, based upon his previous tower design work, a third contract for up to \$64,000 was awarded to Shoreline Engineering for tower rehabilitation engineering evaluation and professional engineering services. The work will be completed in 2020 and will include the development of a finite element computer model of the tower including consideration of replacing the top three levels. The model will incorporate elements for strengthening the tower’s resistance to seismic lateral forces and the top three levels reconstructed of composite materials. The model will be tested against current required building codes. The work will include preliminary cost estimates and an outside peer review of the design. The proposed engineering design is an evolution of the previous designs and considers: installation of vertical steel bolting with periodic anchor plates to distribute stress more evenly through the tower, horizontal reinforcement encircling the tower to improve shear stress resistance, and removal of the exterior ironwork which will be rehabilitated and then reinstalled. The goal is to achieve a restoration that will not be apparent to the observer when completed while reducing construction costs with an elegant, simple design.

Meanwhile, the BLM is planning to have the tower painted to improve its appearance. After the completion of the Shoreline Engineering contract in 2020, it is expected that they will continue their design work with the development of Engineering Design and Construction Documents that will be used to initiate the actual construction for the restoration of the tower. The PBLSA is in the planning stages of a Capital Campaign to provide the funds for not only tower restoration but restoring the remaining buildings of the light station to its period of greatest historical significance.



Above: This Ultra-Low Forced Vibration Testing model shows stresses on the tower during a simulated seismic event. Warmer areas indicate higher stress levels, mainly around the entrance door and windows.

HAPPY 145TH BIRTHDAY, PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT STATION!

The lens was first illuminated on February 15, 1875. Join us as we wish the light station a happy birthday during our regularly scheduled tours on Saturday, February 15th.

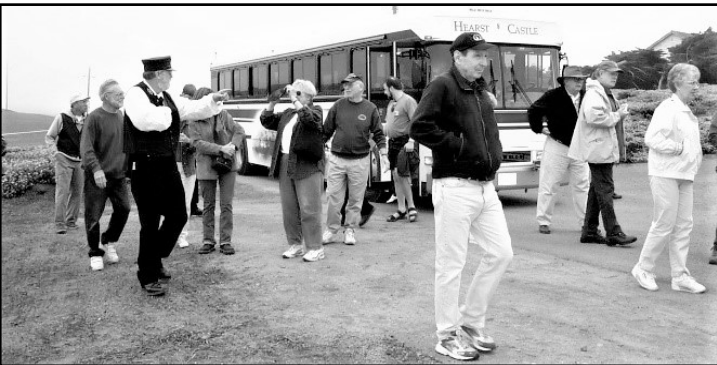


LIGHT STATION TOURS, A CONTINUING TRADITION OF WELCOMING VISITORS

The first public tour of the Piedras Blancas Light Station offered by the Bureau of Land Management was in June of 2003. Visitors boarded buses at Hearst Castle for the brief ride to the light station, where they were greeted by guides dressed in period attire. But was this the first public tour given at Piedras Blancas?



Above: BLM volunteers and staff at the first BLM tour, 2003.
Below: Visitors arrived by Hearst Castle bus for the first tour of the light station, 2003.



Lorin Thorndyke, Jr., who grew up at the light station in the 1880s, gave tours. In a 1973 *Telegram Tribune* article he commented, "Like now, the lighthouse was visited by tourists. I used to make a nickel, 10 cents or a quarter giving them tours." The 1902 manual, *Instructions to Light-keepers*, stated that: "Keepers must be courteous and polite to all visitors and show them everything of interest about the station at such times as will not interfere with lighthouse duties."

During the Coast Guard era, visitors were welcome on weekends. In June of 1962 members of the San Luis Obispo Historical Society were given a tour by Seaman David Fulp. In addition to the lighthouse, the group observed sea lions on the Outer Islet and beach flora. They thought the sea daisies were particularly lovely. John Miller, assigned to Piedras Blancas 1968-1972, said: "It was interesting, the people we would meet."

But things were changing. In December of 1975, due to automation of the light and the un-manning of the light station, visitors were no longer permitted to tour the facilities. However, special arrangements could be made with the Coast Guard for group tours. School classes were also able to arrange visits. Mr. Guy Crabb's 4th grade Morro Bay class saw a zebra on their way to the light station and stopped to see the lens in Cambria on their way home. Some things haven't changed.

Kathe Tanner, reporter for *The Cambrian*, stated: "In late 1998, I began talking to biologists working/living on the site about the possibility of Cambria Historical Society hosting a public tour at the light station. This would be an organized event with people arriving by tour bus (to minimize traffic and environmental impact of so many people). After months of research, my team of research docents had prepared a variety of historical reports that covered the tour area, from the school and two area piers to Hearst Castle, San Simeon Acres, San Simeon Bay, elephant seal rookery, and the lighthouse itself. On May 30, 1999, four busloads of tour takers (180 plus) began and ended their journeys at Coast Union High School in Cambria. Each bus had a guide, and a team of us waited at the light station to conduct the on-site tour. The day was crystal clear, fog- and wind-free. We gave the people short reports on the station's history, flora and fauna, the elephant seals, abalone fishing and more."

So, yes, tours have been part of the fabric of the Piedras Blancas Light Station from the beginning. They varied in type and frequency, but they have always provided the visitor with glimpses of the history of the site, the people who worked there, and the flora and fauna of the area.

COOKING AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

Susan Wright worked as an administrative assistant in the office of the wildlife research station at Piedras Blancas from 1983 until she retired in 2002. Here she shares with us a fond memory: "I felt very fortunate to have a job at such a beautiful and unique site. Being the only female in the office, I soon found myself baking a cake whenever there was a birthday to celebrate. (I must give biologist Tom Murphey credit for baking some of those cakes, however, especially when it was my birthday being celebrated!) I often used the following recipe- a family favorite for over 30 years."

Red Devil's Food Cake

1/2 cup shortening	2 C flour
1 1/2 C sugar	1/2 C milk
1/2 cup cocoa	2 teaspoons baking soda
2 eggs	1 C boiling water
	1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Cream shortening and add sugar and cocoa. Cream thoroughly and then add eggs and beat well. Stir flour into mixture alternately with milk in which soda has been dissolved. Stir in boiling water and vanilla. Line bottoms of two 8-inch cake pans with waxed paper. Turn batter into cake pans. Bake in moderate oven (350 degrees F) 30 minutes. Frost as desired.

Excerpted with permission from Beverly Praver's cookbook "Dinner at the Lighthouse" available in our gift shop.

TRIVIA TIME

Which of the following is a twin lighthouse?

- A. Cape Ann, Massachusetts
- B. Grosse Point, Illinois
- C. Brant Point, Nantucket Island, Massachusetts

How did lighthouses change in the 20th century?

- A. They were built bigger.
- B. The lights were brighter.
- C. They became automated.

What working lighthouse is the northernmost in the contiguous United States?

- A. Cape Flattery, Washington
- B. Whitlock Mill, Maine
- C. Passage Island, Minnesota

Answers: A. Cape Ann Lighthouse north of Boston is actually made up of two separate lighthouses 300 feet apart. They mark a treacherous 90-foot-long underwater rock line. C. Remote sensors and automatic timers replaced lighthouse keepers. Only Boston light has a full-time keeper even though it, too, became automated in 1998. B. Whitlock Mill overlooks the St. Croix River and is 50 miles north of Lubec, Maine.



The Beacon is a joint publication of the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and the Bureau of Land Management. The PBLSA is a nonprofit 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 2020

I SPY WITH MY EYE...

As you walk or drive along Main Street in Cambria, be sure to look up at the lampposts. You may spot our blue banner! Many lampposts in the east village have banners from local organizations. They are colorful and informative and we are happy to be part of this unique way of spreading the word about our public tours.

TAKE A PEEK AT THE LIGHTHOUSE ANY TIME

Since our live webcam was installed in 2016, many visitors have written to say how much they enjoy the live 270 degree view from the light station. You may see elephant seals on the beach or a beautiful moonrise.

Check us out:
piedrasblancas.org/webcam



WHAT IS IT?

We recently acquired this beautiful piece from the family of Principal Lighthouse Keeper Lorin Thorndyke. Can you guess what it might be? It is a beautiful cut glass butter dish. The Thorndyke family also donated a linen tablecloth imprinted with United States Light House Establishment that is over 100 years old.

Photo by Gary O'Neill



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

We are grateful for dedicated volunteers like Nancy Hartwick, who has been volunteering for over ten years!

Since 2008 I have had the pleasure of leading tours at PBLS. Especially enjoyable is sharing my knowledge of natural history and native plants of the lighthouse area. My tour schedule has been interrupted lately by shoulder surgery and physical therapy. But I hope to get back into full swing soon.

When I first became a docent at PBLS I was volunteering for five different organizations including California State Parks, Coastal Discovery Center, SLO Botanical Garden and Master Gardeners. One day it became apparent that my schedule was too hectic, so all the others were eliminated. No regrets for that.

When time and weather permits, I enjoy travelling and camping. Some of my favorite spots are Death Valley, northern California and Arizona. For big trips, driving across the country is a real treat. Right now, Nova Scotia is calling me, again.

Happy trails and safe travels on your next adventure, Nancy!



MEET THE NATIVES



The light station is home to the rare Compact cobwebby thistle (*Cirsium occidentale* var. *compactum*). This native perennial herb is in the sunflower family and is limited to the dunes and coastal habitat of the central California coast. The short, clumpy plant produces fuzzy white flower heads with purple blooms from April - June. Its spines are quite heavily laced with fibers resembling cobwebs. Typical of native thistles, it has hairy stems and grayish-green leaves. Unlike many introduced thistles, it is not a troublesome weed. When non-native ice plant was removed from Piedras Blancas, the compact cobwebby was one of the first native plants to reappear. Our volunteers were thrilled by the comeback of this beautiful, rare California native.

CRITTER CORNER

Bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) are the most widely distributed wild cat in North America and are the smallest of the four *Lynx* cats. They get their common name by their short bobbed tail, which can be around 6 inches long. Their fur is tan and gray with black spots. Bobcats are often confused with mountain lion even though their tails and size are dramatically different. Bobcats weigh between 15 - 18 pounds and are about twice the size of a domestic cat while mountain lions weigh between 75 - 175 pounds. Bobcats are strict carnivores and especially enjoy rabbit, gopher and woodrat. Bobcat are adaptable to urbanization and have been spotted in the Hollywood Hills and Griffith Park in Los Angeles. Bobcats enjoy solitude at Piedras Blancas and a healthy supply of small mammals to dine on. These shy creatures may be seen any time of day, but most likely in the early morning.

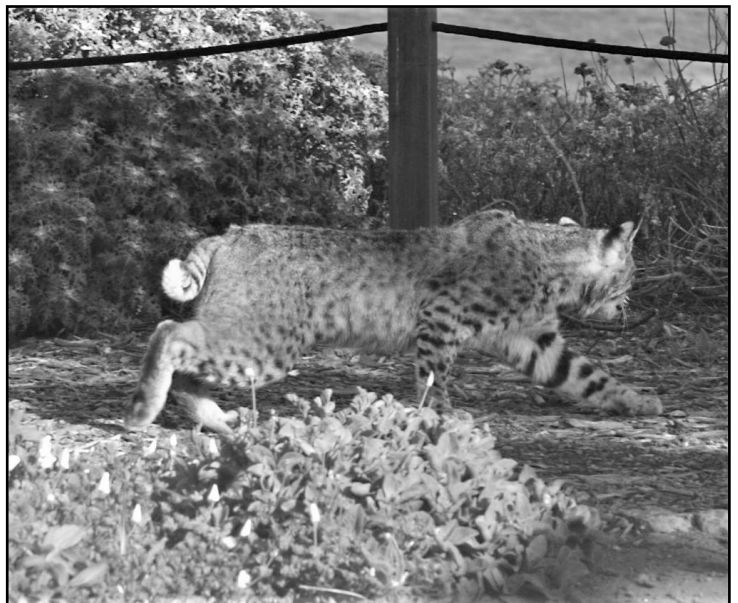


Photo taken at Piedras Blancas Light Station

SIERRA CLUB SERVICE TRIP HELPS BEAUTIFY OUR COASTAL TREASURES

In December 2019, light station volunteer Carole Adams worked with an enthusiastic group of Sierra Club volunteers. Every day brought a different location. It was a terrific group of positive people, eager to get the job done. One day they trimmed along the north elephant seal viewing area. The next day they worked at the light station. Then they weeded just north of the light station and at the rush wetland. On their fifth day they worked at Fiscalini Ranch in Cambria, pulling ice plant (in horrific wind) in the morning, and planting trees (in the calm of the forest) during the afternoon. Evening speakers included Carolyn Skinder on cetaceans, Michele Roest on the history of the conservation effort, and Carole Adams on past Sierra Club trips and native plant restoration at the light station. They group appreciated the work that local volunteers do and the fact this was a learning experience for them, as well as a working experience. They loved working in a different place every day. Their favorite activity was planting trees to protect the butterfly grove on Fiscalini Ranch. That was the icing on the cake. One of the group was a fellow who had been on the 2012 service trip and stayed at the light station. During that trip, they scraped old paint off the units in preparation for painting. We are grateful for these hardworking volunteers and for Carole's tutelage.



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STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION SPENDS MONTH WORKING AT LIGHT STATION



During their monthlong stay at the light station, SCA crewmembers Kenton, Gus, Sarah, and Avery, worked on fence and trail repairs with volunteer Carole Adams, pulled ice plant and other weeds, and re-painted one of the coast guard units at the light station. Trail work included putting up a deterrent fence to try and keep elephant seals from coming up from the south beach and getting onto the light station road. They fixed bent and sagging posts, redid some of the ugly fencing, and they also brushed over a major trail scar. They were so helpful and eager to do every task and we always look forward to having extra hands on deck for special projects. Every year the light station hosts an SCA crew to assist with various maintenance projects.

LIGHTHOUSE NEIGHBORS

Point San Luis Lighthouse

(58 miles south of PBLs)

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



Point Sur Lightstation

(65 miles north of PBLs)

Currently closed for road repairs. Check their website for updates: PointSur.org or call 831-625-4419

Point Pinos Lighthouse

(90 miles north of PBLs)

Located in Pacific Grove. Open Saturdays 10 am - 4 pm and Thursdays through Mondays 1 pm - 4 pm. For more information: PointPinosLighthouse.org

JOIN OUR MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS ON THE 4TH WEDNESDAY OF EVERY MONTH

The Piedras Blancas Light Station Association meets every 4th Wednesday of the month at 6 pm at Mechanics Bank in Cambria. The public is always welcome to come and listen, ask questions or voice concerns.

The board consists of people from varied backgrounds and education who live in different parts of the county. We are always interested in speaking with anyone who is interested in becoming a board member.

Please send us an email if you are interested or have questions: contact.pblsa@gmail.com

Meeting minutes are published on our website under the About Us page.

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 two 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 advanced
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
P.O. Box 127
San Simeon, CA 93452-0127
805-927-3719
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!



Find us on Facebook
and Instagram:
PiedrasBlancasLightStation



PIEDRAS BLANCAS LIGHT
STATION ASSOCIATION
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