

# The Beacon

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

VOL. 14, ISSUE 3

JULY - SEPT 2020

### MOVING FORWARD IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

As most of you are aware, we closed the light station in March to protect our staff, volunteers, and visitors from the spread of COVID-19. We have been working closely with our BLM leadership and paying close attention to state mandates and direction from San Luis Obispo County's public health office to ensure that visits to the light station will not exacerbate the spread of the virus.

We are acting particularly cautiously now, as COVID-19 rates are rising again across the state.

The health and safety of our staff, interns, volunteers and visitors is our paramount concern. As we begin to think about reopening, many of the changes you will see will reflect how COVID-19 affects our community in the coming seasons.

The changes will hopefully be temporary, and we will continue to follow best management practices as we move forward.

#### 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: [pedrasblancas.org/webcam](https://pedrasblancas.org/webcam)

#### SHOP ONLINE AND SUPPORT PBLA

Even though we are closed our online gift shop is always open! We offer custom ornaments, etched wine glasses, shot glasses, mugs, t-shirts, fleece jackets and vests just to name a few. An engraved brick installed at the light station makes a memorable gift, too! Prices include tax and shipping and all the proceeds stay here at the light station. You may also join PBLA or renew your membership online.

Visit us at:

[pedrasblancas.org/gift-shop](https://pedrasblancas.org/gift-shop)



#### CONCRETE PATHS A WELCOME UPGRADE

While the light station is closed it has given our staff a lot of time to work on projects. The wooden walkways in front of the Coast Guard units have been deteriorating. Recognizing that, our interns Veronika, Mike and Christine took the initiative to create concrete paths to replace them. Without any prior experience they figured it out on their own (with some help from YouTube videos) and did a fantastic job. We are grateful to have hard working interns who are proactive and passionate about keeping the light station in ship shape.



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

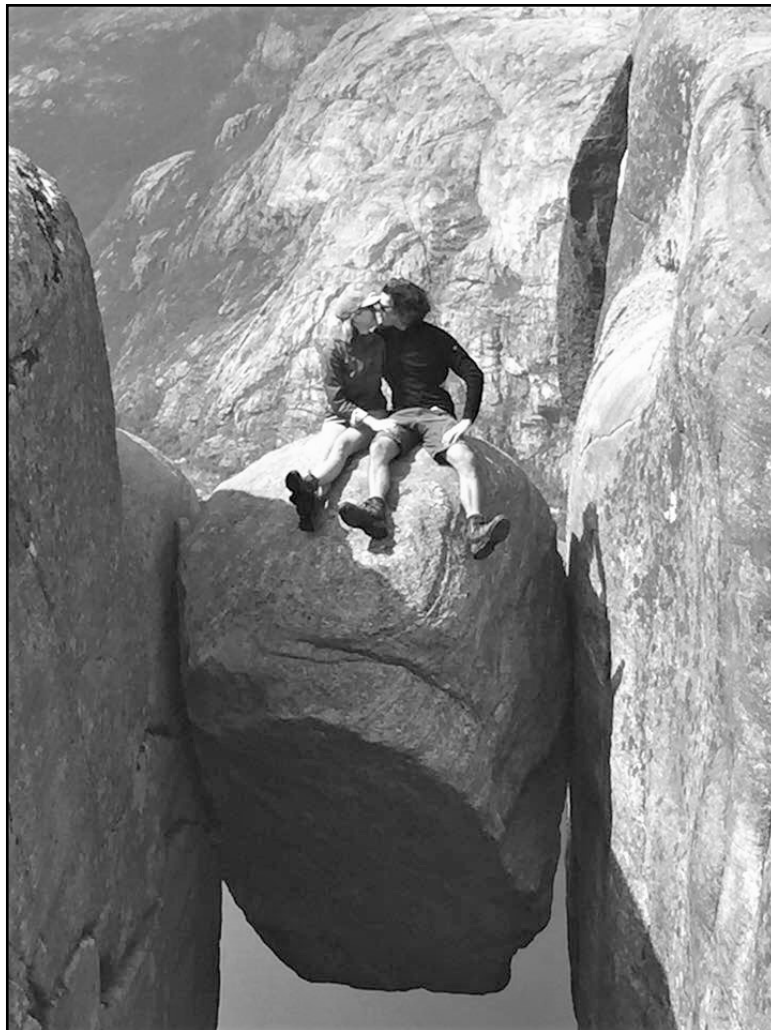


## THERE AND BACK AGAIN, AN INTERN'S TALE: BY MIKE HOLLEY

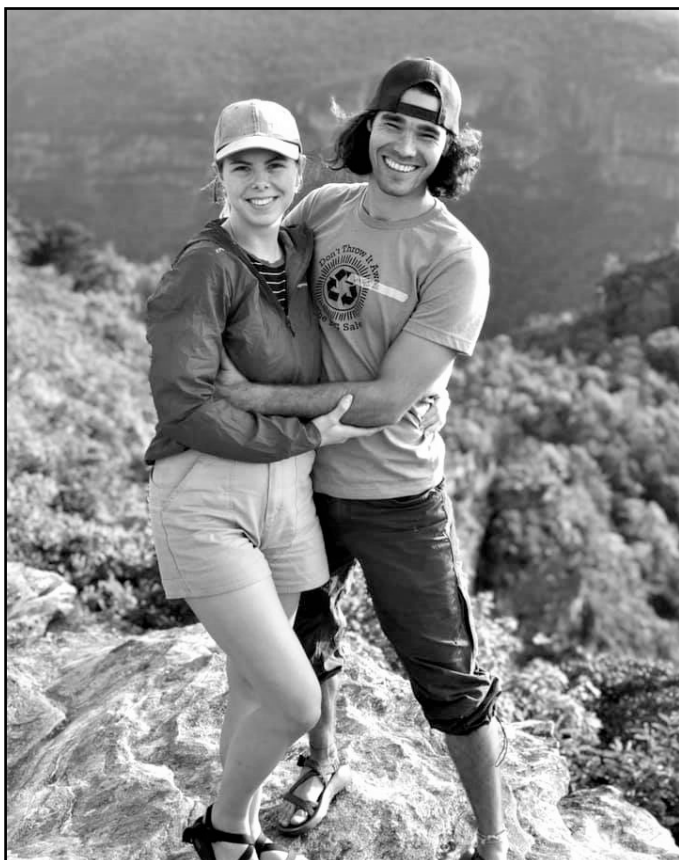
To return to a place such as Piedras Blancas Lighthouse after two years away without the faintest idea that one would ever return is akin to bumping into an old love lifetimes removed from the original tryst, it truly is the sweetest of reveries.

Since working at the lighthouse in 2017, my partner Christine and I have crossed the globe while working in the craggy fjords of Norway with a skydiving club, surfing the desolate and tempestuous desert beaches of Northern Peru, and enjoying the warm waters between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn during the winter swells. Interwoven through these adventures we were also settling into the great blue ridge hills of the Appalachian Mountains. While in Boone, NC, the heart of the Appalachian high country, I attended graduate school for Student Affairs & College Outdoor Programs Administrations while Christine worked with Appalachian State University's college of education. From our quaint off the grid mountain cabin we explored not only the bucolic and ragged landscape of the greenest of mountain sides but also the vast sandy stretches of the Outer Banks, which are home to a few of the most iconic North American lighthouses. After our two wonderful years tucked away into the ancient mountain landscape of the Carolinas we are so stoked to have the opportunity to once again return to frothy shores of Piedras Blancas Lighthouse.

If we aren't busy trimming the trails or keeping the station in top notch order you can be sure to find us just north of the station surfing one of the best waves this coast has to offer! To be a surfing lighthouse keeper is all one needs to be! Kowabungha!



Above: Kjeragbolten, Norway



### COOKING AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

*"I brought this slaw to several lighthouse volunteer potlucks and it has always been well received." Carole Adams, PBLs Volunteer*

#### Lighthouse Keepers' Slaw

1 head of cabbage, shredded  
1 onion, sliced  
3/4 cup sugar

Mix together:  
1 tsp dry mustard  
1 1/2 tsp salt  
1 tsp celery seed  
1 cup vinegar  
Boil.



Add 1 cup vegetable oil and blend. Pour the hot mixture over the cabbage, onion, sugar mixture. Chill 24 hours.

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



## WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR INSTALLATION AND REPAIR OF THE FIRST ORDER FRESNEL LENS?

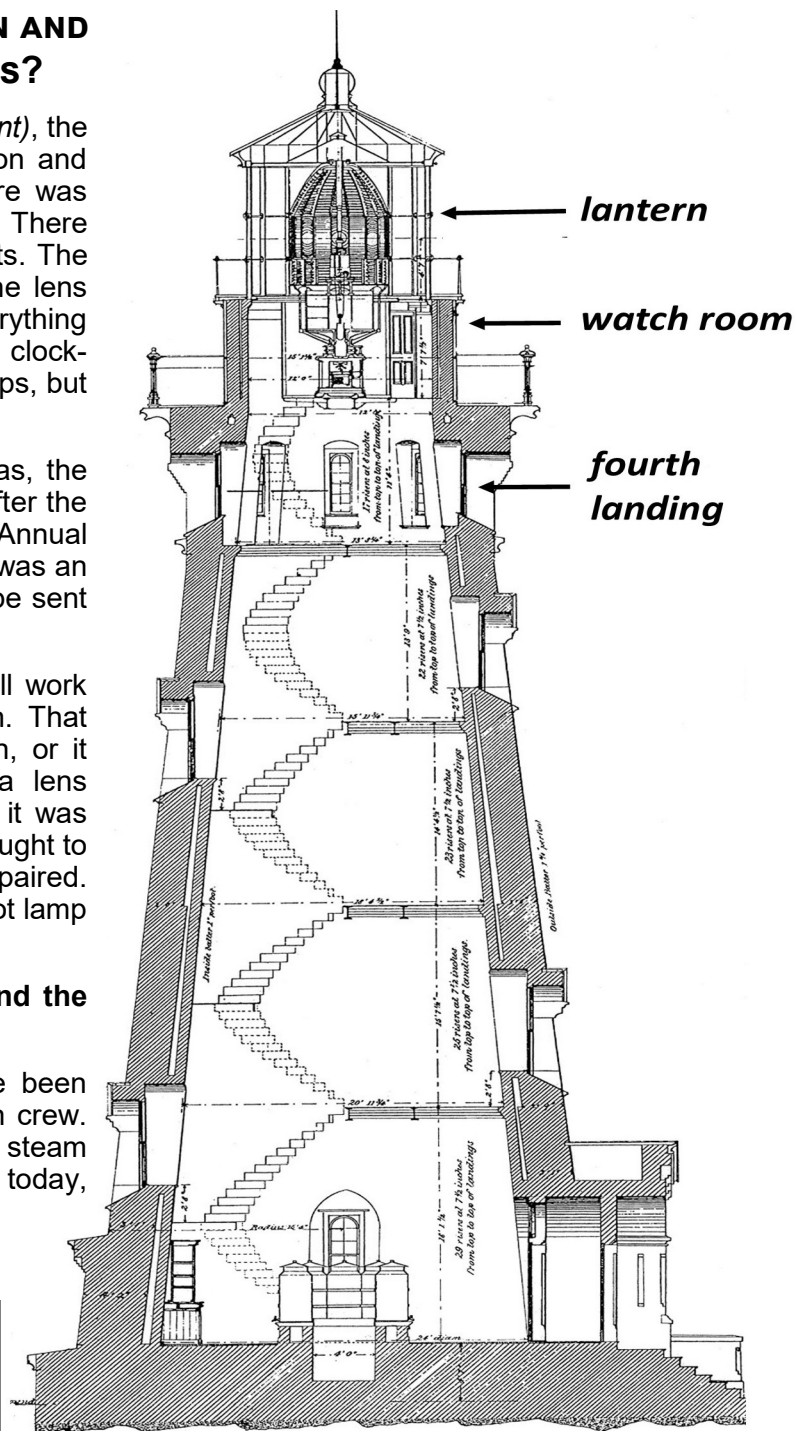
According to Jim Woodward (*The Lighthouse Consultant*), the district lampist staff was responsible for the installation and maintenance of any optic in their service area. There was more staff in the lamp shops beyond the chief lampist. There were junior lampists, learning the trade, and machinists. The lampists were responsible for everything related to the lens itself, while the machinists were responsible for everything related to the pedestal, rotating mechanism, and clockwork. The two trades worked together in the lamp shops, but their responsibilities did not overlap.

For the installation of the new lens at Piedras Blancas, the lampist staff would have installed the lens assembly after the machinist staff installed the pedestal and clockwork. Annual inspections of the lens were done by lampists. If there was an issue with the pedestal/clockwork, a machinist would be sent for to make repairs or adjustments.

During the annual visit, the lampists would perform all work necessary to keep the lens in factory new condition. That might entail no work beyond the thorough inspection, or it could mean on-site repair. On rare occasions, if a lens needed work that was too complicated to do onsite, it was noted and at a future date a replacement optic was brought to the site to be used while the station optic was being repaired. Those repairs might be done onsite or back at the depot lamp shop.

**A related question is, who installed the lantern and the other ironwork in the lighthouse?**

Installing the lantern and other ironwork would have been done by mechanics who were part of the construction crew. In the 1870s, a mechanic could build a building, steam locomotive, or a bridge. We call those folks engineers today, but back then they were called mechanics.



## TRIVIA TIME

## How many steps are in the lighthouse?

Currently there are 92 steps inside the lighthouse. If you add the outside stairs that is a total of 104 steps. According to architectural plans, prior to removal of the upper three floors, there were 114 steps from the ground floor of the lighthouse to the watch room. There would have been additional steps from the watch room to the lantern floor.

## How many bricks are in the lighthouse?

Around 500,000 bricks.

## How long did it take to build the lighthouse?

The work party arrived on April 17, 1874 and the light was first illuminated on Feb. 15, 1875 - about 10 months.

**Originally, how tall was the lighthouse?**

100 feet to the top of the ventilator ball of the lantern.

## PBLS ASSOCIATION AWARDED GRANT

We are pleased to announce that the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association was one of 24 nonprofits awarded a grant from the United States Lighthouse Society in July. Since its inception, the U.S. Lighthouse Society lighthouse preservation grant program has awarded funds to many nonprofit lighthouse organizations across the nation, all designed to help restore or preserve the lights we all love. This year, in light of Coronavirus, grants were awarded to help preserve lighthouse organizations themselves with emergency relief grants similar to what the Federal government has done for U.S. citizens to help ease the financial stress on lighthouse preservation groups. The funds we receive will help offset the costs of signs, interpretive materials and personal protective equipment needed once we reopen to visitors.

## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



### *Meet Abel and Toni Martinez*

We started to volunteer at Piedras Blancas Light Station (PBLS) in 2002. We have been so fortunate to be on a terrific volunteer team that has made a huge difference at PBLS. Working with other volunteers has provided opportunities to meet new friends and learn skills from others who have awesome talents/skills. Our tour guide volunteer duties have made it possible to meet many happy and impressed visitors, especially the 4th grade students who will never forget their very special visit to the light station!

The work accomplished by the volunteer team has greatly contributed to providing continual responsible stewardship at the light station. We will never forget the inexhaustible working spirit and gratification when the volunteers took part in a variety of working groups, especially in an "ice plant pulling party"!

Toni was a special education teacher and Abel was a public health professional in health education up to retirement in 2001. We have 4 sons (1 deceased) and 5 grandchildren. Since 2002 we have kept busy as volunteers with the Cambria Food Bank, Cambria Historical Society Board, CAN driver to medical appointments, Thanksgiving Day delivery of meals to shut-in residents of Cambria/San Simeon, Cambria Dental Children's Program, Special Olympics, Cambria Community Healthcare District, and deliver meals to low income/unemployed families during COVID-19. Since 2004 we have visited, stayed at, and have lighthouse keeper friends at various lighthouses in the USA, Ireland, Scotland, and Canada. Toni has crocheted afghans for a women's shelter and Abel has done fundraising for health/human services organizations in connection with running marathons. We both enjoy gardening and maintaining a Monarch butterfly sanctuary in our yard at Mariposa Lighthouse in Cambria.

*Interested in joining Abel and Toni and our other friendly volunteers? Drop us a line - we would love to meet you! Email our volunteer coordinator, Jodie Nelson: [jrnelson@blm.gov](mailto:jrnelson@blm.gov)*

## 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](mailto:contact.pblsa@gmail.com)

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

## 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](http://PointSanLuisLighthouse.org) or call 805-540-5771



### **Point Sur Lightstation**

(65 miles north of PBLS)

Summer Hours (April-September) Saturdays and Wednesdays 10 am and 2 pm, Sundays 10 am. Visit their website: [PointSur.org](http://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](http://PointPinosLighthouse.org)

## WHALE MIGRATION ALONG THE CENTRAL COAST

The two most common species of whale that may be seen at the light station are gray whales and humpback whales. To condense both species into one brief answer, gray whales can be seen migrating south in the winter and north in the spring. Humpbacks may be seen off the coast during the spring, summer, and fall because they feed in our area. There are always exceptions- some grays don't migrate while some don't go all the way to the arctic seas. This is a summary of what most of them do.

### **Gray whale migration:**

Gray whales spend the summer and early fall feeding in the arctic seas and migrate south to the waters off Baja California in the winter. In the spring they head back north.

The first grays to travel south are pregnant females, in a hurry to get there. Some births occur en route. They are followed by the non-pregnant breeding-aged females and the breeding-aged males. The last to head south are the juveniles and adolescents, who aren't motivated to make it all the way. They may turn around and head north with the first northbound grays.

Our chance of seeing southbound whales is best in January and February. In February the first northbound grays go by. The newly impregnated females are among the first to head north. They are followed by all the rest of the herd except the mothers and calves, who remain in the Baja waters a month or two longer to allow the calves to gain strength before making the long journey. Spring is our best opportunity to view gray whales from the Piedras Blancas area because they usually travel closer to shore when they are heading north. The cow/calf pairs go by in April and May and they are seen very close to shore, often between the two Piedras Blancas rocks and land.

In summary, off Piedras Blancas, gray whales can be seen heading south from December – February, with the peak time around mid-January. The northbound migration is February – May, with the peak time in the first two weeks of March. The peak of cow/calves pairs is usually the end of April/the first part of May.

### **Humpback migration:**

The central coast population of humpbacks spends the winter in the waters off Baja California or Central America and feeds off the central coast of California in the summer and fall. When we see them is not predictable because they go where the food is. During some years there are humpbacks that hang out off Cayucos and Morro Bay in the summer. Not all humpbacks make the migration. We saw a few off Point Piedras Blancas one February a few years ago - an exciting day indeed.

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## CRITTER CORNER

The Pacific gopher snake (*Pituophis catenifer catenifer*) is a subspecies of a family of large non-venomous snakes native to the western coast of the United States. Adults range in size from 3 - 7 feet. There are 2 to 3 rows of spots on their sides. They range along the west coast and are rarely seen above 2,000 feet, preferring drier habitats like fields and meadows. Like other gopher snakes, the Pacific gopher snake can make a loud hiss when agitated or fearful. When threatened it will puff up its body, curl into the classic strike pose of a pit viper, and vigorously shake its tail, which may make a rattling sound if done in dry vegetation. However, gopher snakes are non-venomous and generally good natured. Unless you are a small mammal, bird or lizard you need not worry.



### MEET THE NATIVES

Coastal bush lupine (*Lupinus arboreus*) is indigenous to California and is widely distributed among coastal sage scrub and sand dunes. This evergreen has gray-green leaves and spikes of fragrant white and lavender flowers that bloom in spring and early summer. Typically they grow 3-5 feet tall, but can reach 7 feet (hence the alternative common name, tree lupine). Like many members of the bean family, it is an effective fixer of nitrogen in the soil. This plant is stunning and attracts butterflies and bees.

## 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](mailto: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](mailto: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](http://piedrasblancas.org)  
**Thank you for your support!**



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