The Beacon

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

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STATION MANAGER RETURNS FROM TEMPORARY FIELD ASSIGNMENT

For those of you who did not know I spent most of May through August in a temporary position as the Field Office Manager for the Ukiah Field Office in Ukiah, California. This was a great opportunity for me to expand my horizons and learn other aspects of land management. For comparison, Piedras Blancas is 20 acres, with 2 BLM staff, maybe a couple of interns and many wonderful volunteers. Ukiah was an entirely different world for me. While in Ukiah I was responsible for 23 employees, 270,000 surface acres that spanned 9 counties, 214,000 acres of sub-surface mineral rights, 2 National Monuments, 2 Wilderness areas, approximately 40,000 acres of off-highway vehicle recreation, 6 campgrounds and, of course, a lighthouse. Well, BLM doesn't manage the Point Arena Lighthouse but manages the land around the lighthouse. With that list you can see it was a little different than what we do here at Piedras Blancas.

Another unique situation was the Ukiah Field Office employs two past Piedras Blancas Interns on staff. Molly Nilsson is an Environmental Protection Specialist and Brenna Hare is a Natural Resource Specialist. Some of you may have worked with one or both of them in the past.

It is amazing how things work out though. Not only was this position a learning experience for me, but the Light Station was blessed to have the talented Jesse Pluim here at the Station in my absence. Jesse's skills in graphic arts and design will benefit Piedras Blancas for years to come. Jesse produced a wonderful new brochure, and a virtual tour online that anyone can enjoy. Jesse continues to work on projects will us and before we know it, we will have a short video for the Light Station to use in future tours and promotion.

Don't get me wrong I really enjoyed my time in Ukiah, but I am so glad to be back on the Central Coast. I can't wait until we can get back to tours and I can visit with all our wonderful volunteers again.

~Ryan Cooper

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. 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. For future tour information and updates please visit our website.

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.

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Farewell to our Extraordinary Intern, Veronika Kocen

Veronika Kocen has served Piedras Blancas Light Station as our intern June, 2019 - October, 2020. She is moving on to a wonderful opportunity working on water quality with the United States Geological Survey in Menlo Park, California.

Veronika's internship with the Bureau of Land Management was exemplary. Much of Veronika's work was behind the scenes. While she organized and gave tours, she also maintained our trails, fixed our entrance gate and made other small repairs, painted the Coast Guard buildings, managed social media for the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association, and was responsible for our wildlife cameras. She was always enthusiastic and eager to learn more and contribute new ideas.

We all enjoyed working with Veronika and seeing her successfully navigate her training at the light station and become someone we depended on and trusted implicitly. We look forward to seeing what she will accomplish in the years to come as she grows professionally.

Veronika, thank you for all your hard work and dedication to our public lands. We wish you the best of luck in all your future adventures!

Trivia Time

Were there ever any women lighthouse keepers at Piedras Blancas?

No. Although there have been hundreds of American women lighthouse keepers, there were none at Piedras Blancas. To learn more about women lighthouse keepers, read "Women Who Kept the Light," available at the Piedras Blancas Light Station gift shop.

Were there any women lighthouse keepers along California's central coast?

Yes, Emily Fish, who was well-known as the "Socialite Keeper," served at Point Pinos Light for 21 years (1893-1914). Emily was 50 years old when her husband, a medical doctor, died. Her son-in-law, who worked for the U.S. Lighthouse Service, helped her obtain the position. She moved into the lighthouse along with a Chinese servant and luxurious furnishings. Mrs. Fish planted an extensive garden, kept poodles, livestock, and chickens. She was well-known for entertaining and she received high marks for keeping a tidy station.

Prior to Emily Fish there had been another female keeper, Charlotte Layton (1856-1860), wife of the first Point Pinos lighthouse keeper, Charles Layton. Charlotte was appointed keeper after her husband died.

How did most women lighthouse keepers get their jobs?

Like Charlotte Layton, most female keepers were widows, appointed after the death of their spouse. They usually received the same salary that their husbands made.

Cooking at the Lighthouse

Makes 16 servings (not in my household it won't, but that's what the recipe says.)
-*Carole Adams, PBLS Volunteer*

Carole's Cornbread Casserole

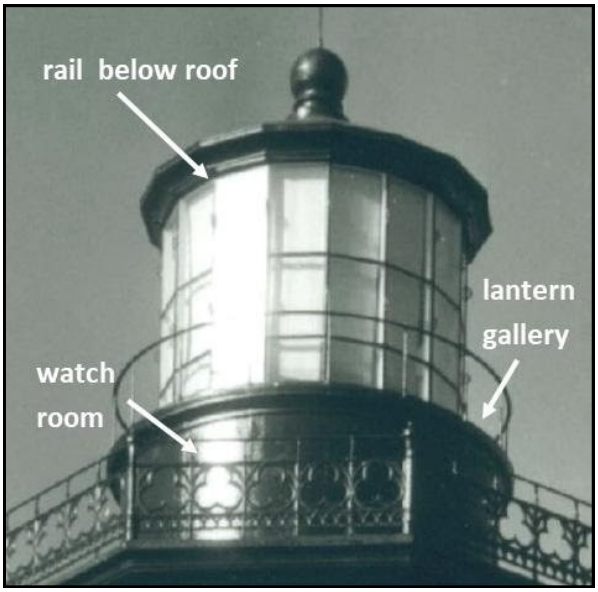
2 large onions, chopped
6 Tbls butter or margarine
2 eggs
2 Tbls milk
2 17 oz cans cream-style corn
1 1 lb pkg. cornmeal muffin mix (Jiffy is great!)
1/2 pint sour cream (1 cup)
2 cups (8 oz) shredded sharp Cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Butter a 13" x 9" baking dish. In a medium skillet sauté onion in butter until golden; set aside. In a medium bowl mix eggs and milk until blended. Add corn and muffin mix. Mix well. Spread corn bread batter into prepared baking dish. Spoon sauteed onion over top. Spread sour cream over onion. Sprinkle with cheese. Bake 35 minutes or until puffed and golden. Let stand 10 minutes before cutting into squares. May be refrigerated or frozen and reheated.

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

How did keepers access the lantern for cleaning?

The glass enclosure that housed the lens was called the lantern. Cleaning the lantern glass was an important task that the keepers had to do frequently. Recently we learned how challenging it was.

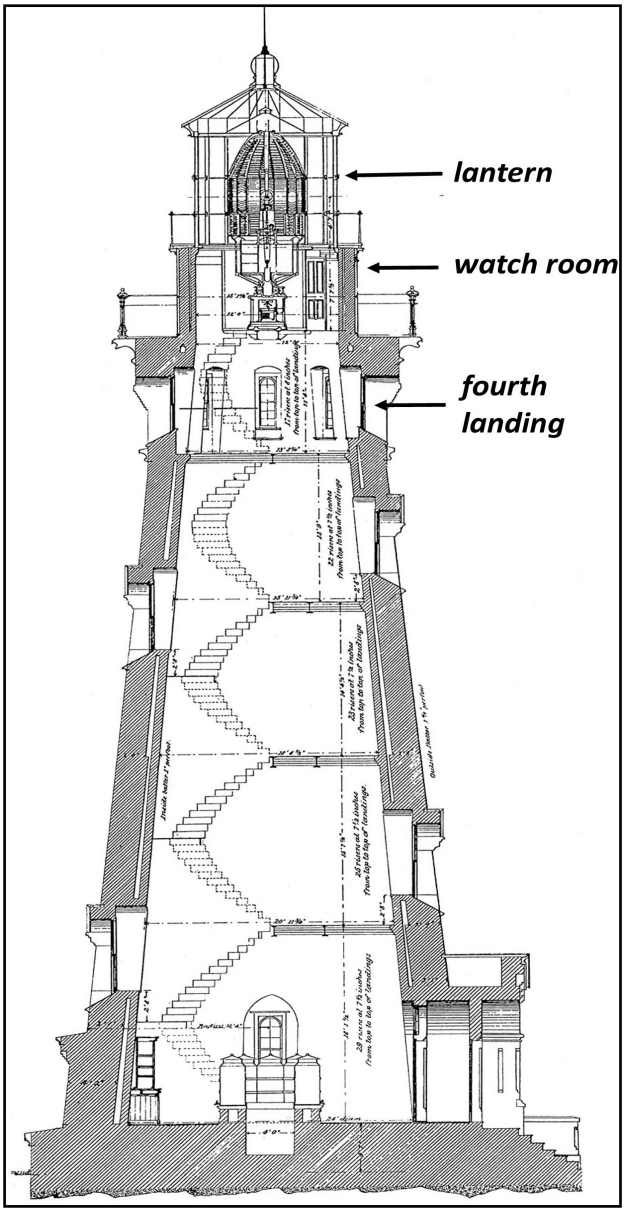


The keepers ascended a tall, winding staircase within the lighthouse to reach the watch room. From there, narrow stairs led to the inside of the lantern. But there was no door from the interior of the lantern to the exterior of the lantern.

How did they get to the *outside* to clean?

According to lighthouse expert, Jim Woodward, because there was no hatch in the floor of the lantern gallery (walkway), there was only one way they could have done it. An iron ladder with two bent hooks at the top would have been kept in the watch room. They took the ladder out through a door, raised it, hooked it to the lantern railing, and up they went! They reached as far as they could from the walkway. To clean the upper panels of lantern glass, they raised the iron ladder to the lantern gallery and attached the hooks to the rail right below the roof.

In Mr. Woodward's words, *"Cleaning the outside lantern windows was an adventure. First you set up the ladder, climbed it, held on with one hand to the hand holds, and cleaned with the other hand. On a quiet, sunny day it was probably somewhat enjoyable. Consider, however, that when the wind is blowing sideways and the windows are being pelted by salt spray that quickly dried, reducing the intensity of the light, the keeper was back out there doing the very same thing. Hair raising! And throughout a big blow like that he had to keep doing it over and over again."*



How did they reach the upper *inside windows* of the lantern*?*

They used the same iron ladder they used outside, hauling it up the inside watch room steps. Inside the lantern, the ladder was hung from iron rods that tied the lantern walls together at the top. Step ladders were not used in lanterns because they are not as stable as the iron ladder.

Did the keepers have to clean the lantern glass at night?

Yes! The keepers were required to keep the glass clean so that the intensity of the light would not be reduced. Especially during storms, cleaning the windows was a constant task. Even on clear nights there could be insects or salt spray that had to be cleaned off. Think of going up and down that exterior ladder at night and during foul weather! Not an easy job.

Accessing the inside of the lens

The inside of the lens was easily accessed via built-in steps. If the keeper needed to get higher on the inside, he would take the lamp off its stand and use a little stool to get up on the lamp stand and reach up from there. A tall person could clean all three sides of the upper (catadioptric) prisms from the outside of the lens.

Outside lighthouse walkways with railings were called galleries.

The lantern gallery, or upper gallery, surrounded the lantern. The watch room gallery surrounded the watch room.

Volunteer Spotlight

Meet Tim Postiff

On my first visit to the light station I was hooked. The occasion was part of the training to become a docent with Friends of the Elephant seal. The day was sunny and windy, with high waves and fluffy cumulus clouds against a blue sky. My thought, even before I parked my car was "how do I get to work here?" That was 2007, and I still volunteer for both organizations.

Most of the ice plant was gone when I started, but there was enough that I could experience a little of what earlier volunteers had been through. Restoration projects seem to take a long time, but almost every building has had major work done since I started here.

My working career was as a high school teacher in Arizona and California. Though my main subjects (math, physical science and computer science) are not closely related to the light station, I have enjoyed learning lots of new information, and imparting it to an interested public. Coming to the light station is something special for most of our visitors and we try to make their day even better than they expected.

While my fingers don't work well for strumming guitar and manipulating stained glass, my earlier hobbies, I can still press a shutter button while waiting for the light station to get back into full operation.

Interested in joining Tim and our other friendly volunteers? Drop us a line - we would love to meet you! Email our volunteer coordinator, Jodie Nelson: jrnelson@blm.gov

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**

Shop Online and Support PBLS

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!

Visit us at: **piedrasblancas.org/gift-shop**

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. *Due to COVID concerns we are holding virtual Zoom meetings. Please email us if you would like to participate.*

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.

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)
Summer Hours (April-September) Saturdays and Wednesdays 10 am and 2 pm, Sundays 10 am. Visit their website: 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

Critter Corner

The American kestrel is the smallest raptor at the light station where it is common year round. Measuring 8”-12” long, they are frequently spotted perched on electricity poles and fence posts. They mainly feed on large insects like caterpillars, dragonflies and moths and small mammals like mice and gophers with the occasional lizard or frog. They hunt by watching from a high perch and swooping down to capture prey. Individual kestrels often specialize on one particular kind of prey. Kestrels are found throughout North and South America.

Meet the Natives

Known commonly as locoweed or rattleweed, *Astragalus nuttalii* is part of the bean family. This perennial herb blooms 11 months of the year. When the seed pods dry they rattle like a snake. Also known as ocean bluff milk vetch, locoweed prefers low water, sandy soil, and elevations below 300 feet. “Locoweed” is generally applied to the entire genus because it can cause bizarre behavior and death in livestock. The California Poison Control System warns that ingestion can cause serious effects to the heart, liver, kidneys or brain! However, not all species of *Astragalus* are toxic. In Baja California, natives chewed it to relieve sore throats and toothaches.

Staff Tackles Major Painting Project

Intern Veronika and contractors Mike and Christine have tackled and assisted with many projects this summer, the largest one being re-painting structures at the light station. All buildings needed to be power washed prior to painting and the first structure completed was the historical white gate that is the entrance to the light station.

Above: Mike power washing the entrance gate.

Coast Guard units C and D were next to be completed, however painting was halted due to poor air quality from nearby fires. Instead, Unit C which houses the main offices for staff was re-painted and organized. Units C and D were finally completed in September, and the next places to be painted are the fuel oil house and metal railing that goes around the top of the lighthouse.

No word yet on when the lighthouse will be re-painted, but for that job we will need a more professional crew! We are grateful for the hard working staff that has kept the light station looking ship shape during the pandemic.

From background to foreground: Mike, Interim Manager Jesse Pluim, Christine and Veronika.

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
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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!

Find us on Facebook
and Instagram:
PiedrasBlancasLightStation

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