

The Beacon

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

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CELEBRATING TWO DECADES OF VOLUNTEERISM AT THE LIGHT STATION

The importance of volunteer engagement was recognized in the early stages of the BLM planning process as being a major support for the light station. In the beginning, there was much to be done and there was no shortage of eager volunteers. For 20 years, volunteers have embraced the goal of stewardship, making a positive difference by assisting in whatever needed to be done, and enjoying the sheer pleasure of spending time at the light station.

Volunteer efforts have included various types of projects such as the removal of non-native plants, in depth historical research, facility maintenance, site construction, administrative support, and visitor services. By the end of the 2020 fiscal year, volunteers will have contributed over 166,000 volunteer hours. Between 2003-2016 an average of 50-70 volunteers were on the annual roster.



Above: Celebration of volunteers and BLM partners in 2014



Above left to right: volunteers remove ice plant, volunteers build blacksmith shop.

Several community groups assisted in major projects and continue to volunteer to this day, groups include but are not limited to: The Native Plant Society, the Sierra Club, the Point San Luis Lighthouse, Cuesta Community College, the American Conservation Experience, California Conservation Corps., the Mormon Helping Hands, and the countless various other groups that have helped along the way.

MOVING FORWARD IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

Great news! As of February 13, 2021, the BLM leadership decided to reopen the light station for tours and volunteer operations. Currently self guided tours will only be operating at a limited capacity on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturdays. The structures of tours have been modified to allow for necessary safety measures and precautions to keep our volunteers, staff, and visitors safe. Reopening measures remain dynamic in nature and are subject to change as the BLM leadership monitors state mandates and instructions from San Luis Obispo County public health office. As always, the health and safety of our staff, interns, volunteers, and visitors is our paramount concern. Changes due to Covid-19 will hopefully be temporary and we will continue to follow the 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. © Copyright 2021



TWENTY YEARS WITH THE BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Twenty years ago, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) took over management of Piedras Blancas Light Station (PBLs). In January 2001, the Coast Guard was in the process of relinquishing the lighthouse property to the BLM. The goal was to assure long term protection and management of historic structures, archeological resources, wildlife habitat, scenic quality, and increased educational and interpretive values.

But what happened prior to 2001 to stimulate interest in the BLM assuming management?

In late 1998, local reporter, Kathe Tanner, discussed with light station biologists, the possibility of Cambria Historical Society hosting a public tour at the station. As part of the planning process, Kathe invited staff from the office of U.S. Representative, Lois Capps, and other legislators, on the tour. The tour date was then set for May 30, 1999, when 180 people boarded four buses at Coast Union High School headed for Piedras Blancas Light Station. The tour was a big success and demonstrated the public's interest in the light station. Over the next couple of years, Kathe would persist in contacting Rep. Capps in regards to the lighthouse and its future.



Above: BLM managers at the dedication ceremony on May 25, 2002. Left to right are: John Bogacki, Ron Fellows, and Bob Rheiner. John Bogacki was the first BLM manager at PBLs.



Above, a view of the light station in 2001, as seen by BLM staff from a Coast Guard boat.

After the 24-inch aero beacon went out in 1999, an emergency light was used, but it was weak and could not be seen in Cambria. The negative public outcry further alerted Rep. Capps to the importance of the lighthouse and its future. Her subsequent actions secured the management of the light station to the BLM.

Traditionally, the BLM manages range land, mines, oil fields and open spaces. This was a whole new role, one in which they recognized the importance of stewardship in protecting the site. On April 9, 2001, a meeting was held at the Cambria Veterans Memorial Building in order to gather community input. Each person attending was given the opportunity to express their hopes and concerns. The Cambria Historical Society helped sponsor the event.

A follow-up meeting was held on October 10, 2001. The public was asked to complete a feedback form and the results guided BLM planning.

| Element | In favor |
|----------------------------------------|----------|
| Restoration of site to 1875-1910 | 94% |
| Access by escorted, structured tours | 88% |
| Continuation of site-specific research | 88% |

On October 12, 2001, management of the light station was transferred to the BLM. The planning process behind the transfer is considered a model of community partnership.

THE TRAIL GOES EVER ON AND ON.....

Various youth volunteer groups from local San Luis Obispo business Ifixit and Cuesta College gathered together on March 19th and March 28th to volunteer at what is hoped to be the first of many "Trail Days" volunteer initiatives. Volunteers guided by local interns Mike and Christine were taught the basics of tool handling, construction techniques and general trail theory prior to setting off to give the visitors' trail a serious makeover.

The half mile loop trail at the lighthouse is an integral part of the visitors' experience at Piedras Blancas. Trails are much more than just a way to explore and enjoy our landscapes; they are a way we protect it. Unlike the magical paths in fairy tales, trails don't just appear. Ideally, they are carefully planned and constructed to provide a route to cause as little disturbance as possible to the natural environment and local species. It is crucial for the longevity and sustainability of the trails that a proper and timely upkeep takes place on regular basis. A well trodden path ensures visitor safety and a positive overall experience.



Local Cuesta College students Garrison, Talia, Thaddeus, and Laura and Mike spend a day giving back to their public lands

With several loads of decomposed granite, a vibraplate, shovels, rakes and the hard work of several volunteers, the team was able to resurface over 100 yards of eroded trail. No matter the budgetary allocation or financial resources provided to trail maintenance, ultimately the proper functioning of the trails and their upkeep rests largely in the hands of dedicated volunteers. On behalf of Piedras Blancas Light Station, we thank everyone who has volunteered their time to carve the path of exploration and education for generations of visitors to come!

Interested in joining our friendly volunteers? Give our volunteer coordinator a buzz, Jodie Nelson: jmnelson@blm.gov

"THE BOOK NOOK" RECOMMENDED LIGHTHOUSE LITERATURE

- **"The Lighthouse Stevensons" by Belle Bathurst**
 - An epic story of Robert Louis Stevenson's ancestors and the building of the Scottish coastal light houses against impossible odds.
- **"Brilliant Beacons" by Eric Jay Dolin**
 - A vivid history of American lighthouses, telling the story of America through the prism of its beloved coastal sentinels. A work rich in maritime lore and brimming with original historical detail.
- **"Women who Kept the Lights" by J. Candace Clifford and Mary Louise Clifford**
 - Details the careers of 34 intrepid women who were official keepers of light stations on the Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific coasts, on Lake Champlain and the Great Lakes, staying at their posts from a few years to half a century.

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

WATCH FOR PACIFIC GRAY WHALES THIS SPRING

Summer Feeding Grounds

May - October

Pacific gray whales feed from late spring to early fall when ice melts and clears the way to abundant feeding waters in the Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas. The whales must gain the fat they'll need to sustain them for the roundtrip migration before the next feeding season.

Migration Route

The whales usually travel within 2.5 miles of shore along 5,000-7,000 miles of coastline. Their nearshore route makes this one of the few whale migrations that we can see from shore.

Winter Birthing and Mating Grounds

December - April

The warm, shallow waters in the lagoons of Mexico's Baja Peninsula are home to mothers and babies in winter. Many other gray whales are seen along the coast of Baja and off the mainland of Mexico. ★ Designates nursery lagoon.

Fall Migration

October - February

Southward migration is led by pregnant females, in a hurry to reach the warm birthing and nursery lagoons. Soon to follow are the males and other adult females. Juveniles join the parade, but some don't even reach Mexico before turning around and heading north.

Spring Migration

January - June

Northward migration occurs in pulses or waves. First to head north are adult males and juveniles, and newly pregnant females. Mothers and babies stay in the lagoons a month or two longer than the others so babies can gain blubber and strength before making the long journey north.

TRIVIA TIME

There have been three BLM managers of Piedras Blancas Light Station. Who are they?

John Bogacki, Jim Boucher, Ryan Cooper

Who managed the PBLS prior to the BLM?

The United States Coast Guard

When did the BLM begin giving tours of PBLS?

June 2003

Where did the original PBLS tours begin?

Visitors would gather at Hearst Castle to board buses to visit PBLS. Buses were provided by California State Parks.

Who made reservations for the PBLS bus tours?

Reservations were made by staff at the Hearst Castle National Geographic Theater.

How do you currently make reservations for tours?

Online at piedrasblancas.org

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 when 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

COOKING AT THE LIGHTHOUSE

"This recipe is great for when PBLS intern Mike HOLley breaks his jaw surfing out at the lighthouse!! Don't worry he is on the mend and will be back out in the water in no time." -Christine, PBLS ACE Intern

Crockpot French Onion Soup

2 quarts beef broth
6 cups thinly sliced yellow onions
1/2 cup butter
1 tbsp. sugar
2 tsp. salt
2 cups grated parmesan cheese



Pour broth into crockpot. In a large skillet cook onions in butter; cover and cook about 15 minutes. Add salt and sugar, stir well. Add to crockpot, cover and cook on low for 6-8 hours. Before serving add cheese. Serve with croutons.

-Donna Thorndyke Schneider

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

MEET THE SCIENTISTS

Katie Heffernan, BLM Wildlife Biologist, recently conducted a mark-recapture survey of small mammals at PBLs in order to develop species inventory and calculate species abundance. Heffernan explains that monitoring the small mammal population at PBLs will lead to a better understanding of the entire terrestrial ecosystem of which small mammals are a vital part. Small mammals can significantly impact plant communities due to population density; they are a critical prey base for many consumers, and they contribute to local and regional diversity.

Over three days 92 catch and release traps were distributed uniformly across PBLs. Heffernan's findings revealed a total of four species detected: 170 deer mice (*Peromyscus maniculatus*), 3 California voles (*Microtus californicus*), 2 house mice (*Mus musculus*), and 2 Botta's pocket gophers (*Thomomys bottae*). All four species are common in the area and were predicted to occur at PBLs. There were no rare or listed species observed. However, more than 80% of traps caught an animal each night due to high deer mice abundance, which indicates that the trap design may not have been robust enough to capture rare species.

Heffernan exclaims that the history of ice plant removal and native vegetation restoration that occurred at PBLs is incredible! She notes that native plant restoration is a vital part of supporting native wildlife and it is clear from the invasive plant survey that native vegetation is flourishing at PBLs. By maintaining native plant restoration efforts, PBLs can help promote healthy populations of native primary consumers, which in turn, lead to healthy populations of secondary consumers, therefore allowing the whole ecosystem to thrive!



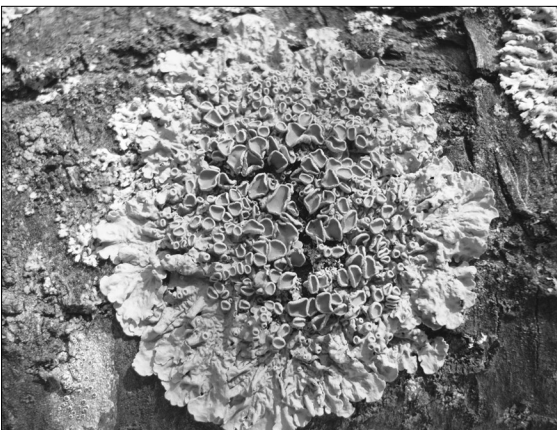
Researcher Katie Heffernan and her volunteer BLM team .

CRITTER CORNER



The California Vole (*Microtus californicus*)! During Katie Heffernan's mark-recapture survey of small mammals at PBLs, a total of three California Voles were found over three days! They are nocturnal, and they spend most of their time in their interconnecting underground burrows and runways (the ones farmers are not too fond of). These tunnels can extend from an area of 730 to 1,110 square feet. Native to the Pacific Coast of North America, the California Vole is a keystone prey species due to their rapid reproduction and high population densities. California Voles are quite common, and their population sizes provide no conservation concern today. It is relevant to monitor their population cycles and habitat availability as they are a vital prey species to more fragile predatory species.

MEET THE NATIVES



Small but mighty, lichens are considered to be some of the oldest living organisms on the planet. Lichens take a long time to form and grow and are often found on rocks, trees, and any variety of other immobile objects, yet sometimes they can even grow on sand dunes! Contrary to popular belief lichens are not harmful to the trees or other objects they grow on. Lichens are also a great indicator of air quality and environmental pollutants. Lichens absorb everything around them like air, water, pollutants, and nutrients. Toxins can be extracted from lichens and scientists can determine the levels of those toxins in the atmosphere. Now that's neat! There are thought to be more than 3,600 species of lichen in North America. Now that is a lotta lichen! On your next walk take a closer look around you to discover all the types of lichen right below your very toes, but be sure not to step on them.

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!



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and Instagram:
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STATION ASSOCIATION
P.O. BOX 127
SAN SIMEON, CA 93452

