



# The Beacon

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

**VOL. 16, ISSUE 2**

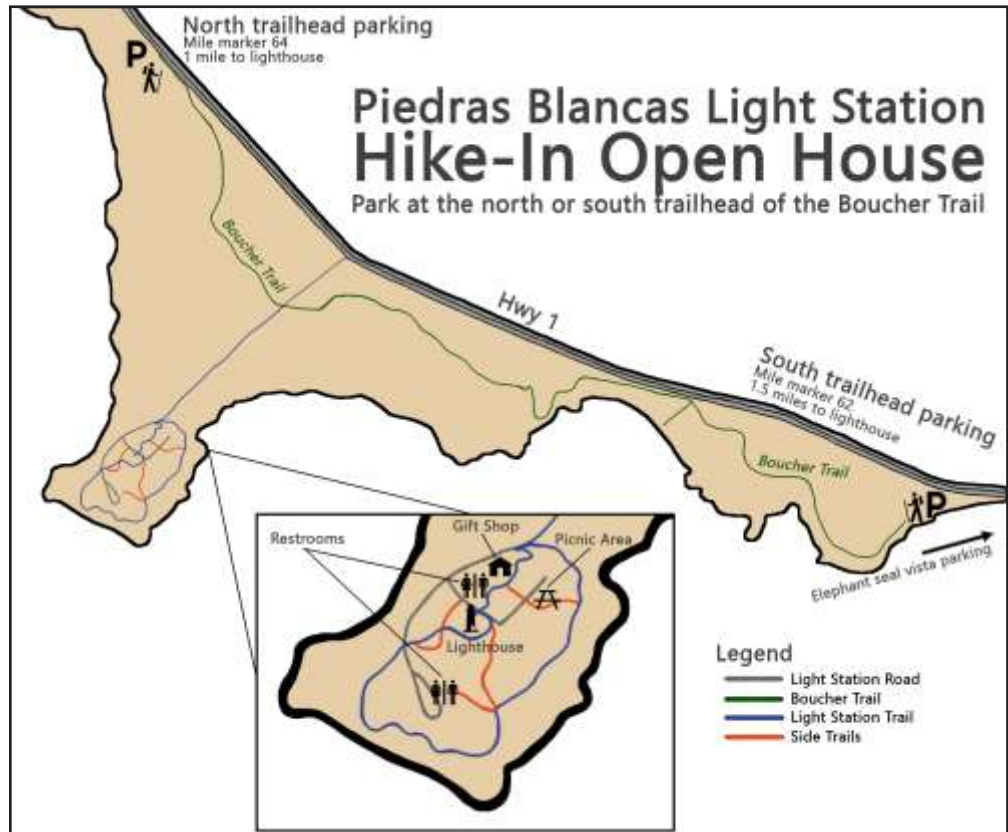
**APR - JUN 2022**

## SUMMER IS HERE! EXPANDED TOUR DATES AND WALK-IN WEDNESDAYS RETURNING

The Light Station is now open for our usual schedule of summer tours, reservable online at [piedrasblancas.org](http://piedrasblancas.org). Tours are now following a more relaxed pace, as adopted last year in response to Covid-19 restrictions. Each tour begins with an introduction from one of our knowledgeable docents, followed by a self-guided walk along the half-mile trail or exploration of the lighthouse and other buildings at your own pace.

Many visitors have told us they enjoy the new tour format, as it gives them time to take in the beautiful views from the trail or ask more in-depth questions of the docents stationed throughout. This more relaxed schedule has proven easier for many families with small children as well.

Walk-in Wednesdays allow visitors to enjoy the light station at an even more relaxed pace. You can park in the lots at either end of the Boucher Trail and hike to the light station to explore the grounds and buildings, shop in the gift shop, and enjoy the picnic area if you bring your own lunch. Docents will be available to answer questions. Suggested donation of \$5 per person. *Subject to cancellation if Covid -19 restrictions change.*



### Walk-In Wednesdays

**July 27, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.**

**August 31, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.**

Reserve now to visit us on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, or Saturday for one of our regular summer tours. Meet at 9:45 a.m., at the former Piedras Blancas Motel at 16420 Hwy 1, 1.5 miles north of the lighthouse. One of our staff will check you in and lead the caravan to the lighthouse. Reservations are required. The light station is closed for regular tours on Wednesdays and Sundays.

For any questions about tours, visit [piedrasblancas.org/tours](http://piedrasblancas.org/tours).



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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## PROGRESS MADE ON FRESNEL LENS

Community stakeholders including the Pinedorado Lions Foundation, the Coast Guard, the BLM, and the PBLSA, gathered on June 15 in a meeting organized by County Supervisor Bruce Gibson to discuss the future of the Fresnel lens currently on Main Street in Cambria.

The first priority is ensuring public safety and the preservation of the lens by deciding whether the enclosure can be repaired. Bruce Elster of Shoreline Engineering and Dan Murphy of Wellsona Iron are working on a plan and estimate to repair the enclosure. The Coast Guard is working with lampist Jim Woodward to see what needs to be done to preserve the lens in the short-term.

All stakeholders involved in the meeting will work together to raise funds for the repair of the enclosure and preservation of the lens. It is anticipated that repairs can be completed by September.

Once the short-term public safety and lens preservation goals are reached, the group will re-convene to begin discussing long-term plans with the community.

## WELCOME TO SUMMER INTERN KATELYN!

Katelyn Owings has joined the light station team this summer as a much-needed extra pair of hands. As a BLM intern, she'll be helping out on tours and doing maintenance around the light station through August. Katelyn has family nearby and previously worked at the Discovery Center at Hearst State Beach for two summers, so she is already familiar with the area.

Katelyn attends Western Oregon University, where she is studying to become a middle school science teacher. She loves living and working near the ocean and can be found tide-pooling when not at work. Katelyn says she is excited to be working at the light station and eager to help out.

Welcome, Katelyn!



## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED AT THE LIGHT STATION

Would you like to help preserve a historical landmark while enjoying beautiful coastal scenery? We currently have a need for volunteers in multiple roles. Are you interested in delving into the history of the light station and sharing that information with our visitors, or would you prefer to help in the gift shop? Some volunteers like working on restoration projects or helping with native plant rehabilitation. Whatever your interests, we'd be glad to have your help. If you'd like more information about volunteering at the light station, contact Jodie Nelson, our Outdoor Recreation Planner, at [PiedrasBlancasTours@gmail.com](mailto:PiedrasBlancasTours@gmail.com).

*Volunteers clear plants in front of the lighthouse to make room for seaside poppies. (See page 5.)*



## JOIN THE PBLSA BOARD MEETINGS ON THE 4TH WEDNESDAY OF EVERY MONTH

The Piedras Blancas Light Station Association meets on the 4th Wednesday of the month at 6 p.m. (except for November and December). Due to COVID concerns, we are currently holding virtual Zoom meetings.

The public is always welcome to listen, ask questions, or voice concerns, so please email us if you would like to participate. Meeting minutes are published on the [piedrasblancas.org](http://piedrasblancas.org) website on the About Us page.

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

Please email if you are interested in the board or have questions concerning the Light Station: [contact.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:contact.pblsa@gmail.com).

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

### Point Sur Light Station

(65 miles north of PBLS)  
Visit their website: [PointSur.org](http://PointSur.org) or call 831-625-4419 for the current tour schedule. No reservations; first come, first served.

### Point Pinos Lighthouse

(90 miles north of PBLS)  
Located in Pacific Grove. Open Saturdays and Sundays. Tours are outside on the lighthouse grounds; the interior of the lighthouse is closed. For more information, visit: [PointPinosLighthouse.org](http://PointPinosLighthouse.org).





# GIFT SHOP UPDATES



We have rearranged the gift shop to showcase items for kids. Introduce children to a variety of ocean animals with new sustainable wooden and cardboard models of sea otters, humpback whales, sharks, and more.

The peregrine chicks have left their nest out on Piedra Blanca, and the adults have been encouraging the chicks to fly from the top of the lighthouse. It's a good chance to teach kids about the wildlife near the lighthouse with our peregrine falcon puppet and our picture book, *Peregrine's Sky*. Come visit us soon!

## IN MEMORY OF ROBERTA MAJOR

On March 18, the light station family lost a long-time volunteer and lighthouse supporter, Roberta Major. Roberta and her husband Jim Major have been volunteering at the light station since 2012.

Along with volunteering at the light station, Roberta and Jim have been living history docents at Hearst Castle, delivered Meals on Wheels, and served on the board of the Joslyn Center. We have been fortunate to benefit from their community spirit for so long.

Jim continues to guide tours at the light station, while Roberta preferred to welcome visitors in the gift shop. She was always a lively and friendly presence, and she will be missed. Our condolences to Jim and the rest of Roberta's family and friends.

## PBLSA MEMBER BENEFIT!

Join the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and get 10% off all gift shop purchases!\*



Simply enter coupon code: **MEMBER** in your shopping cart at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org), or let the gift shop volunteer know that you are a member the next time you visit the light station.

*\*Does not apply to donations, engraved bricks, memberships, or tour fees.*

To join PBLSA, complete and mail the form on the back of *The Beacon*, or join at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org).

Questions about your membership status? Email us at [membership.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:membership.pblsa@gmail.com).

Thank you for supporting the light station!

## DID YOU MISS AN ISSUE?

Check out the archive of *The Beacon* on our website at [piedrasblancas.org/newsletter](http://piedrasblancas.org/newsletter). We have digital versions of the quarterly newsletter going back to 2015.



## GRAY WHALE PRESENTATION BY NOAA SCIENTISTS

On April 23, as part of National Volunteer Week, light station volunteers and members of partner organizations were treated to a presentation by two scientists from the whale counting team that comes to Piedras Blancas annually for the gray whale migration north.

Aimée Lang and Tomo Eguchi, both associated with the marine mammal programs of NOAA's Southwest Fisheries Science Center, gave a presentation on gray whales and the techniques scientists use to measure the health of the population of the eastern North Pacific.

Gray whales can be distinguished at a distance by the heart-shaped plume from their two blowholes. If you're lucky enough to get a closer look, gray whales have mottled gray and white skin, a dorsal hump rather than a fin, and yellowish-white baleen. They are approximately 45 feet long.

Gray whales spend summers in the Arctic, feeding on amphipods, crab larvae, herring eggs, and other



*Tomo Eguchi describes how the team uses a drone to count gray whales. Photo by David Cooper.*



*Aimée Lang speaks in front of a full house of volunteers and members of partner organizations in the Fog Signal Building. Photo by David Cooper.*

small animals they scoop up from the ocean floor. After spending the summer feeding, they migrate south to the warmer water of the birthing lagoons in Baja California for the winter. In the spring, they migrate back north to the feeding grounds. On this journey, female gray whales swim close to shore with their calves in an effort to protect their young from predators like orcas and sharks that attack from below in deeper water. This gives scientists an opportunity to observe them from Piedras Blancas.

The Calf Production Survey at Piedras Blancas began in 1994 and has been conducted every year except 2020. Scientists make their observations in shifts from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., counting mother/calf pairs to help gauge the overall health of the gray whale population. The numbers of calves born each year can vary considerably depending on the amount of ice cover in the Arctic. More ice means less food, and less chance of a female calving. The researchers had counted only 29 mother/calf pairs by April 23 as opposed to 47 pairs the year before. In a follow-up email with Tomo Eguchi, he reported that the number of calves this year is one of the lowest since the survey started in 1994.

The methods scientists use to count the whales who pass by Piedras Blancas include spotting with the naked eye and binoculars, then confirming with their large 25x scope. Another method adopted more recently is to use drones to view mother/calf pairs from overhead. Not only can scientists use this method to count whales, but they can also learn more about body condition and reproductive status by comparing the silhouettes of the whales. For instance, the widest point of a pregnant female's body is lower than in other whales.

The gray whale population is currently in the midst of what scientists call an Unusual Mortality Event or UME that began in 2020. There have been more reported strandings in the past few years, as well as signs of malnourishment in observed whales. UMEs are also correlated with lower calf production. The goal of the researchers' observations is to better understand the links between the health of the gray whale population and the environmental influences that cause such fluctuations.



## THANK YOU TO THE CALIFORNIA CONSERVATION CORPS!

Members of the California Conservation Corps (CCC) have been volunteering at the lighthouse on Friday afternoons since January. Some of the projects they have completed include cleaning the Fog Signal Building, cleaning the lighthouse rotunda, spreading wood chips behind the Coast Guard buildings, weeding, and trimming the walking trail.

Another of the projects undertaken by the CCC members is a small expansion to the eastern portion of the trail, which allows for a better view of the small cove below. The cove is a popular spot with weanling elephant seals, and the new overlook will allow visitors a better view. Volunteer Ken Smith added the posts and rope, creating a charming addition to the trail.



The PBLSA installed a brick on the path in front of the lighthouse as a thank you to the CCC members for all their work this year. Their summertime work involves helping with wildfire mitigation, but we hope to see them back at the light station next winter.

## POPPIES GALORE! BEAUTIFYING THE LIGHT STATION GROUNDS WITH NATIVE PLANTS



Visitors to the light station this spring have been welcomed by an abundance of seaside poppies with their cheerful yellow blossoms.

Seaside poppies (*Eschscholzia californica* var. *maritima*) are a coastal form of the official state flower, the California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*). Low-growing and perennial, they have

finely-cut blue-gray foliage and yellow petals with orange centers. The most profuse bloom begins in March and continues throughout the summer, though you may see blossoms at other times of the year. Poppies are not only enjoyed by humans, but also by native bees and other insects.

In the areas of the light station grounds dedicated to the restoration of native plants, poppies come up where they want to. In the historic district near the lighthouse, where a more traditional gardening approach is used, seaside poppies are featured in the front yards of the Coast Guard quarters and now in front of the lighthouse.

In 2001, when the BLM took over management of the light station, the area in front of the lighthouse was full of non-native ice plant (see photos to the right). After the ice plant was pulled, the area was used for gatherings, like the official ceremony in May 2002, when management transferred from the Coast Guard to the BLM. The current effort to create a poppy patch in front of the lighthouse began in December 2021, when an AmeriCorps crew cleared existing vegetation and transplanted poppies. The results this spring have been stunning, as the poppies continue to spread across the lawn.



## 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. Make your reservations online through our website, [piedrasblancas.org](http://piedrasblancas.org). Meet at the former Piedras Blancas Motel located 1.5 miles north of the light station at 9:45 a.m.

### ***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 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  
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 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)
- \_\_\_ Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to PBLSA,  
or join online at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org).

***Thank you for your support!***



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