



# The Beacon

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

**VOL. 17, ISSUE 1**

**JAN - MAR 2023**

### AMERICORPS TEAM MAKES IMPROVEMENTS AT THE LIGHT STATION

Seven members of the Red One BLM Focus Team of AmeriCorps NCCC Pacific Region arrived at the light station on January 9—just before the power went out for four days as a result of the storms early in the month. Despite that inconvenience, they got to work right away cleaning and painting in the lighthouse while the rain continued.

Once the storms ended, the AmeriCorps group started working to improve the half-mile walking trail and the light station grounds by trimming back brush, cleaning out clogged French drains, using driftwood to more clearly mark the edges of the trail, and spreading additional rock to level it out. They also built up and improved an observation platform started by the California Conservation Corps last spring. The platform allows visitors a better, safer view of the cove below, which is a popular spot with weanling elephant seals as they're learning how to swim.

During their stay at the light station, the AmeriCorps members were also given several informative talks by BLM staff, including a tour of the light station by Outdoor Recreation Planner Jodie Nelson, as well as a night sky presentation and a lesson on developing interpretive programs by new Park Ranger Bre Brown (see page 3). They also spent a morning at the Coastal Discovery Center in San Simeon, learning about the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary from Sophia Barwegen, the Volunteer Program Coordinator there.

We said goodbye to this wonderful group of hardworking young people at the beginning of February, but their contributions to the light station will last for years. Thank you, AmeriCorps!



*AmeriCorps team members spread gravel on a section of trail to level it out. Photo by Bre Brown.*



*AmeriCorps team standing on the elephant seal viewing platform they built on the light station trail. Photo by Bre Brown.*



*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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## A TRIBUTE TO JACK MOREHEAD, 1933—2022

One of the most distinguished friends of the Piedras Blancas Light Station, John M. "Jack" Morehead, passed away on December 11, 2022. He held a variety of leadership positions during his 40+ year career in the National Park Service, including Superintendent of Yosemite National Park and Associate Director of Operations in Washington, D.C. for all the National Parks.

In 1994, Jack moved to the Central Coast after his retirement. He served as a docent for the Friends of the Elephant Seals and a tour guide for the PBLS while consulting on park planning and environmental compliance in locations including Death Valley and Jordan.

Jack Morehead chaired the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association Board of Directors from 2013-2016. He deftly steered the association in new directions, developed budgeting and funding systems and standards, and expanded board membership. "Jack was especially influential," recalls current chair David Cooper, "in setting a high standard of dedication and commitment to the stewardship of public lands. I worshipped him. He was a true mentor."

Jack's family requests that those who wish to honor his service and dedication may do so with tax-deductible contributions to his favorite causes during his retirement years: The Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and the Friends of the Elephant Seals.

### DID YOU MISS AN ISSUE?

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

### 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). 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](https://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 Piedras Blancas Light Station: [contact.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:contact.pblsa@gmail.com).



*Jack Morehead speaking to a group of visitors from Jordan.*

### DO YOU FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA?

Keep up with Piedras Blancas Light Station online by following us on Facebook and Instagram. Recent posts share information about the neighboring elephant seal rookery and the recent king tides, show the capture of an injured pelican by Pacific Wildlife Care, and highlight some of the volunteers who lead tours, answer visitor questions, work in the gift shop, and serve on the PBLSA board.



Follow us @piedrasblancaslightstation

<https://www.facebook.com/PiedrasBlancasLightStation>  
<https://www.instagram.com/piedrasblancaslightstation>

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

#### Point Sur Light Station

(65 miles north of PBLS)  
Visit their website: [PointSur.org](https://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](https://PointPinosLighthouse.org).





## WELCOME TO BRE BROWN, NEW BLM PARK RANGER!

Breanne Brown has joined the light station team as BLM's newest park ranger. In her new role, Bre will be conducting tours, leading environmental education programs, maintaining the grounds, and helping with administrative work.

Prior to this position, Bre spent four years working seasonally for the National Park Service as an Interpretive Park Ranger, Education Technician, and EMT. Some of her "offices" have included Rocky Mountain, Acadia, Sequoia, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, and Voyageurs National Parks, as well as Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. In these positions, she has designed and led public programs and field trips for thousands of visitors, and has been a first responder on dozens of search and rescues, all while striving to protect some of our country's most special places.

Bre is originally from southern California. She graduated from UCLA with a degree in Anthropology and a minor in Conservation Biology in 2018. Her passion for public lands began at a young age during frequent family camping trips.



*BLM Park Ranger Bre Brown.*

Today, that love still rings true—when not working, Bre can be found backpacking, hiking, kayaking, and mountain biking.

While Bre loved her time spent traveling with NPS, she is ecstatic to have found a place to call home and is excited for the chance to build a long-term community on the

central coast. Bre was originally drawn to Piedras Blancas for the chance to continue growing in her career with public lands while getting to live close to the people she loves – but the beauty and history of PBLS is what really sealed the deal! She looks forward to working with the team to help protect such a special place!

## ROAD CLOSURE IMPACTS LIGHT STATION TOURS

Highway 1 was closed just north of the Elephant Seal Vista Point parking lot on January 4, limiting access to the light station to employees and volunteers.

After discussing with Caltrans, BLM staff was able to meet visitors at the Elephant Seal Vista parking lot and lead them to the light station for tours. The number of visitors was limited when tours started again on January 17, allowing staff to test the new procedure. The maximum number of visitors increased to normal on January 26.

On February 8, Caltrans announced that the road closure would move to Ragged Point, returning the tour meeting place to the former Piedras Blancas Motel. Please direct any tour questions to [PiedrasBlancasTours@gmail.com](mailto:PiedrasBlancasTours@gmail.com).



*Due to roadway damage to the north caused by the storms at the beginning of January, Hwy 1 was closed to through traffic 1.5 miles south of the light station.*

## PIEDRAS BLANCAS FROM THE SEA: PHOTOS OLD AND NEW

The familiar panoramic photo that has been the banner of *The Beacon* since 2010 wasn't taken to showcase the beauty of the lighthouse and its shoreline. Instead, it was part of an important aid to navigation.

The photo (top right) was printed from a negative (middle right) marked as from the "List of 1904". The list refers to the publication that mariners used to navigate by identifying lighthouses as they passed. Piedras Blancas was identified by its light pattern at night—a fixed white light, varied by flashes every 15 seconds—and its 'daymark' by day. The 1904 list describes the Piedras Blancas daymark as "*White; dome of lantern, gallery, and balustrade, black. Dwelling, outhouses and fences white. Conical tower 90 feet high. Dwelling 50 feet in rear... The tower is behind a rock known as Piedras Blancas.*" The included photo aided this identification.

The gift shop sells a post card with the 1904 photo marked "1895". Likely, it was confused with a similar photo (lower middle right), which is from the "List for 1895". It's not as clear as the 1904 photo and has a slightly different composition. It's not known when exactly these photos were taken. We also don't know either photographer's name, but it would have been someone hired by the government. The images were acquired from the National Archives.

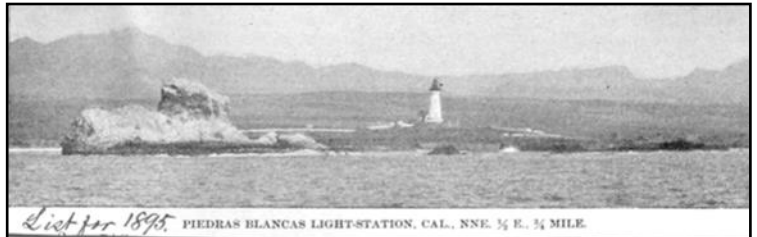
In August 2017, frequent light station photographer Gary O'Neill had the opportunity to accompany a research boat from the Cal Poly Marine Biology Division that monitors fish in the Marine Protected Area just off Piedras Blancas. Gary spent five or six hours taking photos of the light station from various angles while the researchers caught, weighed, and tagged fish before releasing them. He was able to take the photo below, with its close similarity to the composition of the 1904 photo, near the end of the day.



Piedras Blancas, "List of 1904"



Negative of above photo, "List of 1904"



Piedras Blancas, "List for 1895." Note there are differences between this photo and the 1904 photo.



The image from the 'List for 1893' was a drawing.

Gary describes the day as calm, a definite advantage when trying to take a photo from a ship at sea. It's unknown how the photographer of the 1904 image was able to achieve such a clear photo with the technology of the day.



Photo by Gary O'Neill.



## 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, while others help out with Friday morning school tours. 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.*



## 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.

## 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.

To join PBLSA, complete and mail the form on the back of *The Beacon*, or join through our website at [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org). Questions about your membership status? Email [membership.pblsa@gmail.com](mailto:membership.pblsa@gmail.com).

Thank you for supporting the light station!

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



## THE ONLINE GIFT SHOP IS ALWAYS OPEN!

Visit [shop.piedrasblancas.org](http://shop.piedrasblancas.org) to support the light station through the gift shop, buying an engraved brick for the path near the lighthouse, making a donation, or becoming a member.

## VISIT THE LIGHT STATION ANY TIME, DAY OR NIGHT . . .

. . . with our live webcam, courtesy of Surflife. Enjoy a view of the light station grounds, the beaches to the north and south, and the waves crashing on the rocks offshore. Look for elephant seals on the beach and pelicans and seagulls perched on the rocks. Whether it's a foggy morning or a moonlit night, check us out:

[piedrasblancas.org/webcam](http://piedrasblancas.org/webcam)



## 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 tour 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!



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All memberships include *The Beacon*, our quarterly newsletter.

\_\_\_ \$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 people)

\_\_\_ Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**HELP RESTORE  
AND PRESERVE  
THE PIEDRAS  
BLANCAS LIGHT  
STATION BY  
JOINING PBLSA**

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

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

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

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**Thank you for your support!**



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