

The Beacon

Piedras Blancas Light Station Outstanding Natural Area

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Piedras Blancas Light Station, 1934

The lower photo tells the story of life at the light station in 1934. The old rain shed water system, utilized since 1908, was about to be replaced with a more reliable system using a surface spring located about 1/2 mile north of the station. Management of the station would be transferred from the U.S. Lighthouse Service to the U.S. Coast Guard in 1939. It was the end of an era.

The fog signal building is at the lower right of the photo. To the left of it is the blacksmith shop. Heading up the sidewalk is the oil house, where fuel oil used in the fog signal equipment was stored. This group of buildings met the needs of producing a sound signal. In the center of the photo, the lighthouse is gleaming white in the sun. The upper three levels are intact, but a closer inspection would reveal the use of steel bands around the fourth landing, in an attempt to stabilize earthquake damage that had occurred over the years. The light was still produced by first order Fresnel lens and oil lamp.

In the upper left of the photo is a complex of living structures and support buildings. The largest building is the Keepers Dwelling, occupied by three keepers and their families. The smaller dwelling, at left, was the Keeper's Cottage, occupied by Principal Keeper Norman Francis, who arrived in 1934 and served until 1948. The other structures are storage sheds and out-buildings. Behind the houses there is a large concrete pad called a rain shed, part of the water supply system used between 1908 and 1935. Rain water fell on the concrete pad, drained to the large tanks in the upper left, and from there, was pumped to the elevated water tanks. There are no vegetable gardens seen. It wasn't until 1935, and installation of a more reliable, water supply system, that vegetables could be grown. At the far upper left, the derrick and wharf are located, reminding us that supplies arrived by tender ships. The structure at lower left was a four car garage. Along the bluff there are chicken coops and a wind fence. The elevated water tower, seen in both photos, was removed in 1935.



The above photo, donated by Florence Hunt, who discovered it in an antique shop, was taken around 1934. The following names are listed on the back: "Grace and Henry, Jack and his Dad." Does anyone know who these people are?



A joint publication of the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association and the Bureau of Land Management. The Piedras Blancas Light Station Association is a non-profit partner for the Bureau of Land Management. It provides support for the restoration, conservation, interpretation, and stewardship of the unique natural, historical, and cultural resources at the Piedras Blancas Light Station. © Copyright 2014





BLM update

by Jim Boucher, Park Manager

Drought and Piedras Blancas

Like many parts of the country, 2014 has been a very dry year at Piedras Blancas. With the exception of some foggy days that dampened the grounds, there has been no moisture for months. The wetland that supplies the light station with water has shrunk to a fraction of its previous size but miraculously so far has been able to keep a 10,000 gallon storage tank full. The stored water is primarily in case of fire, as there is no community water system available.

Like many places throughout the west, water conservation measures were implemented at the light station. Landscape watering was discontinued, washing of structures to remove salt and dirt was reduced and low flow fixtures were installed. The result being that only a few hundred gallons of water were used per week at Piedras Blancas.

A shortage of water was not uncommon in the past at Piedras Blancas and water has always been a very precious commodity. Historical records indicate that water was often transported to the light station in times of shortage and history could repeat if the drought continues.

Despite the drought, it has been a spectacular summer to view wildlife at Piedras Blancas. Warmer offshore water temperatures have brought large concentrations of small fish and squid to the area and visitors have been treated to viewing intense feeding activity especially by pelicans, cormorants and humpback whales.



Above left, humpback feeding at San Simeon cove. Photo by Jack Morehead. Above right, pelicans resting between feeding bouts at Piedras Blancas.

Twilight Tour, October 25th, 2014

Piedras Blancas Light Station is pleased to announce there will be a Twilight Tour on Saturday, October 25th, 2014. This special tour features guides in period attire, historic enactments, and sunset viewing. Reservations are required. Call 805-924-1807.

Tour times are 5:00, 5:15, 5:30, and 5:45. The fee is \$15 for adults, \$5 for ages 6-17. Tours last about 2 hours. This popular tour fills up quickly, so call now for your reservation!

For information on Piedras Blancas Light Station

www.piedrasblancas.org
or www.piedrasblancas.gov

National Lighthouse Day

August 7, 2014 was the 225th anniversary of George Washington signing the Lighthouse Act of 1789, in which the U.S. government took over responsibility for building and maintaining our nation's lighthouses.

The U.S. Congress designated August 7, 1989 as National Lighthouse Day in recognition of the 200th anniversary of the signing of the Lighthouse Act. National Lighthouse day is not a formal holiday, at least not yet. This summer, on August 9th we celebrated National Lighthouse Day at Piedras Blancas with a special living history tour.

Below: Paul Beaver as keeper working on a painting project. Keepers spent a lot of time painting.



Above: Sandy Bosworth and Bev Hardwick as keeper's wives. They talked about what it was like to live at Piedras Blancas in 1908. In the background Linda Waring can be seen doing a laundry enactment.

Spotlight on volunteer

Dave Babcock

Dave Babcock has been a volunteer guide at Piedras Blancas Light Station since 2010. Dave is a retired guide from Hearst Castle and brings a lot of experience and expertise to his tours. His love of history, and for the light station, give his tours a special touch. Always smiling and wearing an aloha shirt, he is like a ray of sunshine on even the foggiest days.

Dave led a total of about 40 tours during the 10 week summer season. We couldn't have done it without him! He deserves a medal. Thank you Dave!



A special moment

On July 7, 2014 Michael Morrow of Eastvale, California proposed to the love of his life, Susan Nelson, at the Piedras Blancas Light Station. The proposal occurred as tours were ending. It was a touching moment for all who witnessed it. The joy and love emanating from this couple was wonderful.

Michael stated: *“We haven’t set a date yet, but we are thinking of July, 2016, We have known each other for over 20 years, going back to high school. She was the one that got away and after we lost touch I wondered what had happened to her. I got back in touch with her about a year ago, when I was going through a bad divorce. It was nice to have her friendship again, but I couldn’t live with myself if I didn’t tell her how I really felt about her. Once I did, we started dating and it’s been heaven ever since.*

I chose the lighthouse to pop the question for a couple of reasons. First, we saw the Point Fermin Lighthouse in San Pedro, CA. We decided after that tour that we wanted to see all the lighthouses in California.

Secondly, I thought the lighthouse acted as a perfect metaphor for our relationship. She has helped me to straighten out my life after a really rough period, She guided me away from dangerous decisions and helped me to reset my course in life. She acted as my personal lighthouse. What better place to propose than a beautiful lighthouse!”

From everyone at Piedras Blancas Light Station, we wish all the best to Susan and Michael!



Dave Babcock, tour guide, captured the moment using Michael’s camera.

Piedras Blancas elephant seal breeding season summary, 2014 by Brian Hatfield, USGS Wildlife Biologist

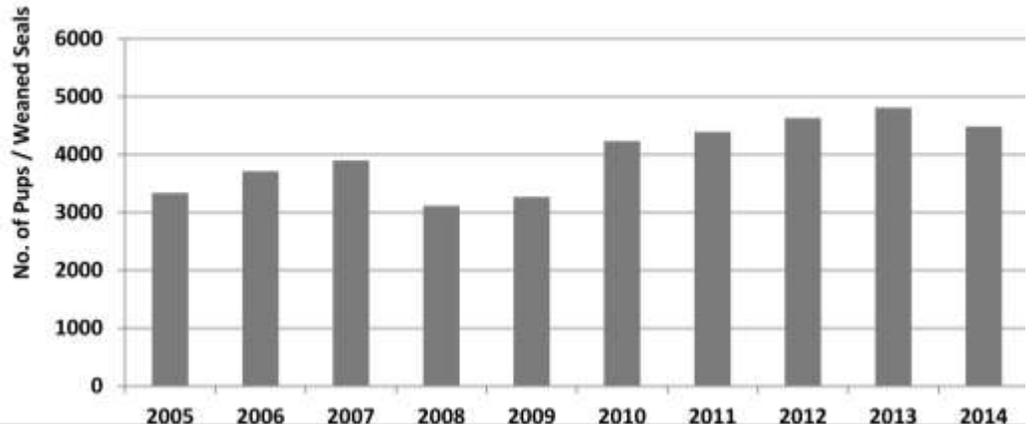
The number of adult female elephant seals at the Piedras Blancas rookery this past breeding season, and the number of estimated births (about 5,300 births), were up approximately 2.5% from last year. However, the number of live young-of-the-year seals counted at the end of the season (4,500) was down almost 7% from last year. This indicates we had higher pup/weaner mortality this year. This is probably not a surprise to regular visitors to the rookery since there was more than the usual number of dead seals. The rookery experienced a couple of different periods of concurrent large swells and high tides this season that likely contributed to the mortality.

A bit unusual this year were the numerous dead seals in good body condition (i.e., fat) with no sign of obvious trauma – some of which stranded miles from the rookery. Two of three fat “black coats” that stranded in San Luis County and were examined by a veterinarian from The Marine Mammal Center exhibited evidence of internal injuries likely caused by a crushing type of event. This type of injury can be caused unintentionally to pups by large males chasing each other through harems, but this can also result from large males (usually sub-adult) trying to mate with weaned seals.

If this latter type of seal behavior was responsible for some of these deaths and if (I am speculating here) some occurred in shallow water where weaned seals congregate, it would be more likely that some of the dead young seals were washed out to sea and subsequently stranded on beaches away from the rookery.



Figure 1. Live Pup, Weaned and Orphaned Seal Counts at Piedras Blancas (Late February/Early March)





PBLSA update

by David Cooper, Chair

The PBLSA Board of Directors is passing through a season of changes. As reported in the last issue of the *Beacon*, Jack Morehead stepped down as Chair in June. In July the Board asked me to take over the wheel. I am still operating on my learner's permit.

Shortly after Jack's departure, Fred Apitz resigned as Board Treasurer. During his two-year service, Fred streamlined the Association's accounting, financial, and reporting systems. The Board took yet another hit in early summer when Cathy Shusta announced that she would be leaving the Central Coast to be closer to her daughter in the Los Angeles area. We are grateful for the outstanding leadership, significant contributions, and continuing friendship of Jack, Fred, and Cathy.

I am pleased to announce that Harry Thorpe has agreed to take over as Board Treasurer. Continuing PBLSA Board members Tim Postiff and Jim Harris provide important continuity, experience, and collective memory. Holly Gant provides outstanding administrative support.

We have added two new directors: Ellen Stoner and Jackie Howland. Ellen, familiar to many of us for her work in the light station gift shop, is a former community college instructor and award-winning educator. Interested in contributing to the Board's fund raising efforts, Jackie and her husband come to the area from Yorba Linda where she was a school principal and mentor to new teachers; Jackie's innovations in inquiry-based science teaching were recognized by the Smithsonian Institute.

Like the Boards before us, this new group is dedicated to the mission of the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association: to support Park Manager Jim Boucher and the Bureau of Land Management in restoring the light station to its period of historical significance, and to preserve and protect the material, cultural, and natural resources of the area for the benefit of present and future generations.

The Board meets the fourth Wednesday of every month at 6 pm in the Cambria Rabobank conference room. All are welcome to join us.



David Cooper, recently appointed Chair of the Piedras Blancas Light Station Association, volunteers at the light station in many ways. In the above and left photos, David is seen on the left, assisting contractor Dan Murphy, with construction of the replica elevated water tower.

David also helped install the concrete curb around the fog signal building. But that's not all! Keep an eye out for David assisting with tours.

Piedras Blancas Light Station Association board members welcome your comments or questions. 805-927-3719 or membership.pblsa@gmail.com

Board meetings are held at the Rabobank in Cambria, at 6:00 PM on the fourth Wednesday of every month. The public is welcome.

Join us on the path to restoration!

Your purchase of a personalized, engraved brick to be placed in the path around the lighthouse will help restore the light station.

Maximum of three lines. Each line can have up to 16 characters, including spaces and punctuation. All letters are capitalized. Not all three lines have to be used. You may purchase multiple bricks. Minimum donation \$100.

Line 1																	
Line 2																	
Line 3																	

I am paying by check (Made out to PBLSA) MasterCard or Visa

MC or Visa number: _____ Expiration date _____

Donor's name _____ Phone _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Mail form to:
Piedras Blancas Light Station Association.
P.O. Box 127,
San Simeon, CA 93452
or order online:
www.piedrasblancas.org
To order by phone, call
805-927-3719.

Thank you!



News from Point Sur Lightstation (our lighthouse neighbor to the north)

From an article in the Lighthouse Quarterly, Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers newsletter, Summer 2014

125 years ago... by Carol O'Neil

This year Point Sur celebrates the 125th anniversary of the official lighting of the Point Sur Light on August 1, 1889. The lightstation at Point Sur was built over a two year period culminating in the light being added to the official Light List as an aid to navigation in 1889. The light, fog signal and the equipment to make all of it operate were always state-of-the-art. This continues today, although only the light itself is still operational: it is a modern LED light.

The people at Point Sur, the keepers and their families, lived simple rural lives that received modern conveniences only after many of their contemporaries. Electricity from the grid did not come to Pt. Sur until 1949. Keepers at Pt. Sur in 1889 had no indoor plumbing, but managed with a 2-hole privy where the garage stands today and a cliff hanging privy at the lighthouse. All four keepers were housed in the large Triplex. The Head Keeper was in a comfortable three-story apartment on the south side. Two other keepers and their families were housed in the north half of the building. The two families shared an interior staircase and possibly a common kitchen. Where the fourth keeper lived is unclear.



2013 Annual Report

Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers (CCLK) was formed to promote awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the lighthouses on the Central Coast of California and to aid in their preservation. Over the years, CCLK has assisted the lights at Piedras Blancas, Pigeon Point, Point Pinos, and Point Sur, and even helped Middle Bay Lighthouse in Mobile, Alabama! CCLK helps other lighthouse when it has the wherewithal to do so, but it has a commitment to the Point Sur Lightstation. As the Cooperating Association, most of CCLK's activities are centered on Pt. Sur, and in particular, the Lightstation.

Financially, CCLK enjoyed another record breaking year for revenue during 2013. Revenues for 2013 are reported as \$178,440. Of that \$101,713 were generated by tours. Operating expenses for 2013 are reported at \$77,617 with the largest chunks going to restoration/preservation and gift shop costs.

In the beginning of 2014, CCLK donated \$519,311 to California State Parks to match \$519,311 of state funds under a program established by Assembly Bill AB 1482. CCLK's donation is the largest all-cash donation made to State Parks through this program. The donation was made possible by the many generous members of CCLK and donors. The combined total of \$1,038,622 will be used to rehabilitate the five wooden bridges.

Below is a listing of funds used for restoration projects at Pt. Sur since 1996.

COST SUMMARY OF RESTORATION PROJECTS			
1996-2014(est.)			
BUILDING	COST(\$K)	%TOTAL	YEARS
Bridges	1,445.0	36%	2010-2014
Barn	522.6	13%	1997-2000
Lighthouse	496.1	12%	2001-2010
Asst. Keepers' Quarters	474.8	12%	1998-2006
Head Keeper's Quarters	352.8	9%	1998-2014
Trail & Stairs	229.2	6%	2006-2012
Infrastructure	168.7	4%	1997-2013
Water Tower	135.0	3%	2001
Carpenter/Blacksmith Shop	93.7	2%	1999-2011
Other structures, etc.	72.3	2%	1996-2013
Garage	60.0	1%	2002
	4,050.2	100%	

Our hats are off to Point Sur Lightstation and the CCLK for providing support and inspiration to the central coast lighthouse community!

Point Sur 125th Anniversary party

On August 2nd, Point Sur State Historic Park celebrated 125 years of continuous operation with a special living history event. Attendees strolled the lightstation, visiting all the buildings and observing "keepers" and their "families". Old fashioned games and crafts were available for children. Vans transported almost 300 visitors to the top of the "rock" for this special occasion. WOW!



Lighthouse neighbors

Point Sur Lightstation For a complete listing of tours, go to www.pointsur.org or call 831-625-4419. November through March tours are offered at 10:00 am on Saturdays and Sundays and at 1:00 pm on Wednesdays.

Point Pinos Lighthouse Located in Pacific Grove, open Thursday through Monday, 1:00-4:00. www.ci.pg.ca.us/lighthouse.

Point San Luis Lighthouse For a complete listing of tours and access, go to www.sanluislighthouse.org or call 805-540-5771 to reserve a ride on the trolley.

Piedras Blancas Light Station Tours

Tours are offered year round on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. From June 15 through August 31, tours are offered 6 days a week, Mondays through Saturdays. There are no tours on federal holidays. Tours last about 2 hours and include the historic Piedras Blancas lighthouse and support buildings and 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 a.m.

Please do not wait at the gate to the light station!

Groups of ten or more please make advance arrangements.
\$10 for adults, \$5 ages 6-17, no fee for children 5 and under.

For information on tours email PiedrasBlancasTours@gmail.com or call 805-927-7361.



Dress warmly and wear comfortable walking shoes.
No pets!

Tours may be cancelled on the day of the tour due to inclement weather.

PBLS Association
P.O. Box 127
San Simeon, CA 93452-0127
805-927-3719
membership.pblsa@gmail.com



All memberships include the quarterly newsletter and knowledge you are helping with restoration and maintenance 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 www.piedrasblancas.org.

Thank you for your support!

Piedras Blancas Light Station Association
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93452-0127