



# News Release

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## Guiding lights preserved

### **Lighthouses and Light Stations in California State Parks**

Along California shorelines, lighthouses have historically provided guiding lights for navigators coming in by sea. These towers shined their beacons along the state's coast and lakeshores to mark hazardous waterways and provide safe entries to harbors. Because of modern navigational aids, the number of operational lighthouses has declined. Fortunately, a number of state parks are home to these historic light houses that played such an important part in California history.

The lighthouses are the towers containing the lantern room with the lens. The light station is the property containing the outbuildings of the station, as well as the lighthouse.

There are several lighthouses and light stations in California that welcome visitors with tours and stories of their past. Some are still in operation.

**Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park** (SAN MATEO COUNTY), 50 miles south of San Francisco, is in an area originally known as Punta de las Balenas (Whale Point) after the annual migration of gray whales offshore. The site's name was changed in memory of the clipper ship Carrier Pigeon, which shipwrecked off the coast in 1853. Other shipwrecks took place and it was determined that a lighthouse was badly needed. In 1872 a 115-foot lightstation was established, which remains one of the tallest lightstations in America. The lighthouse is still an active U.S. Coast Guard aid to navigation. The lighthouse is currently closed to the public, but guided history walks around the lighthouse are available Fridays through Sundays. For more information, call (650) 879-2120 Friday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. or visit [http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=533](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=533)

**Point Sur Light Station** in **Point Sur State Historic Park** (MONTEREY COUNTY) is 19 miles south of Monterey off Highway 1. The station's first light became operational in 1889 using a Fresnel lens. It is the only complete turn-of-the-century light station open to the public in California and is on the National Register of Historic Places. The unique stone light house still guides ships with its light, though now it is completely automated. In the winter and early spring, visitors can see whales offshore on their migration route. Volunteers lead three-hour walking tours year-round on a first come, first served basis. There are also moonlight tours when visitors can hear about the "ghosts" of light house keepers past. For more information, call the park (831) 625-4419 or visit <http://www.pointsur.org/> and [http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=565](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=565)

**D.L. Bliss State Park** (EL DORADO COUNTY), 17 miles south of Tahoe City on Highway 89, is the site of a former light house on Rubicon Point. Built in 1919 at a cost of \$900, its flashing 70 candle-power acetylene light was visible for seven miles. The lighthouse is a small arts and crafts style wooden structure at an elevation 200 feet above the surface of Lake Tahoe. The light was moved to nearby Sugar Pine Point in 1921. The original structure has been renovated and can be seen in the park today via Lighthouse Trail. There are no tours of the structure, but visitors can see it from the trail. For more information, contact the park at (530) 525-9529 or visit [http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=505](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=505).

**Angel Island State Park** (MARIN and SAN FRANCISCO COUNTIES), in San Francisco Bay, was home to a fog bell station – and later a light station - at Point Knox on the west side of the island in the 1880s. As the story goes, the Point Knox lighthouse keeper, Juliette Nichols had to ring the bell for nearly 20 hours when the mechanism broke down during a heavy fog in the months after the '06 earthquake when many ships were entering the bay bringing supplies for repairs. She rang the bell with a hammer, at the appropriate interval, until the fog lifted. The mechanism was repaired - and broke down again several days later. Ms. Nichols had another episode of double digit hours ringing the bell by hand.

In 1915 a second light was added at Point Stuart and in 1960 a third signal was added at Point Blunt. The Point Knox site no longer exists. Today, Point Blunt is an unmanned Coast Guard station and a green light still shines from the watch building. There is a smaller light at Point Stuart as well. Both sites are maintained by the U.S. Coast Guard.

There are no tours, as the historic stations are for the most part foundation only and in inaccessible locations. The park visitor center has a Fresnel lens on display with photos of the

Point Know Light Station. Visitor center hours vary, but typically open from the first boat of the day (10 a.m.) until the last boat (usually 3 p.m.) To learn more, contact the park at (415) 435-1915 or visit [http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=468](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=468)

**Point Montara Light Station** (SAN MATEO COUNTY), 25 miles south of San Francisco on Highway 1, was the site of a fog signal station that was established in 1875 because of heavy fog in the area. A Victorian home was also built for the keeper. The first light at the station was added in 1900. In 1929, the 30-foot cast iron tower that now stands was built. During World War II, the U.S. Coast Guard managed the station as a lookout. Today, an off-shore signal has replaced the fog signal and a modern optic device has replaced the Fresnel lens. The buildings have been preserved and restored by Hostelling International, American Youth Hostels and California State Parks in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard. The lighthouse is not open to the public and there are no tours. For more information, call (650) 728-7177 or visit [http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=534](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=534)

**Año Nuevo Island** (SAN MATEO COUNTY), a part of **Año Nuevo State Reserve**, 27 miles south of Half Moon Bay on Highway 1, was the site of a fog signal built in 1872 because several ships were lost at sea nearby. The story goes that when the new fog signal first went off cows from a nearby ranch stampeded the beach. In 1890 a light station was constructed with a lens lantern put on top of a water tank. Later a tower with a Fresnel lens was built. The lens was destroyed by an earthquake in 1926 and a new one was installed soon after. The light station was abandoned in 1948. Today, the ruins are part of the reserve and the island is an important seabird colony and rookery for elephant seals and sea lions. The old Victorian light keeper's residence still stands, inhabited by sea lions, sea birds and elephant seals. For more information dial (650) 879-2025 or visit [http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=523](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=523)

**Lighthouse Field State Beach** (SANTA CRUZ COUNTY), on West Cliff Drive in downtown Santa Cruz, is home to the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse which overlooks the internationally renowned surfing spot Steamer Lane. The lighthouse contains the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum with photographs, surfboards, and artifacts tracing over 100 years of surfing history in Santa Cruz. The museum is open Thursday through Friday from Noon to 4 p.m. More more information, call (831) 420-6289 or on-line: <http://www.santacruzsurfingmuseum.org/index.html>

The park area is also known as Point Santa Cruz and forms the northern boundary of Monterey Bay - one of the last open headlands in any California urban area. The beach is popular for tourists, surfers, birds and wintering Monarch butterflies. Sea lions can be seen on the offshore rocks.

Visit California State Parks on line at [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

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