

# Seacliff & New Brighton State Beaches



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at **(831) 685-6500**. If you need this publication in an alternate format, contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov).

### **CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS**

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(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.

711, TTY relay service

[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

### **Seacliff State Beach**

**201 State Park Drive, Aptos, CA 95003**

**(831) 685-6500**

### **New Brighton State Beach**

**Park Avenue off Hwy. 1, Capitola, CA 95010**

**(831) 464-6329**

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*Long stretches of bluff-backed sandy beaches invite visitors to play on the beach, watch a glorious sunset, or stroll peacefully along the shore.*



## **A**t Seacliff State Beach, a mile-long expanse of soft sand

connects this popular recreation spot with New Brighton State Beach, where wooded bluffs provide unparalleled views of Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

### **AREA HISTORY**

The Ohlone Indians thrived for thousands of years on the area's natural resources. The riches of the ocean, rivers, and forests provided plentiful sources of food—from fish, shellfish, and game to edible plants and seeds. Their numbers were severely reduced by illness and cultural changes brought to California by European settlers, yet some Ohlone descendants continue their ancient traditions and crafts today.

Spanish colonization led to the establishment of Mission Santa Cruz. After Mexico broke away from Spain in 1821, the land was subdivided into Mexican land grants (ranchos).

### **SEACLIFF STATE BEACH**

Known by 1833 as Rancho Aptos, Seacliff developed into a bustling shipping port with the building of the Castro-Spreckels wharf. During the mid-1920s, landowners built summer homes on the bluffs above Seacliff and the area to its south, Rio del Mar. On the north side of Seacliff, 1920s tourists enjoyed upscale camping facilities.

Seacliff became one of California's first state beaches in 1931. For more than 80



*SS Palo Alto*

years, beachfront camping, picnicking, fishing, and interpretive walks have been among the park's most popular activities.

### **THE CEMENT SHIP**

Seacliff's famous fishing pier extends out to a unique concrete tanker, the *SS Palo Alto*. It was built during World War I, when wartime steel shortages created a demand for alternate shipbuilding materials. However, when the war ended, so did the need for new ships. The *SS Palo Alto* never saw wartime service.

In 1930 the Seacliff Amusement Corporation bought the ship and turned it into an elaborate amusement center. The *SS Palo Alto* was brought to rest in shallow water near the beach, and a pier was built leading to the ship's main deck.

A neon sign at the top of the bluff at Seacliff simply read *The Ship*. Thousands dined at the Fish Palace onboard, with its spectacular ocean view on three sides. In the elegant Rainbow Ballroom, diners then danced on a new white ash floor. Unfortunately, the Seacliff Amusement Corporation went bankrupt after only two seasons of dining and dancing,

thwarting future plans for expansion. Today, the stripped, abandoned *SS Palo Alto* is unsafe and closed to the public, as is part of the pier near the ship.

### **NEW BRIGHTON STATE BEACH**

In the 1850s, Thomas Fallon acquired part of Rancho Soquel

and turned it into a resort he named New Brighton, in honor of his favorite English seaside retreat. New Brighton became a state beach in 1933. Fishing, camping, hiking, and swimming are now favorite family activities at New Brighton State Beach.

New Brighton, once known as China Beach, was the site of a driftwood Chinese fishing village during the 1870s and 1880s. The village inhabitants proved invaluable in building the California railroads, and the village of China Beach provided fish, produce, laundries, chefs, and laborers. New settlers took the village away from the Chinese, and laws were passed to make it illegal for the Chinese to fish, so the Chinese moved south to Watsonville and beyond.

### **WILDLIFE HABITATS**

Much as a reef does, the *SS Palo Alto* attracts an immense variety of marine life within its concrete wreckage, and many of the same animals found on rocky shores live on it. Mussels, barnacles, sea stars, sea anemones, ocean worms,



*Sooty shearwater*  
Photo courtesy of NOAA

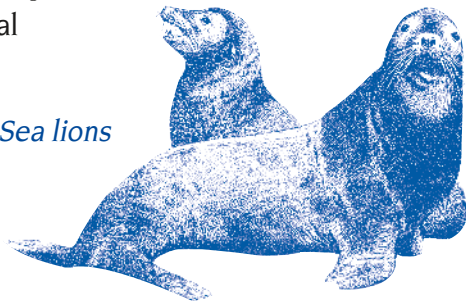
and rock crabs all cling to the sides and insides of the ship and pier. Harbor seals and sea lions line the deck, while pelicans and cormorants perch on the bow. Pier anglers catch sole, flounder, mackerel, halibut, lingcod, cabezon, bocaccio (tomcod), kingfish, and occasionally salmon and steelhead. During summer and fall, sooty shearwaters (small, dark seabirds) arrive by the tens of thousands from as far south as New Zealand, soaring in masses over the ocean, searching for anchovies. Sea lions, dolphins, sea otters, and migrating whales are often spotted in the water.

## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Seacliff visitor center features natural and cultural history interpretive exhibits, a tidepool tank, and an aquarium. Beachfront camping at Seacliff is for recreational vehicles (RVs) only. Picnicking, fishing, and guided fossil, history, or beach walks are among the most popular activities. Children's arts and crafts programs highlight Seacliff's story.

The New Brighton visitor center tells the story of Pacific wildlife migrations and highlights the history and contribution of Chinese immigrants in the area. Campfire and Junior Ranger programs are offered during the summer. More than 100 family, group, bicycle, and RV campsites make this a special vacation spot.

Sea lions



Fishing from the pier



Children learn about fossils from docents.

Site-specific camping reservations for both beaches may be made by calling (800) 444-7275 or visiting [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

To schedule educational programs at Seacliff, call (831) 685-6444. For New Brighton's educational programs, call (831) 464-5620.

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Borrow beach wheelchairs from the camp host. **Seacliff State Beach**—The visitor center and some RV hookup campsites are accessible, as are restrooms and shady picnic sites.

**New Brighton State Beach** has accessible visitor and campfire centers, family, group, and RV campsites, and restrooms.

Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Sunset State Beach  
201 Sunset Beach Rd., Watsonville 95076  
(831) 763-7063
- Manresa State Beach  
Sand Dollar Lane, Watsonville 95076  
(831) 761-1795

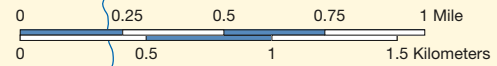
## PLEASE REMEMBER

- Day-use hours are from 8 a.m. to sunset.
- The speed limit is 15 mph.
- Climbing the unstable sandstone cliffs is prohibited.
- All natural and cultural features in state parks are protected by law and may not be removed or disturbed.
- Dogs must always be on a leash no longer than six feet and attended by humans.
- Do not feed or leave food out for wildlife.
- A license is not required to fish from the pier, but Department of Fish and Wildlife limits apply. See [www.wildlife.ca.gov](http://www.wildlife.ca.gov).
- Consuming alcohol is not allowed on the beach or in the day-use areas—only within registered campsites.
- Fires are not allowed on Seacliff's main beach. At New Brighton and Rio del Mar, fires must be confined to fire rings provided and attended at all times.
- Vehicles must park on pavement and not on gravel or dirt walkways.

# Seacliff & New Brighton State Beaches

## Legend

- |  |                    |  |                   |  |                       |
|--|--------------------|--|-------------------|--|-----------------------|
|  | Freeway            |  | Campground: Bike  |  | Picnic Area           |
|  | Paved Road         |  | Campground: Group |  | Restrooms             |
|  | Trail              |  | Campground: RV    |  | RV Sanitation Station |
|  | Accessible Feature |  | 111 Campsites     |  | Showers               |
|  | Campfire Center    |  | Fishing           |  | Swimming              |
|  | Campground         |  | Parking           |  |                       |



This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks  
 144 School Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
 (831) 429-1840 • [www.thatsmypark.org](http://www.thatsmypark.org)

