Like a siren perched where coast and ocean meet, the lighthouse at Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park calls to motorists along Highway 1. It's hard to miss the stately 115-foot structure, the tallest operating lighthouse on the West Coast. Pigeon Point Light Station is on the National Register of Historic Places—a reminder of the days when whalers and Gold Rush era clipper ships fought gales, stiff seas, jagged coastal rocks and unforgiving fog.

THE POINT'S COLORFUL PAST

Pigeon Point's original name, Whale Point, was inspired by the gray whales that migrate past the point. California's boom from gold rush to statehood brought many ships to these rugged waters. In June 1853 the Boston-based *Carrier Pigeon*, on her maiden voyage, was torn apart by a fog-blanketed rock off Whale Point. Thereafter, it was called Pigeon Point.



A series of wrecks off the point indicated the need for a lighthouse. On November 15, 1872, the station's fog signal began sounding a distinctive bellow that guided mariners for more than a century. The lighthouse was outfitted with the most powerful lens of the day—a first-order Fresnel lens. Perched in a glass-enclosed room at the top of the lighthouse, the lens stands 16 feet tall and weighs four tons. Its designer, French physicist Augustine Jean Fresnel, used 1,008 handcrafted, brass-framed prisms to concentrate the source of light, thereby maximizing light efficiency.

The prisms, stacked vertically to form two dozen nine-and-a-half-foot tall panels, were joined together to form a six-foot-diameter circular frame with the light source in the middle. A clockwork mechanism rotated the panels, producing a light flash precisely every ten seconds. The lighthouse's signature beam continues today, flashing light from a 1,000-watt light bulb every ten seconds. The fog signal was replaced by modern aids to navigation in 1976, although it is sometimes sounded on special occasions. The lighthouse sits on an eight-foot foundation. Its walls, four-and-a-half feet thick at the base and tapering to two feet at the top, employ structurally connected inner and outer walls strong enough to emerge undamaged from the 1906 San Francisco and 1989 Loma Prieta earthquakes.



Gull

NATURAL HISTORY

History may be the park's top billing, but the point's natural beauty is also a major attraction. Its high perch provides scenic views of harbor and elephant seals and whales. During spring and winter migrations, the whales travel relatively close to the lighthouse grounds, particularly in the shallow waters of the cove south of the point. Standing on the station's overlook boardwalk, visitors can observe northward-bound California gray whale cows and their new calves taking advantage of the safety of the cove. Farther out the spouts of humpback and blue whales can often be seen.

Some 50 species of migratory and native birds live here, including marbled murrelets, an endangered species that nests in nearby old growth forests and feeds in coastal waters. Tidepools are a short walk north of Pigeon Point. Below the point, frothy waves washing over rock ledges cause sea palms to sway.

WHERE, WHEN AND WEATHER

Pigeon Point Light Station is approximately midway between Half Moon Bay and Santa Cruz, near the village of Pescadero. The grounds are open daily from 8:00 a.m. to sunset, except for rainy days, Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's Days. Tours are offered from 10:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Friday through Sunday. Self-guided tour pamphlets are available at the bookstore on tour days.

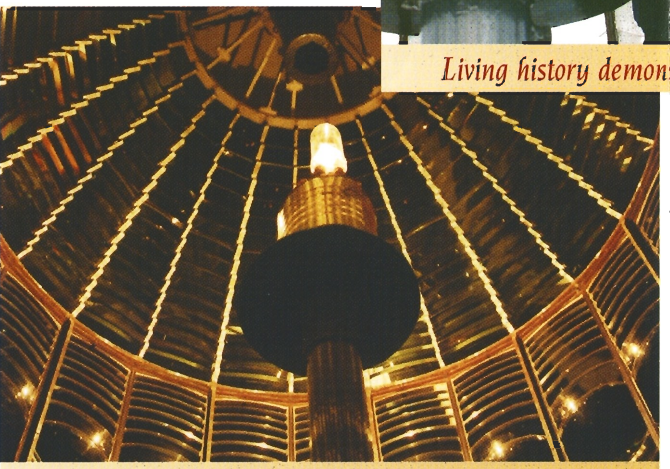
Be prepared for unpredictable weather. Rain may occur between November and March, and even summer brings chilly fog, particularly in the mornings. Stiff northwest winds can develop anytime, so dress in layers.

CEREMONIES AND SPECIAL TOURS

The Fresnel lens is lighted during the annual celebration held on the Saturday closest to November 15. Activities include expanded tours, marine mammal displays, living history demonstrations and educational videos. The celebration concludes with the lighting of the lens from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.



Living history demonstration



Annual lighting of the Fresnel lens

On guided tours, park docents recount the light station's rich history while leading visitors among the old buildings and around the grounds. Educational exhibits also reveal the story of the whales and their migrations. For group tours, offered year-round, reservations must be made three weeks in advance. Contact the park at (650) 879-2120 for current programs and group reservations.

For a virtual tour of the light station and more park information, select Pigeon Point Light Station SHP at *www.parks.ca.gov*.

PIGEON POINT HOSTEL

Four Light Station buildings, converted to lodging for up to 50 people, are operated by the American Youth Hostels. Each house has two male or female bunkrooms. Separate bunkrooms can be reserved for families or couples. Hostel guests share bathrooms, kitchens and living rooms, and participate in housekeeping activities. To make reservations, call (650) 879-0633 from 7:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. Information is also available at *www.norcalhostels.org*.



Spiral staircase inside the lighthouse

ACCESSIBLE FEATURES ♿

Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park currently has no developed, wheelchair accessible facilities that meet the regulatory standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Año Nuevo State Reserve, 27 miles south of Half Moon Bay (650) 879-0227/2025
- Butano State Park, seven miles south of Pescadero (650) 879-2040
- Pescadero Marsh State Beach, 14½ miles south of Half Moon Bay (650) 879-2170

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information contact: San Mateo Coast Natural History Association • P.O. Box 3245 • Half Moon Bay, CA 94019 (650) 879-2025 (Año Nuevo SR)

Pigeon Point Light Station
State Historic Park

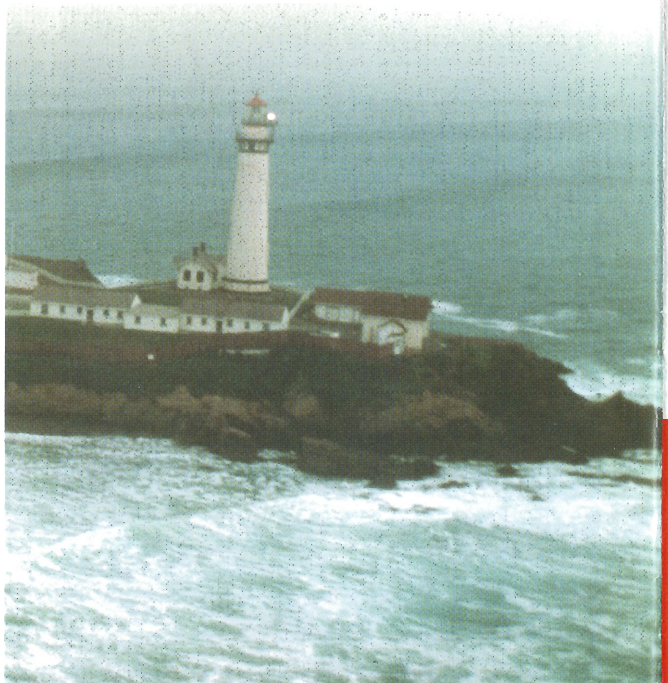


PLEASE REMEMBER

- Dogs and smoking are not permitted on the lighthouse grounds.
- Children taking the lighthouse tour must be at least 40 inches tall, and an adult must accompany those under age 9.
- No high heels on lighthouse tours—footwear must at least be secured with backstraps.
- Cliffs can collapse onto the rocks below—stay off the cliffs and on pathways.
- A public phone and restrooms are near the entrance to the park grounds.
- The U.S. Coast Guard owns Pigeon Point Light Station and leases it to California State Parks.



In June 1853 the Boston-based Carrier Pigeon, on her maiden voyage, was torn apart by a fog-blanketed rock off Whale Point. Thereafter, it was called Pigeon Point.



Our Mission

The mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation 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.

GRAY DAVIS
Governor

MARY D. NICHOLS
Secretary for Resources

RUTH COLEMAN
Acting Director, California State Parks

California State Parks does not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at the phone number below. To receive this publication in an alternate format, write to the Communications Office at the following address.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001

For information call:
(800) 777-0369
(916) 653-6995, outside the U.S.
(888) 877-5378, TTY
(888) 877-5379, without TTY

www.parks.ca.gov

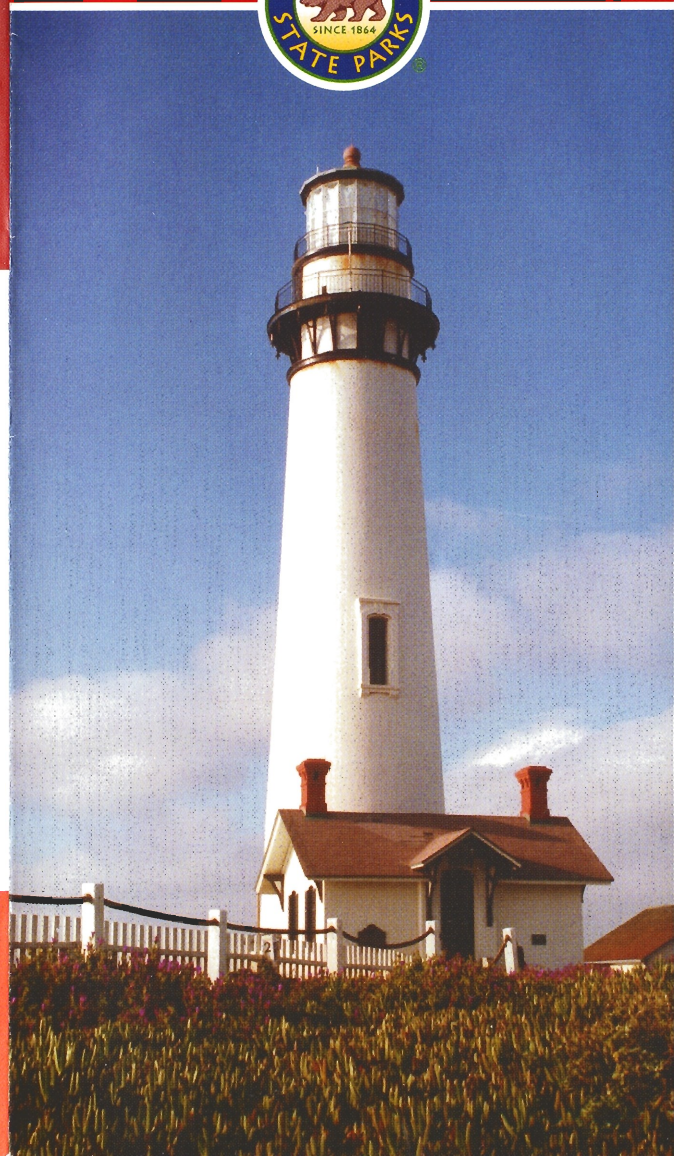
Pigeon Point Light Station State Historic Park
c/o Año Nuevo State Reserve
New Years Creek Road
Pescadero, CA 94060
(650) 879-2120

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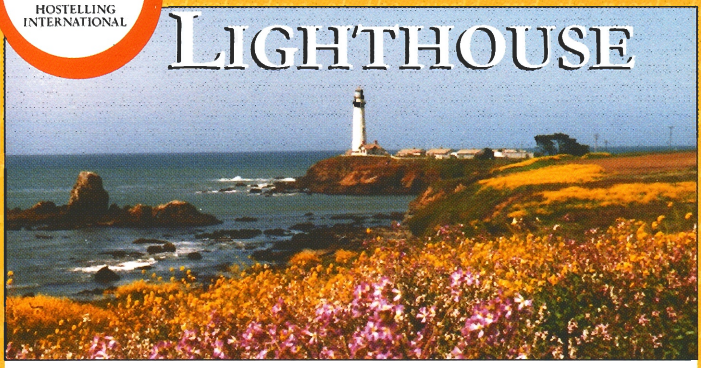
Pigeon Point Light Station

State Historic Park



HOSTELLING INTERNATIONAL

PIGEON POINT LIGHTHOUSE



210 Pigeon Point Road
Pescadero, CA 94060
tel (650) 879-0633 • (800) 909-4776
fax (650) 879-9120
pplhostel@norcalhostels.org

Wheelchair Accessible

Eco-Friendly Establishment

OVERNIGHT RATES*

$15-18 per adult • $10.00 per child
$1.00 linen rental

*rates are subject to change, please call hostel for specials

- Historic 1872 lighthouse stands 115 feet tall and is one of the highest in the nation
- Watch gray whales on their annual migration or explore tide pools filled with marine life
- Wander amongst 1,000-year-old redwoods
- Discover Pescadero Marsh, a feeding and nesting place for 150 species of birds
- Visit nearby Año Nuevo State Reserve, the breeding site of northern elephant seals

RESERVATIONS: Individuals reserve with a credit card in advance. Individual cancellations require notice by 10:00 AM two days prior to arrival. Call the hostel for more information about group rates, private rooms, reservations, cancellations and refunds.

HI–PIGEON POINT



The Pigeon Point Hostel is operated by the Golden Gate Council of American Youth Hostels in cooperation with the Department of Parks and Recreation. AYH is a 501(c)3 non-profit educational organization whose mission is: to help all, especially the young, gain a greater understanding of the world and its people through hostelling.

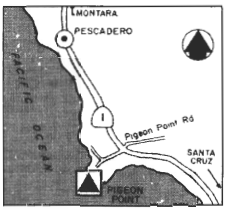


HOSTELLING CUSTOMS

- People of all ages welcome
- Shared, dormitory-style accommodations
- Office hours 7:30 - 10:00 A.M. and 4:30 - 9:30 P.M.
- Hostel closed 10:00 A.M. - 4:30 P.M.
- Comfortable common room for relaxing and visiting with friends
- Alcohol and drug free environment
- Fully-equipped, shared kitchen facilities
- Friendly, expert advice from staff on local attractions and activities

DIRECTIONS

Take California Hwy. One, 20 miles south of Half Moon Bay or 27 miles north of Santa Cruz.



BECOME A MEMBER!

Travel the world. Meet new friends. Get great discounts. Your Hostelling International membership opens doors at 4,500 hostels in more than 70 countries worldwide. Hostellers are people of all ages and backgrounds who love to explore. Start your adventures today! Join online or at any hostel.

www.norcalhostels.org

Welcome to Pigeon Point Lighthouse

Built in 1872, this 115 foot tall brick tower with its original first order Fresnel lens is one of the most beautiful lighthouses in the U.S. Easily accessible, it is located on Highway 1 twenty-two miles south of Half Moon Bay and twenty-five miles north of Santa Cruz.

The grounds, except for the tower, are open every day. A self-guided walk brochure is available for $1.00.

Docent led climbs to the top of the tower are conducted on Saturdays, Sundays and certain holidays between 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., weather permitting. A $2.00 fee is charged for adults and $1.00 for children.

On tower climbs, certain safety rules apply: footwear must be secure; bare-feet and loose sandals are prohibited. People with cardio-vascular problems or those who have a fear of heights should not attempt the ten-story climb. Children must be 40" tall and capable of making the climb unaided. Young children may not be carried in adult's arms or in back carriers.

Pigeon Point weather is unpredictable; clothing to protect against fog, wind and rain is recommended.

A gift shop on site offers books, postcards and lighthouse mementoes. A public phone and toilets are on the grounds. Household pets are not allowed.

Reservations for weekday group tours may be made 2 weeks in advance. Call 650.879.2120.

During your visit, stay on the paths to preserve plant life. Keep inside the fenced area as the cliffs can collapse onto the rocks below. Do not remove or disturb plants, animals or the geology. Kindly respect the 'no entry' signs at the Hostel.

The Sea at the Point

When the tower is open for tours, the observation deck at the outer Point is also open. The outer Point is one of the best places on the coast to observe gray whales during their migrations in the early winter and spring. Harbor seals forage in the reefs, and elephant seals, otters, sea lions, dolphins and humpback whales are often spotted. For seabird watchers, the outer Point is a bonanza—over 50 species have been seen.

A Short History

Pigeon Point was first called Whale Point because a whaling station operated to hunt gray whales as they passed on their migrations between the Arctic and Baja California. Few ships sailed past the Point before 1848. But after gold was discovered in the Sierra, the waters became a highway as dozens of vessels a month flocked to the booming city of San Francisco.

Fog, gales and currents on the coast caused many wrecks. One was the clipper *Carrier Pigeon.* On her maiden voyage from Boston to San Francisco, she grounded at Whale Point on June 6, 1853, broke up and sank. Soon thereafter, Whale Point became known as Pigeon Point.

Throughout the second half of the 19th century, the Lighthouse Service built a network of light stations on the West Coast. At Pigeon Point a steam fog whistle started blasting in 1871, and a year later the light on the tower was 'lit-off'. The tower is unique in that it employs structurally connected inner and outer walls. This design proved its worth when the tower emerged undamaged from the earthquakes of 1906 and 1989.

The lantern room at the tower top houses the original first order Fresnel lens. The lens consists of 1008 prisms that bent the light from a central lamp into horizontal beams that could be seen up to 20 miles. Rotated by a clockwork mechanism, the light produced a flash every 10 seconds. Today's light is a rotating aero-beacon of 680,000 candlepower that also flashes every 10 seconds.

In the late 1800's a trading village flourished at the Point. Lumber, hides, tallow and produce were loaded aboard steamers for San Francisco. A whaling station operated here as well. Whalers sailed small boats out to sea to harpoon whales, then towed them back to land where the blubber was rendered into oil.

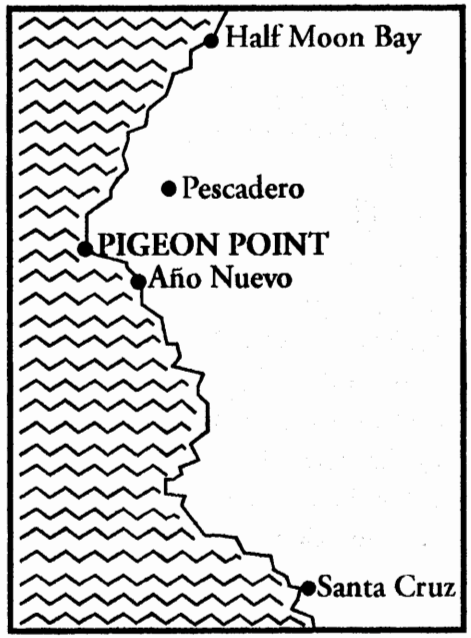
Before the turn of the century roads to the station were often impassable. So, several times a year, steamers delivered fuel, supplies and mail. For food, the keepers kept a produce garden, poultry yard and livestock.

The keepers served in the U.S. Lighthouse Service until 1939 when the U.S. Coast Guard assumed control. Coast Guard personnel left when the light was automated in 1974.

Nearby Attractions

Next to the lighthouse are the former U.S. Coast Guard Keepers' quarters. Today the buildings are operated by American Youth Hostel which provides low-cost dormitory style lodging for travelers. For Hostel reservations call 650.879.0633 between 7:30 and 9:30 a.m. or 5:30 and 9:30 p.m.

Año Nuevo State Reserve, lying six miles to the south, is a major elephant seal rookery. For tour information inquire at the Visitors' Center or call 650.879.2025.



The U.S. Coast Guard owns Pigeon Point Light Station and leases the site to the California Parks Department
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Photo by Judy Pfeil

California State Parks



PIGEON POINT LIGHTHOUSE

State Historic Landmark
Pescadero, California

A unit of the California State Park System

For information, call
650.879.2120