

# Point Cabrillo Light Station

State Historic Park



## 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.



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### **Point Cabrillo Light Station**

**State Historic Park**

**13800 Point Cabrillo Drive**

**Mendocino, CA 95460**

**(707) 937-5804**

*Point Cabrillo Light  
Station has ensured  
the safety of thousands  
of ships traveling the  
treacherous waters off  
Point Cabrillo.*



## Point Cabrillo Light Station State Historic Park

is a living link to California's history, featuring a beautifully rehabilitated 1909 lighthouse and 11 other structures, including three lightkeepers' homes.

In a nearby cove rest the remains of the *Frolic*, the most important Gold Rush-era shipwreck in California.

Located four miles north of Mendocino, the park's 296.5 acres of open space include an impressive variety of wildlife and hiking trails.

### PARK HISTORY

#### Native People

For thousands of years, the rich waters and headlands around Point Cabrillo were the summer hunting and gathering grounds of the Pomo people. The Pomo moved here from their inland encampments in early summer to harvest abalone, mussels, seals and sea lions, deer, kelp and salt. These foods were carried to their permanent villages and stored for the winter.

In the late 1850s, settlers and lumbermen began using the lands for grazing and harvesting timber for railroad ties. As the influx of settlers increased, the Pomo way of life was forever altered.



Family of lightkeeper Albert Scott, ca. 1911

Today Pomo descendants occupy parts of their ancestral lands and have revived their language and traditions.

#### The Wreck of the *Frolic*

In 1850, the clipper brig *Frolic*, on its

way to San Francisco with a cargo of Chinese housewares, struck a reef just north of what later became Point Cabrillo. After securing the wrecked ship in what is now called Frolic Cove, the captain and some of the crew took long boats to carry word of the wreck south to Fort Ross. In 1851, Harry Meiggs, a San Francisco lumber dealer, sent Jerome Ford north in hopes of salvaging cargo. By then, the ship had sunk, but not before the Pomo had removed Chinese ginger jars, bolts of silk, camphor, lacquered trunks, housewares and other items. Ford found Pomo women wearing splendid silk shawls, but there was no cargo left to salvage.

Ford told his employer about the lack of salvageable cargo, but noted that there were groves of redwood and Douglas fir in the area. A year later, Meiggs had sawmill equipment shipped around Cape Horn and erected a mill at Big River. This led to the founding of Mendocino and the beginning of the timber industry in Northern California. Local mills supplied wood to help build San

Francisco and to construct the Point Cabrillo Light Station.

#### The Light Station

The Point Cabrillo Light Station was built following the 1906 earthquake, which had ravaged San Francisco. The Light Station was needed to guide small "Doghole" schooners that plied the coastal waters, carrying lumber to rebuild San Francisco. The earthquake severely damaged the Point Arena Lighthouse, leaving no lighthouses between Cape Mendocino and Bodega Bay.

Construction of the Point Cabrillo Light Station building began in 1908 and was completed in early 1909. The Light Station, comprising 30.5 acres and 15 structures, was managed by the U.S. Lighthouse Service. The Head Lightkeeper was in charge of the Light Station, overseeing the work of the First Assistant (the Wickie) and the Second Assistant (the Timer). Daily tasks included maintaining the Lighthouse lantern room, lens, kerosene oil lamp, clockworks, the other 14 buildings and the raised garden beds where food was grown. The U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) assumed command of the Point Cabrillo Light Station in 1939 and managed it until 1991.



Frolic Cove

## The Lens

The British-built Fresnel (fra-*nel*) lens—the most advanced example of lens technology at the time—was first lit on June 10, 1909, by Wilhelm Baumgartner, the first Head Lightkeeper. The British-built lens, one of only twelve in the U.S., was manufactured by Chance Brothers and shipped around the Horn. The lens has 90 glass prism pieces; the original lens was turned by a wind-up clockworks mechanism.



*Volunteer with Fresnel lens today*

The oil lamp and clockworks were replaced by electric lamps and motors in 1934 and 1935, respectively. In 1972 an automated beacon replaced the Fresnel lens. Then, in 1999 the USCG allowed relighting of the original Fresnel lens. Today's lens is powered by a 1000-watt lamp, operational around the clock. On a clear night, the 10-second flash can be seen 14 to 15 miles at sea.

## Rehabilitation and Restoration

The California Coastal Conservancy supported and funded the acquisition of the property in 1991. They provided grants, joined with private donations, to rehabilitate the Lighthouse, its lens, the Blacksmith/

Carpenter Shop and Oil House.

California State Parks acquired the Light Station and surrounding property in 2002. Rehabilitation of three lightkeepers' houses and three other structures began in 2002. Rehabilitation of the Lighthouse and the grounds has been overseen by the nonprofit Point Cabrillo Lightkeepers Association, by agreement with State Parks. The Point Cabrillo Restoration Project received the 2007 Governor's Historic Preservation Award and the California Preservation Foundation's Preservation Design Award.

With 12 of its original 15 buildings, Point Cabrillo is one of the most complete Light Stations in the U.S. Currently, four of its buildings are open to visitors, and the Inn is open to registered guests.

## NATURAL HISTORY

The Light Station sits on the second of five coastal terraces that were pushed up from the ocean floor by plate tectonics. Native plants have adapted to high winds, drenching winter rains, foggy summers and salt spray. Native grasses are evident today, but are usually covered by planted European grasses. Look for more than fifty species of birds, including northern harriers, white-tailed kites, osprey, black oystercatchers and cormorants. From the bluff tops, visitors may see gray whales, orcas, humpbacks, dolphins, seals, sea lions, and, rarely, a blue whale.



*Northern harrier*

## EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

The Light Station hosts an annual Whale Festival in March, four summer Lantern Room

tours and guided site tours each Sunday. Contact the park for details at (707) 937-6122.

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Two parking lots near the Museum and Inn are reserved for cars with disabled placards or plates. The Visitor Center, Museum, Blacksmith Shop/Marine Science Aquarium, and the first floors of the Inn and the Lighthouse are all accessible.

## PLEASE REMEMBER

**Water Safety**—Stay back from the water's edge to avoid large rogue waves and strong currents that can sweep people out to sea.

- All of the park's natural, underwater and cultural features are protected by state law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Pets must be kept on a six-foot leash.
- Driving off designated roads is not permitted.
- Bicyclists must stay on paved trails.
- Fishing is not allowed within the park.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Mendocino Headlands SP, 725 E. Main St., Mendocino, CA 95460 (707) 937-5804
- Russian Gulch SP, 9500 N. Highway One, Mendocino CA 95460 (707) 937-5804

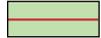
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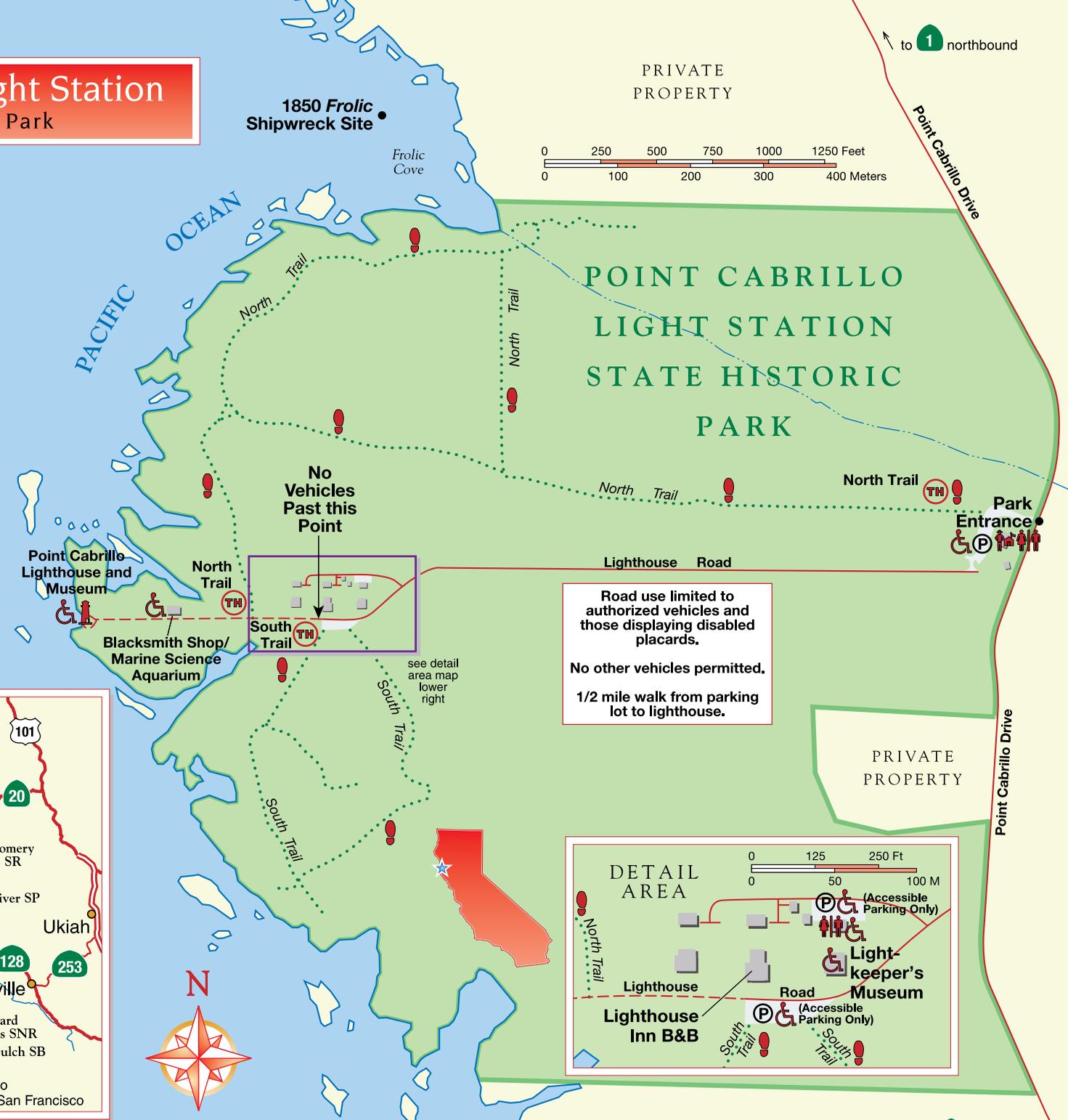
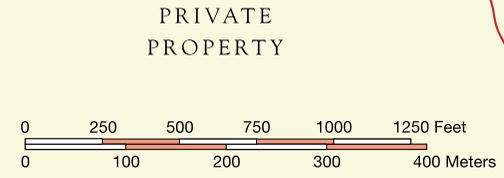
For more information, contact  
Point Cabrillo Lightkeepers Association  
PO Box 641, Mendocino, CA 95460  
(707) 937-6122 [www.pointcabrillo.org](http://www.pointcabrillo.org)

# Point Cabrillo Light Station

## State Historic Park

### Legend

-  Paved Road
-  Unpaved Road
-  Unpaved Trail
-  Accessible Feature
-  Building
-  Hiking
-  Lighthouse
-  Parking
-  Restrooms
-  Trailhead
-  Visitor Center



Road use limited to authorized vehicles and those displaying disabled placards.  
No other vehicles permitted.  
1/2 mile walk from parking lot to lighthouse.

