



e-Newsletter Number 2

October 2011

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS SAN MATEO COAST STATE PARKS THRIVE THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE COAST

Times are tough for state parks, but your contributions through the San Mateo Coast Natural History Association (SMCNHA) have helped keep coastside state park programs going. The challenges continue, but there is still good news on the coast. Read about your achievements, in partnership with the local parks, in this newsletter.

SMCNHA's new membership program is significantly expanding our ability to help the parks. If you haven't joined yet yourself, consider the contribution you can make by [joining now](#). As you will read in the newsletter, there are many ways your membership can help the parks and benefit you.

If you think others may be interested in this newsletter, please share it with friends who might also like to know how coastside state parks are managing and how SMCNHA members help. Remember, [SMCNHA](#) is here for you, a nonprofit totally devoted to supporting state parks on the San Mateo coast.

Please also consider giving SMCNHA memberships as gifts in the holidays or consider a [year-end gift](#) to SMCNHA to help the parks

If you did not receive this newsletter in your email but would like to be emailed future newsletters, please let us know at info@SanMateoCoastNHA.org

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Pigeon Point Lighthouse: Good News/Bad News

The “bad news” for fans of Pigeon Point Lighthouse is that the annual lighting of the tower’s Fresnel lens will not take place this year. The **good news** is that the traditional mid-November event has been canceled because state parks expects that the first step in the restoration of the damaged lighthouse will begin in November—the removal of the lens from the tower.

State Parks San Mateo Coast Sector Superintendent Paul Keel reports that a state-designated historian has approved plans to remove the lens and display it in the nearby Fog Signal Building. Moving the lens is an important step, required so the lens can be protected and viewed by the public while the lighthouse restoration is underway.

Steps to ensure the interim stabilization of the tower will follow the lens removal work. The entire project to repair damage to the tower, which caused it to be closed to the public over a decade ago, will proceed in stages and require as much as 4 or 5 years and 9 to 10 million dollars to complete. (For further details on the restoration process, see SMCNHA’s [July newsletter](#).)

The cash-strapped state parks don’t have the funds needed for the restoration, so almost everything that is being done at Pigeon Point, including the recently completed parking lot, is being done with private funding through the [California State Parks Foundation](#) (CSPF) or SMCNHA, or with funds contributed by other state agencies. Contributions from individuals like you are making a difference.

Keel said that he anticipates SMCNHA will support parts of the project related to interpretation for visitors—raising funds for such things as interpretive displays that will be set up with the lens in the Fog Signal Building, for volunteer coordination and training, and for commissioning plans needed to lay out how the lighthouse and surrounding park can best be developed for the education and enjoyment of visitors. If you would like to support those efforts, you can [donate](#) via the SMCNHA website.

The Fog Signal Building is the larger building to the right of the lighthouse.



What the Lens Looks Like Up Close

These photographs, taken by Paul Zaretsky, show the Pigeon Point Fresnel lens as it is now in the tower.

The lens weighs four tons and, as you can see, it is large enough to stand inside.

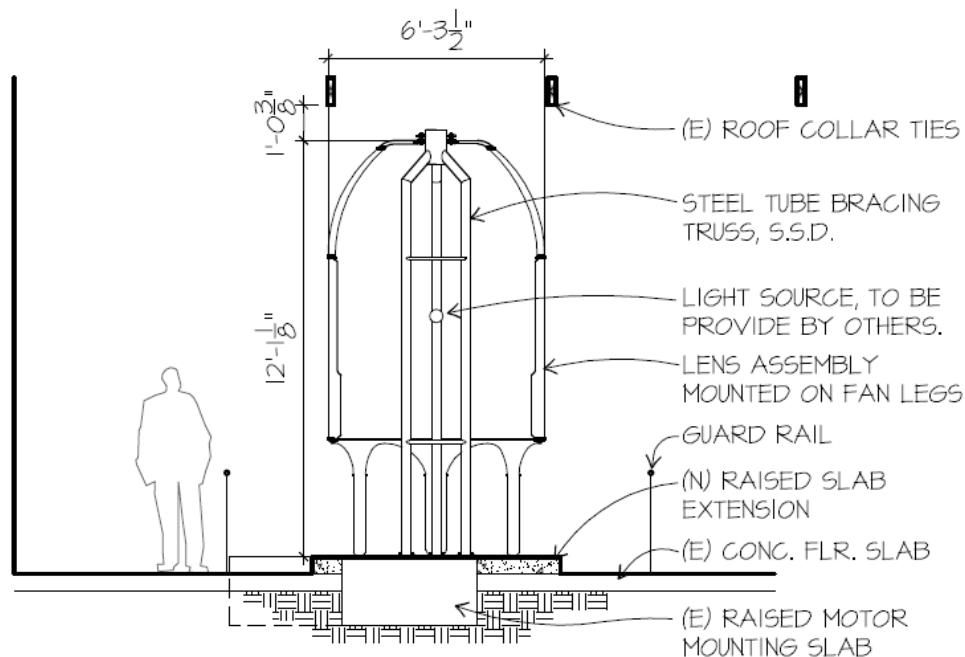


Preview of the Lens Display

Superintendent Keel shared the plans for the display of the Fresnel lens to let SMCNHA members and subscribers get an early look at how the lens will be presented. The lens will be moved carefully, piece by piece, to the Fog Signal Building. It will be reassembled and displayed in the center of the building, now occupied by a stove, pictured below.



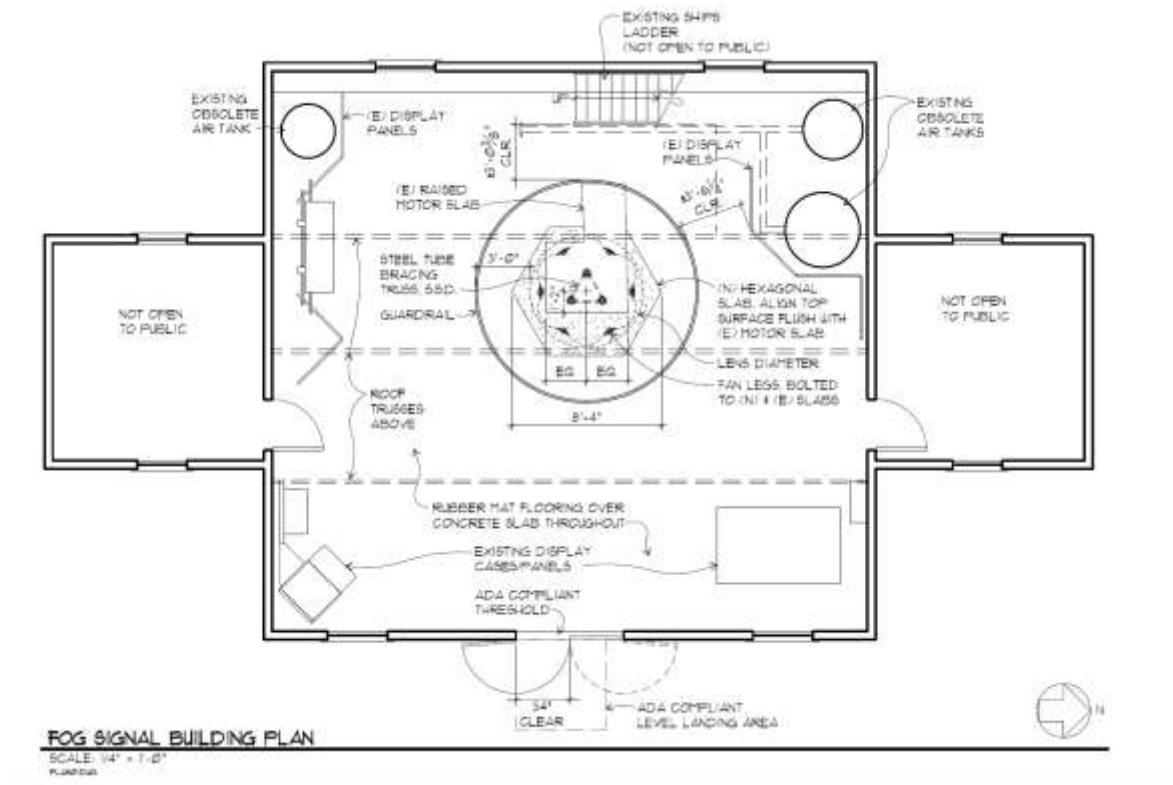
These are the architectural drawings that show how the lens will be displayed.



LENS SECTION - LENS ON FAN LEGS

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

PIGEON POINT LENS SECTION.DWG



It will be awesome for visitors to be up close to the lens for the first time since the tower was closed to the public in December 2001. The lens is a rare treasure and will really be appreciated in its new home until it can be returned to the lighthouse tower after the restoration has been completed.

Other Good News

You may notice other important changes that have taken place at the lighthouse. Thanks to funding from the State Coastal Conservancy, there is a new parking lot, and chemical toilets have replaced the old porta potties.

As part of this project, more will yet be done, including burying electric and phone lines and planting native plants in the new open spaces around the parking lot. Revegetation efforts have already begun, and the early rains will allow more plants from the native plant nursery at Half Moon Bay State Beach to be planted soon.

At the north end of the parking lot, a new trail has been put in, leading to an overlook with a view of the beach and the lighthouse. This is part of the California Coastal Trail, which will eventually be extended along the bluff to connect with Pistachio Beach, at the northern junction of Highway 1 and Pigeon Point Road.



Planting has begun around the new parking lot. The new toilets are in the small building with the blue roof.



California Coastal Trail Sign at the overlook north of the new parking lot.

Still More Good News

Those of you who have closely followed the history of Pigeon Point and efforts to restore the tower may know that state parks did not officially receive the deed to the lighthouse in May 2005, when Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton handed a six-foot facsimile of the deed to California State Parks Director Ruth Coleman at a [ceremony](#) at the lighthouse. Many roadblocks needed to be overcome before the transfer became official, but the last step was finally taken on 9 September this year, when the California State Board of Public Works officially authorized the acquisition of the lighthouse. It was a difficult step, as Superintendent Keel remarked: "Given the way things have gone with state parks in the last few years, it is pretty tough to take on a unit with a \$9 million restoration job looming over it." The official transfer is just one more of the important milestones that had to be passed on the path to the restoration of the lighthouse.



SMCNHA in the News: Pescadero Marsh Bridge and “Big Sit”

On Sunday 9 October, SMCNHA joined leaders from other organizations that had contributed to the construction and [installation of a new footbridge](#) in [Pescadero Marsh](#) earlier this year. The bridge reconnects the two main marsh trails for the first time in nearly two decades. On the same day the [Sequoia Audubon Society](#), which was among the bridge project partners, held a special birding event in the marsh—the “[Big Sit](#)”—with birders gathered on a hill above the bridge to count as many bird species as they could in one day.

At the central Pescadero Beach parking lot volunteers from SMCNHA, state parks, and Sequoia Audubon set up information tables and spoke to visitors about their organizations, the marsh, and the events of the day.

SMCNHA was able to give visitors a new Pescadero Marsh brochure, which it had just published, with a [map](#) showing the new bridge and all the marsh trails. Copies of the brochure are available in SMCNHA stores at Año Nuevo, Pigeon Point, and Half Moon Bay State Beach.



SMCNHA board member and past President John Fox and current President Joyce Pennell



Pescadero Marsh docents Rita Jennings (left), a SMCNHA board member and Suzanne Black (right)

Bridge Dedication

At 1:30 representatives of organizations that contributed to the new footbridge gathered for its dedication and celebration. Supervising Ranger Michael Grant welcomed everyone and spoke of the significance of the bridge.

“Have you ever waited 18 years for something?” Grant asked. He explained that “In 1993 we opened up the levee here as part of a marsh restoration program. When we did that it closed off access here to the North Pond Trail. Prior to that, thousands of school kids used this trail every year. So, we had always hoped that we could a build bridge here.”

He paid tribute to all the organizations and people that made the bridge possible--the [Silicon Valley Community Foundation](#), [Damasco & Associates LLP](#), the San Mateo Coast Natural History Association, Sequoia Audubon Society, countless volunteers, the Trail Center, the state parks Resources Department, and the Trail Crew.

Grant added that now “we have a wonderful bridge, a wonderful viewing platform up there, and a connected trail system, which kids are using again. It all happened because of all of you and, given the state finances, I don’t think it could have happened otherwise. We could have waited another 18 years, and it still might not have happened. So all of you made it possible and we really appreciate your contribution. For the next 18 years, instead of waiting, we will be using this bridge and using the platform.”



Supervising Ranger Michael Grant



SMCNHA President Joyce Pennell, speaking next, explained that since 1990, SMCNHA has supported state parks on the San Mateo coast, funding educational, volunteer, and environmental programs. With the help of a new membership program, SMCNHA this year is raising more money for additional projects. Pennell said she was most excited about plans to help pay for the interpretive display for the Fresnel lens at Pigeon Point Lighthouse when it is moved from the tower to the Fog Signal Building for safekeeping while the lighthouse is restored.

SMCNHA was able to contribute to the construction of the marsh bridge by acting as a repository for the money donated by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation until state parks could use it and, when the bridge was almost finished and there wasn’t enough money for the installation, by providing the funds necessary to close the gap.

SMCNHA President Joyce Pennell

Jennifer Rycenga, president of the Sequoia Audubon Society, declared “we are thrilled to have this bridge in place and to have contributed to its building.”

Rycenga added that the Sequoia chapter “has had a long and rich relationship with Pescadero State Beach and Marsh. We are quite concerned that this area, one of the largest wetland areas between Point Reyes and Monterey, be kept as the amazing area that it is for birds and other wildlife.”

She also called attention to the Big Sit the chapter had organized at the marsh. It is part of an international activity, with similar events on the same day going on all around the world.

The challenge of the Big Sit is for participants to stay in one spot that is particularly rich in bird life throughout the entire day and see how much they can see from that spot. When last Rycenga was up on the hill an hour earlier, she said, they had already seen 91 species—“better than we had any hope for.”



*Sequoia Audubon Society
President Jennifer Rycenga*

The history of Sequoia Audubon’s relationship with the marsh was recalled by past President Carol Masterson, who noted that the society was involved in the marsh even before state parks was. In the 1960s Sequoia pulled money together to help, along with other donations, to buy the marshland and then donate it to the state.

She expressed her pleasure that so many people got together to make this “fabulous bridge.” She particularly thanked Damasco & Associates LLP, who was “really instrumental in stepping forward to donate,” and their money was matched with others.



*Sequoia Audubon Society past
President Carol Masterson*

Julia Damasco, owner with her husband Jude of Damasco & Associates LLP, recalled that she began her association with Sequoia Audubon at Pescadero Marsh, where she went on her first bird watching trip about 18 years ago. She went on to become a president of the society and to meet her husband through their common involvement in Audubon.

She expressed appreciation for the contribution of Sequoia Audubon, not only through projects such as the bridge, but also by providing free public education and recreation through volunteer activities and bird walks.



Julia and Jude Damasco



*State Parks Environmental
Scientist Joanne Kerbavaz*

State park environmental scientist Joanne Kerbavaz thanked all who contributed to the bridge project, but offered a special tribute to state park employees who, she said, “did an awesome job with the bridge.”

Kerbavaz particularly praised the state park sector superintendent Paul Keel, who had been working on the project for 18 years and “was just not going to give up until this happened” and the remarkable work of the Trail Crew that actually installed the bridge. She added that, “given everything else that people are juggling,” the state park staff “did a heck of a job.”



Participants wave from the bridge after the ceremony

The Big Sit

The Big Sit continued throughout the day on the hill above the bridge, with birders sponsored by the Sequoia Audubon Society crowded within a 17-foot circle surveying the marsh, beach, and ocean for birds from early morning until dark. Their final count of 103 bird species was a remarkable achievement—the [third highest count](#) of any of the teams participating around the world—and was a real testament not only to their skill and dedication, but to the rich diversity of our coast.



Explore the Marsh Yourself

State park docents lead [nature walks](#) in the marsh on the first Sunday of the month, beginning at 10 AM, and the third Sunday of the month, beginning at 1 PM. Walks leave from the central Pescadero Beach parking lot, just south of the Highway 1 bridge over Pescadero Creek.

Rewards for SMCNHA Members



There are benefits to being a SMCNHA member, in addition to the satisfaction that comes with helping coastside state parks. SMCNHA organizes special activities for its members throughout the year to reward them for their generosity and enhance their enjoyment of the parks. So far this year, members have been invited on a guided walk along the Bean Hollow Trail and SMCNHA Partners and Patrons attended a reception and talk by a local historian. Members will be notified by email of more benefits and opportunities in the coming months.

If you are not a member and would like to participate in similar events in the future, you can join SMCNHA [online](#) today.

Walk on a Wild Bluff

On 24 July over a dozen SMCNHA members, some of whom joined that day, explored the trail between Bean Hollow State Beach and Pebble Beach on a guided walk led by local botanist Toni Corelli, with commentary on the history and geology of the beach by state park volunteer Avis Boutell. All participants received copies of a newly published guide to the trail, its plants, history, and geology, with color photographs of nearly 40 of the most common wildflowers then in bloom.

The walk began at Pebble Beach with snacks and coffee, then a scramble down to the rocks below the parking lot, where Boutell explained the origins of the oddly formed rocks and recounted the history of the beach.



On the mile-long walk to Bean Hollow, Corelli identified the many plants that grow along the trail, including one of the two orchids that grow there and the spectacular angelica (left) that flourishes along the bluffs.

The walk was featured by one of the participants in her [blog](#) a few days later, noting that her SMCNHA membership dues “immediately paid off,” with the receipt of an invitation to the walk.





Butano Falls

Afternoon Feast and Local History

On 2 October SMCNHA Partners and Patrons—members joining SMCNHA at the \$250 or \$1,000 level or above—were treated to an afternoon of good food and drink and an entertaining talk by historian [Sandy Lydon](#).

The program was opened by SMCNHA President Joyce Pennell, who thanked the attendees for their significant contributions to SMCNHA's efforts to preserve and protect our local state parks. Her sentiments were echoed by Sector Superintendent Paul Keel, who emphasized the important role SMCNHA plays in these times of tight budgets.



Historian Sandy Lydon

Lydon, an award-winning author and historian emeritus at Cabrillo College, wove a story about how the isolation of the coastside defined the landscape we see today. His talk focused on the Butano forest above Butano Falls, recounting how logging of the forest in the 1950s affected him as a young boy and helped spur the effort to protect the remaining redwoods. He also commended modern-day forestry for attempting to responsibly manage and preserve our forests.



SMCNHA President Joyce Pennell



New Docent Training Takes Off at Año Nuevo



Mike Merritt introduces the 2011 class of new docents to Año Nuevo

After a hiatus in the fall of 2010, the 2011 training for new docents at Año Nuevo is in full swing in anticipation of the elephant seal breeding season, which begins in December. The class is full at 30 students, with a waiting list of people who would still like to join. The training was not held in 2010, because a full contingent of about 180 volunteers was still anxious to lead tours, and there was no need for new docents.

Docent Coordinator Mike Merritt says that was a proud moment for the docent program, as it indicated how many of the docents enjoy their volunteer experience enough to stay on year after year. However, it also means that some in the current class have waited two years for the opportunity to become an Año docent.

The current class, as usual, comes from a wide variety of backgrounds. A random sample of some members of the group includes an 8th grade science teacher and a physicist at the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center. A retired couple in the class already volunteers at Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park in Felton two days a week and transports injured sea birds for a bird rescue organization one day a week. Now they hope to volunteer two days a week at Año Nuevo—retirement isn't for sissies!

The rest of the group appears to be equally diverse, but, as Merritt says, “no matter where they come from, everyone in the program is here for one thing: that’s to share the park with visitors.”

The training program started in early September and the 14 required sessions continue through December 10, when the successful new docents will be ready to lead tours. The classes, which average 2 ½ hours but can run to 12 hours in a day, cover such topics as elephant seal research, marine mammals, geology and history of Año Nuevo, and the Ohlone Indians, as well as training on interpretive techniques, working with children, and the logistics of leading tours.

Each trainee is assigned a mentor from among the experienced docents. Mentors act as guides throughout the training process and are there to answer unlimited questions and to share their own learning experiences with their trainees. The mentors help the trainees develop their own script for a tour, and they are expected to do practice runs with the trainees.

The training program is funded 100% by SMCNHA, so it is thanks to our members and donors, as well as all those who make purchases in the San Mateo state park bookstores that the parks are able to maintain the program. Thank you to all who have contributed.

View from the Parks: Año Docent Coordinator Mike Merritt

We asked Mike Merritt, Docent Coordinator at Año Nuevo, his thoughts on how SMCNHA supports San Mateo State Parks. His reply:

The easiest answer for this is reliable and quality support. All the funding we receive to run our docent programs and develop interpretive exhibits comes from SMCNHA. Without this reliable resource, we would not be able to offer the high quality interpretation that visitors have come to enjoy and expect.

Although we rely heavily on money raised for our interpretive programs, SMCNHA is also there to support us in other ways. They help get the word out about the needs of our local state parks, build interpretive training documents for use in docent trainings, and help our parks know that they have an ally in keeping our parks open for the public.

Let Us Know What You Want for the Parks and Your Membership

SMCNHA wants to hear from you. You are essential to maintaining and strengthening the state parks and their educational programs along the San Mateo coast. Let us know what your priorities are, how you would like to help the parks, what you would like SMCNHA to do, and what benefits of membership you would like.

Contact information:

San Mateo Coast Natural History Association
New Year's Creek Road
Pescadero, CA 94060

info@SanMateoCoastNHA.org

The San Mateo Coast Natural History Association (SMCNHA) is a non-profit 501(c)3 Cooperating Association founded in 1990 to provide support to state parks along the San Mateo Coast. Its mission is to inspire public appreciation and stewardship of the natural resources and cultural heritage of the San Mateo coast, in partnership with California State Parks.