



Foundation Document Overview

Cabrillo National Monument

California



Contact Information

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Purpose



CABRILLO NATIONAL MONUMENT, on Point Loma at the ocean gateway to San Diego, commemorates Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo's 1542 voyage of exploration and discovery of Alta California and conserves maritime and military cultural resources and dynamic terrestrial and marine ecosystems.



Significance

Significance statements express why Cabrillo National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo became the first European to set foot on and chart the West Coast of what is now the United States, opening the doors for those who followed in exploring the world during the Age of Discovery. This event also marked the advent of a dramatic transformation of indigenous communities and landscapes.
- The Old Point Loma Lighthouse, illuminated in 1855, was among the first eight lighthouses built along the West Coast at that time by the U.S. Lighthouse Board. The lighthouse helped improve navigation and promoted maritime commerce and safe travel along the developing West Coast.
- The extensive rocky intertidal area along the monument's western boundary and the southern tip of the Point Loma Peninsula contains one of the best-preserved and well-studied mainland Pacific tide pool ecosystems in Southern California.
- Cabrillo National Monument preserves 21 military fortifications, including the only remaining pop-up searchlight, which protected San Diego Harbor and the West Coast during World War I and World War II.
- An isolated yet viable remnant of the rare and sensitive coastal Southern California Mediterranean ecosystem, the Point Loma Peninsula is valued for its distinctive flora, refuge for wildlife, research, and educational opportunities.
- Perched on a peninsula more than 400 feet above the shoreline, Cabrillo National Monument offers unparalleled panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean and the urban skyline and mountain ranges from San Diego to Mexico.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Cabrillo Commemoration/Statue**
- **Tide Pools / Marine Ecosystem (Intertidal Zone)**
- **Old Point Loma Lighthouse**
- **Military Harbor Defenses**
- **Scenic Views**
- **Terrestrial Ecosystem**

Cabrillo National Monument contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Visitor Center Historic District**
- **Geologic Resources**



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- In 1542, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo became the first European to explore and chart the West Coast of what is now the United States, extending the domain of New Spain and opening the doors for explorers that followed and changing the world of the indigenous people of the region.
- As one of the first eight lighthouses built by the U.S. Lighthouse Establishment on the West Coast, the Old Point Loma Lighthouse helped improve navigation and promoted maritime commerce and safe travel in the developing West.
- The regionally significant rocky intertidal habitat at Cabrillo National Monument is protected and valued for its public access, research potential, and educational opportunities.
- The U.S. Army coastal defense systems that protected San Diego are part of our national heritage and represent the universal human desire to protect values, families, and ways of life.
- An isolated but viable remnant of the sensitive coastal Southern California Mediterranean ecosystem is being preserved on the Point Loma Peninsula and is valued for its public access, research potential, and educational opportunities.
- The terrestrial and marine resources in and adjacent to Cabrillo National Monument are inextricably connected to and affected by human influence; their condition requires protection, preservation, interpretation, and restoration to enhance them.

Description

Cabrillo National Monument is in San Diego, California, occupying approximately 160 acres on the southern end of the Point Loma Peninsula. The narrow 2.5-mile-long peninsula forms the western side and entrance to San Diego Bay. Bordered by sheer cliffs facing the bay and the Pacific Ocean, the rugged terrain of the peninsula rises inland to an elevation of 422 feet, the highest point on Point Loma. From its crest, the monument offers expansive panoramic views of the city, surrounding region, and ocean.

In June 1542, Captain Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, in the service of the king of Spain, sailed north from the port of Navidad on the west coast of Mexico. Commanding three vessels, Cabrillo sailed up the coast and came ashore at the sheltered harbor of present-day San Diego on September 28, 1542. The event marked the first European discovery of San Diego Bay, as well as the first time Europeans set foot on the West Coast of the future United States.

The nationally significant Old Point Loma Lighthouse was constructed in 1854 and its powerful Fresnel lens was installed and operational the following year. For the next 36 years, the lighthouse served as an aid to navigation and helped safely guide ships into San Diego Harbor. It was replaced by a new light station built at the southern tip of the peninsula in 1891 and presently managed by the U.S. Coast Guard. Beginning in World War I and continuing through World War II, the monument area served as an integral part of San Diego harbor defenses. Gun batteries, coastal searchlight batteries, artillery fire control stations, a radio station, and a signal station (the lighthouse) played key defensive roles. Many of the harbor defenses remained operational until formally discontinued in 1950.

The rocky intertidal area along the monument's western boundary and the southern tip of Point Loma contains one of the best-preserved mainland Pacific tide pool ecosystems in Southern California. Although fragile, the area is open to the public and is managed to preserve the unique plants and animals that have adapted to the harsh intertidal conditions. A coastal Mediterranean ecotype, which is one of the rarest and most biodiverse in the world, also exists within the monument and supports sensitive plant communities and provides habitat for a wide variety of native animals.

In cooperation with other agencies and partners, the National Park Service assists the protection of these species in the Point Loma Ecological Conservation Area, which is a larger reserve system managed jointly by the National Park Service, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Veterans Administration, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, City of San Diego, and the U.S. Navy.

At the Cabrillo National Monument visitor center, visitors can find site orientation and information, and view exhibits and films. The monument also features three museums: the Cabrillo Museum, the Assistant Lighthouse Keeper's Quarters, and the Military History Exhibit. Easy walks lead from the visitor center to the Cabrillo statue, coastal defense exhibit, Old Point Loma Lighthouse, assistant keeper's quarters and lighthouse exhibit, and the Kelp Forest and Whale Watch Overlook. The 2.5-mile-roundtrip Bayside Trail descends about 300 feet, crossing native coastal sage scrub and passing remnants of the former coastal defense system. Visitors can also drive to and park near the tide pool area. The monument is open for day use only.

