A BRIEF HISTORY OF
CABRILLO NATIONAL MONUMENT

Cabrillo National Monument was created by presidential proclamation signed by Woodrow Wilson on October 14, 1913, and is one of nearly 400 National Park areas in the United States. The monument was established to commemorate the voyage and discoveries of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in 1542-1543. Cabrillo and his men were the first Europeans to explore San Diego Bay and what is now the West Coast of the United States.

MISSION STATEMENT

The National Park Service at Cabrillo National Monument commemorates Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo's voyage of exploration and its significance. Protects, preserves and manages the monument's cultural and natural resources and associated values in a manner that leaves them unimpaired while providing a high quality educational and recreational experience for all visitors.

PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purposes of Cabrillo National Monument as stated in the General Management Plan (1996) are:

- To commemorate the 1542 voyage of exploration and accomplishments of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo and communicate this story and its significance to visitors and local residents.
- To preserve, restore, protect, interpret, and enhance the significant cultural and natural resources within and adjacent to the park.
- To provide visitors the opportunity to enjoy one of the great harbor views of the world and to experience and understand the relationships humans have with their land and sea environment.

SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

The significance of Cabrillo National Monument can be summarized as follows:

- The monument overlooks the first landing site of Europeans on the West Coast of what is now the United States of America, and represents an important chapter in the history of Spanish Exploration and settlement of North America.
- The significance of the monument is enhanced by the presence of the Old Point Loma Lighthouse, one of the first eight lighthouses built along the west coast by the US government in the 1850s; 21 historic structures of the US Army’s coastal defense system at Fort Rosecrans which protected the aircraft industry and naval port of San Diego during World War II; one of the best land-based sites from which to watch the annual migration of the Pacific gray whales; one of the few protected and accessible intertidal communities on the Southern California mainland; and US Fish & Wildlife Service-designated sensitive coastal sage scrub/maritime succulent scrub habitat which is representative of the Southern California environment.
- The monument further provides visitors from around the world with the opportunity to enjoy a world-class view of natural and cultural resources in juxtaposition (military operations, shipping, the city and harbor of San Diego, landforms, wildlife, Mexico and the Pacific Ocean) which illustrates the relationship humans have with their environment.
Cabrillo National Monument began with the efforts of a local civic group, the Order of Panama. The group hoped to commemorate the 1542 expedition of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, the first European explorer of what would become the West Coast of the United States. They originally wanted to establish a monument to Cabrillo by erecting a 150-foot statue where the Old Point Loma Lighthouse stands. The committee obtained permission for the monument when President Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation on October 10, 1913, three years before the National Park Service was created. Because the organization did not act, the statue idea was set aside allowing the lighthouse to stay intact.

The original one-quarter acre site was removed from the administration of the War Department and transferred (along with 48 other sites) to the National Park Service in 1933 when President Franklin Roosevelt signed the Reorganization Act. Cabrillo National Monument was formally dedicated on September 23, 1935, with responsibility for the site placed with the Superintendent of Sequoia National Park. In 1956, the monument became an independent entity with its own staff and budget.

The first statue of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was donated to the National Park Service in 1949. Sculpted by Alvaro DeBree, a Portuguese sculptor, it stood by the lighthouse until 1966 when it was moved to its current location near the new Visitor Center. In February 1988, the current replica statue of Cabrillo was dedicated. It was sculpted by Charles de Almeira and donated by Mrs. Marion Reupsch.

Today, Cabrillo National Monument encompasses approximately 160 acres located at the southern end of Point Loma. It commemorates the accomplishments of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo and much more. It is a place to study and learn about the Old Point Loma Lighthouse, the U.S. Military History of the area, the Rocky Intertidal area (tidepools), the Coastal Sage Scrub and other Coastal Mediterranean communities, the annual migration of the Pacific gray whales, and the relationships that people have with their environment.

**MAJOR PARK THEMES**

**The Voyage and Discoveries of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo and 16th Century Spanish Exploration**
Though it is uncertain whether Cabrillo actually set foot on the land that is now included in the park, his landing site and areas he visited within San Diego Bay are visible from the outstanding vistas afforded from the monument.

**The Old Point Loma Lighthouse**
The lighthouse began operation in 1855 and served until 1891, when the present Coast Guard lighthouse was built. Today the Old Point Loma Lighthouse is furnished to reflect the 1880s period when it was actively maintained by Lighthouse Keepers and Assistant Keepers and their families who lived in the sturdy stone building.

**The Rocky Intertidal Area on the Pacific Coast**
Being the only federally protected tidepools on the Southern California coast, the intertidal zone at Cabrillo National Monument protects a variety of sea life that is considered rare or endangered.

**Coastal Sage and Chaparral Ecology**
Once the predominant vegetation of the San Diego coast, this ecosystem has now shrunk to remnants of its former size due to development and introduction of non-native plants. The park preserves a remaining oasis of this ecosystem, one of the most sensitive in the world.

**The World War I and II Fortifications and Military Use of Point Loma**
Established as a military reserve in 1852, Point Loma remains the site of coast artillery gun batteries and observation lookouts from both World Wars.
The Development and Growth of San Diego and the Ongoing Relationships between People and their Environment
San Diego was established with the founding of the Mission San Diego de Alcalá in 1769 and has grown to become the second largest city in California and the sixth largest in the United States. The view of the city and Pacific Ocean from Cabrillo National Monument affords an outstanding look at the city and the development that has occurred since Cabrillo’s arrival, underscoring the intimate relationship between humans and the terrestrial and marine environments.

Visitors to Cabrillo National Monument will find a variety of sites and activities that preserve and interpret these unique elements of the park. As one of nearly 400 National Park areas throughout the nation and the only one in San Diego, Cabrillo National Monument holds a valuable place as a major site in the protection of America’s cultural and natural heritage.

The Pacific Gray Whale Migration
During the annual migration of the Pacific Gray Whales from their feeding grounds in the Arctic Ocean to their calving lagoons of Baja California, the whales come within sight of visitors at Cabrillo National Monument. Tens of thousands of visitors come to the park during the migration season from late December through early March to catch a glimpse of these enormous sea mammals.

For more information, read:

