

Human Layers on the Land

Over 5,000 years of human history awaits your discovery at Point Reyes. More than just a natural sanctuary, this peninsula holds within its forested ridges, rolling grasslands, and coastal expanses the stories of people who came before us. Their cultures, interactions, and experiences are echoed in the landscape. These human layers offer a window into our past and hold the potential to shape our lives even today.

Coast Miwok—The First People

Coast Miwok people inhabited small family villages in present-day Marin and Sonoma Counties for thousands of years. They enjoyed a rich economy based on gathering, fishing, and hunting. At the time of European contact, an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Coast Miwok lived in the area.



Coast Miwok in Regalia

Acorns, a nutritious starchy seed, were a favored staple of the Coast Miwok. A family of four ate about 500 pounds of acorns a year. Acorns, collected in autumn, were stored in granaries, and later prepared and cooked by the women.



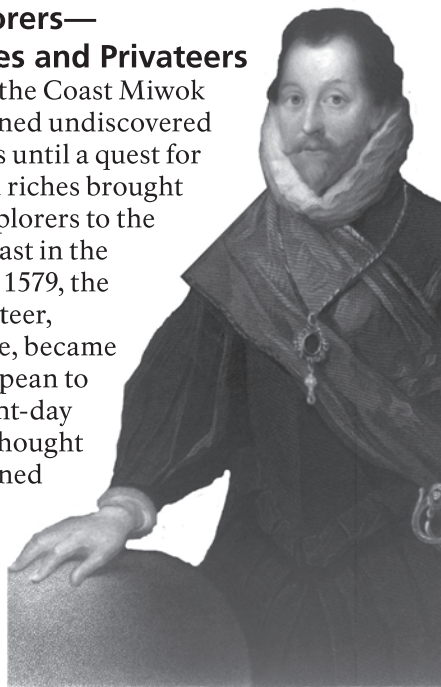
Coast Miwok Basket

Miwok women also gathered and prepared plant materials, such as willow, hazel, lupine and sedge, for making baskets. Many of these beautiful baskets are now in museum collections around the world.

Miwok men made at least two types of arrows, one long and one short. The longer was used for deer and bear, and the shorter for accuracy. Tips were made from manzanita wood, obsidian, and other stone. Sinew was used to attach three feather fletchings and the point.

Early Explorers— Missionaries and Privateers

The home of the Coast Miwok people remained undiscovered by Europeans until a quest for new land and riches brought European explorers to the California coast in the late 1500s. In 1579, the English privateer, Francis Drake, became the first European to land in present-day California. Thought to have careened his ship, the *Golden Hind*, into an estuary along the Point Reyes peninsula to make repairs, Drake camped along a nearby beach which today bears his name. He claimed this new land for Queen Elizabeth, before completing a circumnavigation of the globe.



Sir Francis Drake © National Archives

Trade routes led Spanish galleons past Point Reyes and in 1595, the wreck of Sebastian Cermeño's galleon, the *San Agustín*, became the first recorded shipwreck here. On January 6, 1603, Sebastian Vizcaíno sighted the headlands on the feast day of the Epiphany. Vizcaíno named the point "la Punta de los tres Reyes"—the Point of the Three Kings—to honor the three wise men.

Franciscan missionaries arrived overland in 1775 and changed the traditional life of the Coast Miwok forever. Disease, malnutrition, cultural loss, and depression destroyed 90% of the Miwok population in less than 100 years.

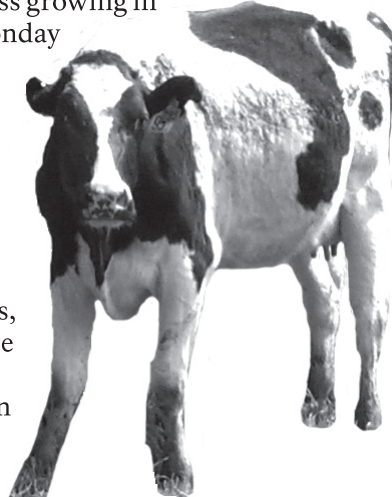
The mission fathers released large herds of feral cattle, which grazed as far west as Point Reyes. Secularization of the missions followed Mexican independence from Spain and led to land grants that divided the peninsula and expanded cattle ranching. The expansive coastal prairie that early ranchers found here was partly the result of Coast Miwok burning practices over more than two millennia.

Ranching by the Sea

In 1849, a wave of immigrants came west in search of gold. Settlers on the Point Reyes peninsula found their fortune not in nuggets of precious metal, but in great golden wheels of cheese and casks of butter made for the growing city of San Francisco.

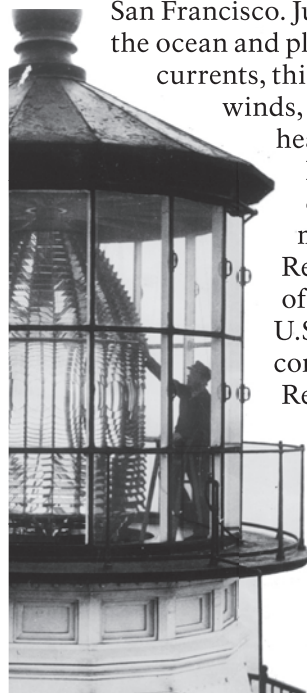
The cool, moist climate of Point Reyes was ideal for dairy ranching: plenty of grass, a long growing season, and abundant fresh water. The 1880 History of Marin County remarked of Point Reyes, "The grass growing in the fields on Monday is butter on the city tables the following Sunday."

Although the peninsula was granted to Mexican settlers, their claims were often disputed. Eventually, a San Francisco law firm, Shafter, Shafter, Park, and Heydenfeldt established ownership. They sold the northernmost tip to Solomon Pierce and divided the rest into tenant dairies, largely run by new immigrants. The ranches were designated alphabetically: "A" Ranch—closest to the Lighthouse—through "Z" Ranch—on the summit of Mt. Wittenberg. Park headquarters and Bear Valley Visitor Center stand at the site of "W" ranch. Point Reyes dairies set the standard for product quality and soon were producing record yields of butter and cheese. In 1919, the Shafter firm sold the tenant ranches, and many immigrant families bought the land they had worked so diligently.



Light Keepers, Lifesavers and the Age of Wireless Radio

Gold-miners, dairy farmers, and lumbermen counted on safe passage through the waters offshore of Point Reyes to transport valuable goods to and from the booming port of San Francisco. Jutting ten miles out into the ocean and plagued by treacherous currents, thick fog, and punishing winds, the sheer granite headlands of the Point Reyes provided a deadly challenge to even the most skilled sailor. Recognizing the severity of these conditions, the U.S. Lighthouse Board constructed the Point Reyes Lighthouse in 1870. With its revolutionary first order French-made Fresnel lens and mechanism, this beacon helped provide safe passage and served as an aid to navigation.



Point Reyes Lighthouse. E. Muybridge

In addition to tending the light, keepers in 1870 had to wash the lens, polish brass, and, at foggy times, stoke the furnace with coal for the steam-powered fog signal. Keepers often responded to shipwrecks and risked their lives to rescue others from the raging seas and deadly cliffs below the lighthouse. At the end of each shift, they had to ascend nearly 300 feet along a wooden stairway, often in howling winds, to reach the comfort of their homes.

Loneliness and depression were constant companions, and many drank alcohol, though it was forbidden. A *San Francisco Chronicle* writer noted that one keeper was "notorious for his love of the flowing bowl. It is said that he even regaled himself when out of whiskey with the alcohol furnished for cleaning lamps. . ."



Lifesavers at work

Despite the heroics of lighthouse keepers, ships continued to founder along the rocky shores of Point Reyes. In response, the first lifesaving station was established in 1889 on the Great Beach, north of the lighthouse. Like the lighthouse keepers, lifesavers endured grueling and dangerous conditions. They walked the beach day and night in four-hour shifts through bone chilling fog and fierce winds watching for shipwrecks and passengers in need of rescue from the frigid waters and powerful currents. Even their weekly drills were dangerous requiring the seamen to launch the lifeboat through the pounding surf twice a week. The severity of that risk resonates through the Life Saving Service motto—"Ye have to go out but ye don't have to come in."

In 1927, a new station was built along the protected shores of Drakes Bay, proving to be more efficient and less daunting. The new life-saving station was equipped with motorized boats, which were launched from the boathouse on rails. Though many successful rescues took place along the treacherous headlands at Point Reyes, several boatmen did not survive drills and rescues in such threatening waters. The Life-Saving Service Cemetery near the historic G Ranch commemorates four men whose lives were lost while on duty at Point Reyes.

Beginning in 1913, Guglielmo Marconi pioneered a wireless radio communication facility in the Point Reyes area, establishing a telegraphy transmitting station in Bolinas and a receiving station in Marshall, along Tomales Bay. Together, these stations formed "KPH", the most successful and powerful ship-to-shore and land station on the Pacific Rim. The Marshall station was replaced in 1929 by a new Art Deco style facility on the G Ranch at Point Reyes. The entrance is marked by two rows of Monterey cypress trees that still line the driveway today.



Guglielmo Marconi © National Archives

Creation of a National Seashore

As early as 1929, Californians were concerned about the fate of their coastline. Development had swallowed most of the eastern seaboard, and plans were being made for the west coast. Congressional reports recommended the creation of a system of national seashores both, to protect these vanishing landscapes and to provide public access to beaches.

When we look up and down the ocean fronts of America, we find that they are passing behind the fences of private ownership. The people can no longer get to the ocean...

Harold Ickes, Interior Secretary 1933-1946

In 1953, the first national seashore was established at Cape Hatteras, on the dynamic barrier island system off the North Carolina coast. Local, state, and federal advocates for protection of the Point Reyes peninsula were encouraged by this success. However, Drakes Bay Estates, with proposed development of over 400 housing units, began construction near Limantour Beach in 1956, lending urgency to the conservationists' battle.



Development at Point Reyes

In the late 1950's, legislation was first proposed to establish a national seashore at Point Reyes. When he took office, President John F. Kennedy announced two conservation agendas: the creation of national seashores, including Point Reyes National Seashore, and the adoption of the Wilderness Bill. Key players in these struggles were President Kennedy's Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, Sierra Club executive director David Brower, California Congressional Representatives Claire Engle and Clem Miller, and author Harold Gilliam, among many others. In August of 1961, a second national seashore was established at Cape Cod in Massachusetts, gaining further momentum for the Point Reyes cause. The 1962 Sierra Club publication of Gilliam's book, *Island in Time*, brought much-needed publicity and a poetic voice to the campaign to protect Point Reyes. David Brower distributed a copy to every member of the 87th Congress.

Congressional floor debates took place during the summer of 1962, as battles waged over incorporation of ranches and other private property into the seashore. The intense effort finally ended with the passage of S. 476 and on September 13, 1962, President Kennedy signed "The Point Reyes Authorization Act."

On October 20, 1966, Lady Bird Johnson and Interior Secretary Stewart Udall came to Point Reyes to dedicate the park. In her dedication speech, Lady Bird warned that "the growing needs of an urban America are quickening the tick of the conservation clock." She called Point Reyes "a bright star in the galaxy of conservation achievements of the 1960s."

The Seashore Today

Congress authorized the National Park Service to purchase the ranches, which were leased back to the existing ranchers. Currently, thirteen ranches operate in the park, and continue to provide fresh, healthy food for the local community and the nation. Black and white Holstein cows are raised on seven ranches. Black Angus and the brown and white Hereford breed are raised on six beef ranches. The National Park Service and the ranchers act as stewards - protecting the natural landscape and the cultural history of ranching. The historic Pierce Ranch at Tomales Point offers a self-guided walking tour of what was once Point Reyes' premiere dairy.

Maritime history is preserved as well. Though replaced with an automated light in 1975, the Historic Point Reyes Lighthouse still stands, offering visitors a glimpse into the life and work of a 19th century keeper. The Historic Lifeboat Station at Chimney Rock has been restored, complete with the last intact marine railway on the west coast. The home of KPH wireless radio at the G Ranch, though also out of service, remains intact, functional, and used for ceremonial occasions by former RCA key operators today. Though newer technology has eclipsed the need for these installations, the park cares for these sites to preserve a piece of maritime history and honor the lives of those who kept vigilant watch over this coast for over 130 years.

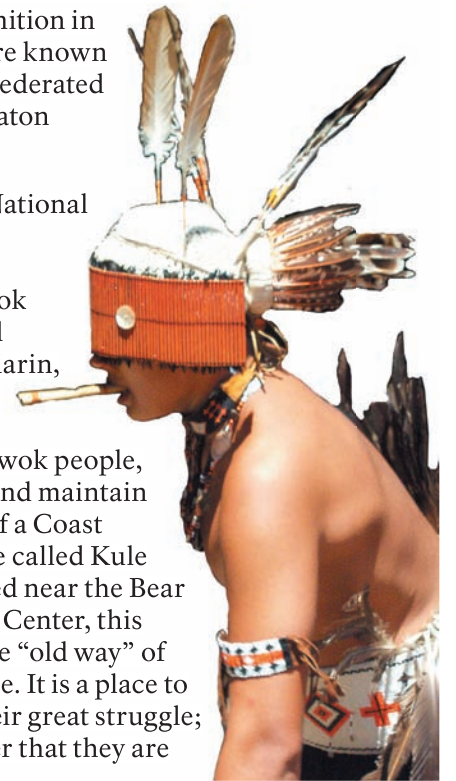


Lady Bird Johnson at the 1966 dedication of Point Reyes National Seashore

We Are Still Here

To gain tribal rights, the modern Miwok people, consisting of more than 1,000 descendants, retraced their family trees to redefine and rediscover their cultural and historic lifeways. After 30 years of research and documentation by the tribe, President Clinton granted the Coast Miwok federal recognition in 2000. They are known today as the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.

Point Reyes National Seashore in partnership with the Miwok Archeological Preserve of Marin, community volunteers, and Coast Miwok people, constructed and maintain a recreation of a Coast Miwok village called Kule Loklo. Located near the Bear Valley Visitor Center, this site honors the "old way" of the first people. It is a place to remember their great struggle; it is a reminder that they are still here.



Today, Point Reyes National Seashore serves as a model for land stewardship and resource protection. Providing a needed escape from crowded urban areas, it is a place to remember our connection to the land. It is also a place to reflect on the many ancestors that have left their mark here, and to contemplate how best to ensure the protection of this special place in the future.

Support Your Park

Point Reyes National Seashore relies on community partnerships to accomplish its mission. You can get involved by becoming a volunteer or by supporting the Point Reyes National Seashore Association.

Volunteer-In-Parks

Get involved by volunteering your time and talents to Point Reyes National Seashore. As a volunteer you can:

- Help combat invasive, non-native plants
- Restore stream habitat for Coho salmon and Steelhead trout; monitor spawning success
- Educate seashore visitors about elephant seals, whales, snowy plovers, and tule elk
- Assist researchers by monitoring tule elk and harbor seal populations



Elk docent and visitor at Tomales Point

- Perform trail maintenance
- Patrol the park on foot, horseback, or kayak
- Help catalogue and manage the Seashore's museum collection
- Collect native grass seeds and re-vegetate restoration areas
- Orient and identify points of interest to visitors at a seashore visitor center
- Help preserve Native American culture by maintaining the Kule Loklo cultural exhibit

Please visit www.nps.gov/volunteer/ for additional volunteer opportunities and to apply.

Point Reyes National Seashore Association

The Point Reyes National Seashore Association (PRNSA) is the park's non-profit partner organization that supports park programs through fundraising, bookstore sales, memberships, and education. You can support PRNSA and the Seashore by:



- Becoming a member of PRNSA
- Purchasing merchandise in any of the Seashore's visitor centers
- Enrolling in a PRNSA field seminar
- Volunteering as a field seminar facilitator
- Donating your car to PRNSA
- Making a monetary donation

For more information, visit www.ptreyes.org