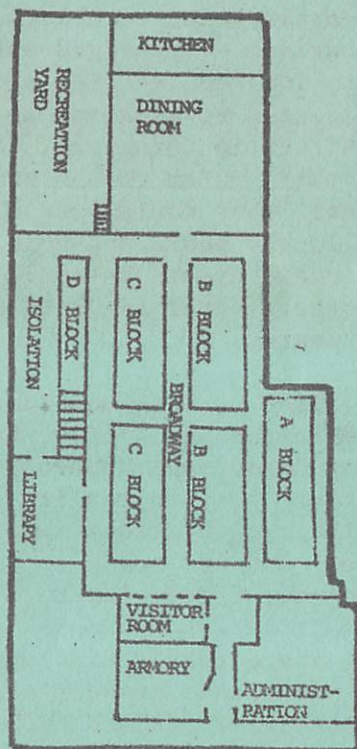


In 1972 Congress established Golden Gate National Recreation Area, of which Alcatraz Island is a part, and tours began in October of 1973.

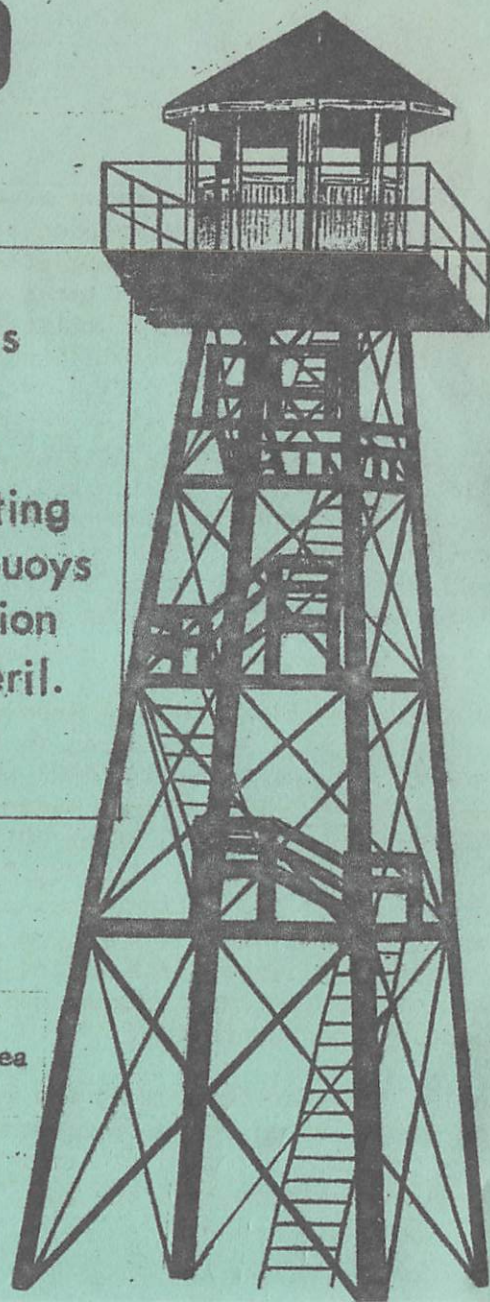


If you have any questions or comments please feel free to contact us at Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Fort Mason, Building 201, San Francisco, California 94123. Our telephone number is (415) 556-0560. For reservations please call (415) 546-2805.

ALCATRAZ ISLAND

United States
Penitentiary
WARNING!
Persons attempting
to come inside buoys
without permission
do so at their peril.
KEEP OFF!

Golden Gate
National Recreation Area
U.S.N.P.S.



For centuries explorers had bypassed the break in the northern California coast now called the Golden Gate. In 1775, Juan Manuel de Ayala entered the Bay. Many of the obvious landmarks were given Spanish names, including a small barren island in the middle of the Bay. This island became known as La Isla de las Alcatrazes, or the "Island of the Pelicans". The name was anglicized and is now known as Alcatraz.

The United States government acquired California in 1848 from Mexico and quickly recognized Alcatraz's strategic potential as an Army fortification to protect the growing community of San Francisco.

By 1859 the Island was known as the Post on Alcatraz, with the first lighthouse completed on the West Coast, barracks for 130 soldiers, and a ring of defensive batteries consisting of heavy artillery. International and domestic tensions hastened the expansion of military batteries on Alcatraz, resulting in a total of one hundred fifty four big guns by 1867.

The 1870's saw a steady decline in the heavy guns while the military prison population averaged over one hundred. Between 1873 and 1895 some American Indian prisoners were sent to Alcatraz, including Paiutes, Apaches, and prisoners from the California Modoc Indian War of 1873. The next large influx of men came as a result of the Spanish American War, raising the military population to four hundred.

By 1901, no modern coastal guns stood mounted on the Island. Any future role for Alcatraz in the defense of San Francisco came to a complete end in 1907 when the Secretary of War selected the Island as the site for a large permanent military prison, which after 1915 was called the Pacific Branch, United States Military Prison. The soldiers incarcerated in the military prison did hard labor. They completed many major changes on the Island. These included changing the composition of the barren rock by building retaining walls and bringing soil to Alcatraz, as well as planting the vegetation.

In 1933 the War Department was contemplating abandoning the prison as an economic measure. On June 25th, 1934, the Army commandant turned Alcatraz over to the new warden, James A. Johnston, and the new "super prison" for hard-core

criminals began. This new prison was to be a maximum security Federal Penitentiary for civilian inmates. At this point, the eighty-seven years of military history had come to an end. The facilities were remodeled with modern technology: tool resistant steel bars, metal detectors, and bullet proof glass were installed.

The incorrigibles sent to Alcatraz came from other Federal prisons. Escape-artists and trouble-makers were sent to learn how to live in a prison. The rigid schedule, monotony, high ratio of guards to inmates, and isolation kept these men in line. Inmates referred to Alcatraz as a "hellhole" because of its lack of rehabilitation programs. Most infractions of the rules would send the inmates to the punishment unit of the prison. Once there, they could lose all their privileges and spend 24 boring, lonely hours a day in their cells with nothing to do. When an inmate proved he could control his behavior he was sent back to the general population. The average stay on "The Rock" was 8 years.

Al Capone led the list of infamous inmates at Alcatraz. Others included George "Machine Gun" Kelly, Roy Gardner, Alvin Karpis, Doc Barker, Mickey Cohen, and Robert Stroud, the alleged "Birdman of Alcatraz" who, in reality, never kept birds on "The Rock". Despite their reputations and fortunes these men had no special privileges and were made to perform the same menial tasks as the remainder of the inmate population.

In such a prison, where rehabilitation and parole were meaningless terms, some men became desperate enough to try what was thought to be impossible. ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ. Thirty-nine convicts attempted to escape. Ten of these men paid with their lives, while the majority, were recaptured. Five men remain unaccounted for.

After twenty-nine years as a maximum security, minimum privilege penitentiary, the Federal prison closed its doors. Once the prison closed and the inmates were taken to other Federal prisons, the General Services Administration took control of the Island.

The Island was inactive for six years until the "Indian Occupation" began in November of 1969. Eighty-five Indians came to Alcatraz with the hope of establishing a cultural center for the heritage of all Indians. By June, 1971 the Indian Occupation came to an end.