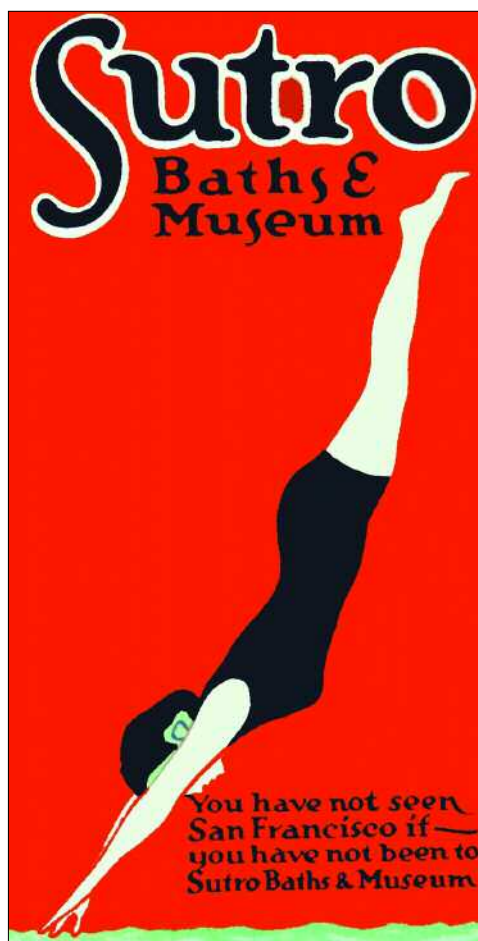




The Value of Play

The consequences of “all work and no play” are well known—monotony, tedium, dullness! Since time immemorial, people have looked for ways to balance work and play in their lives. Today, many struggle to find time to “recreate,” time to recharge and revitalize. Fortunately, our parklands offer numerous venues and possibilities. In fact, before they *were* parklands, many of these places echoed with the laughter and good-natured shouts of people enjoying themselves. To find out more about historical pursuits of pleasure in what are today the Golden Gate National Parks, start with “A Gem of a Diamond,” [page 3](#).



Forgotten Pleasure Ground

Merrie Way wasn't always a somewhat forlorn parking lot—it once featured a collection of reclaimed attractions assembled by Adolph Sutro for the sole purpose of public recreation. During the early days of Sutro's amusement empire, the Firth Wheel, Mystic Maze, Haunted Swing, and other diversions entertained—and pleasantly terrified—thousands of visitors.

4

The Glass Palace

Proudly presented to the public in 1896, Sutro Baths experienced a number of incarnations during its seventy-year life. Between its grand opening and its ignoble bulldozing in 1966, the Baths' *fin de siècle* atmosphere, “redolent of saltwater and musk,” attracted San Franciscans of all ages and interests.

6

Escaping Boredom

Living on Alcatraz, either as an inmate or as a child, offered lots of challenges. Boredom ranked high on the list for both populations, and they were inventive in the ways they devised to combat it.

7

Behind the Scenes—New and notable in the parks, [2](#)

Park Programs—A pull-out event calendar, center spread

News from the Parks Conservancy—Reclaiming the Gardens of Alcatraz, [5](#)



Behind the Scenes

Golden Gate National Recreation Area consists of over 75,500 acres of land, and protects more than 1,250 historic structures, 27 rare and endangered species, and many small “islands” of threatened habitat. NPS staff, volunteers, and partners work hard to take care of the park’s treasures for the millions of people who visit each year, and for future generations.

Serious Fun

Protecting, preserving, and restoring the land are important jobs, and the National Park Service takes them seriously. But there’s another element involved too, that of public recreation, which has a very long history in these landscapes edged by either the Pacific Ocean or San Francisco Bay (or both). Anywhere there were people, there were games and activities of one sort or another. And for sheer concentration of fun, what’s known today as the Sutro District was hard to beat; for a small sample, see “When Vaudeville was King” at the bottom of this page, and follow the Web links to some of Edison’s “moving pictures” documenting these early hi-jinks.

From the Brink to the Clink

A lone peregrine falcon, member of a species on the brink of extinction in the 1970s, has returned to its Alcatraz roosting spots. If you are exceptionally lucky, you can spot it on the water tower or the historic power plant smokestack. The raptor will have its eye on the Rock’s pigeons and other tasty meals.

A New View at Baker Beach

There’s a new view at Baker Beach. In June, Presidio remediation crews began clearing a US Army landfill uphill from the beach, removing 1,500 truckloads of corroded metal pipes, concrete slabs, and soil contaminated with invisible contents such as PCBs and DDT. The sublimely named “Disturbed Area 3” has now been “clean closed” (in remediation parlance) and planted with natives such as mock heather, lizard tail, and coyote bush.

and Seal Rocks from the public outdoor terraces of the Cliff House. The newly rehabilitated Cliff House Restaurant is open seven days a week for lunch and dinner; call 386-3330 for reservations. The Camera Obscura on the lower terrace is open seven days a week, weather permitting.



Remediation site, Baker Beach, prior to replanting.

Green Medals for Blue and Gold Fleet

The Blue and Gold Fleet has won both the 2004 Department of the Interior and National Park Service Environ-

mental Achievement Awards for, among other things, reducing bilge water by nearly 50 percent and developing a cost-effective fuel mixture that will reduce airborne particulates up to 60 percent. They’ve also worked with the Marine Mammal Center to minimize their crafts’ impact on sea lion populations

Cliff Course and Clean Up

During the foggy days of Fall, life-guards practice cliff rescue skills, and this year they added a clean-up to the mix. Rappelling down Eagle’s Point in Lands End, our crew picked up litter and rope skills at the same time.

Eye in the Sky

As part of a study of natural processes at Ocean Beach, the USGS has mounted a webcam on the Cliff House, focused on the shoreline. Smile—you may become part of the database on your next Ocean Beach stroll!

Cliff House Is Open Again!

Enjoy the views of the Pacific Ocean

When Vaudeville was King at Sutro Baths

Many today wistfully remember hours spent swimming, ice-skating, or visiting the museum at Sutro Baths. But few recall a time when thousands paid 10¢ each to pack the decks and grandstands overlooking the swimming pools and be entertained by the Baths’ Sunday vaudeville performances, band concerts, and swim contests.

The crowds thrilled to extravaganzas such as a “monster May Day festival,” which featured a beautiful queen, triple May poles, 1,000 children in grand march, and the butterfly ballet; Professor Karl, the marvelous “anthropic amphibian” who ate,

drank, smoked, wrote, and slept underwater, in full view of the audience; Professor M.H. Gay and his wonderful dog Jack, the highest-diving dog in the world; Zeda, the boneless boy wonder; world champion Australian swimmer, Charles Cavill, performing his Monte Carlo drowning act; the greatest living one-legged, high-kicking and dancing acrobat, Eddie Dime; three-legged swimming contest; tub race; walking-on-water-20-yards contest; walking-underwater contest, with contestants carrying (and surfacing) with 50-pound dumbbells in each hand; and the 50-yard doughnut race—each swimmer devoured six doughnuts before starting.

Immensely popular, performances at the pools had all but disappeared by

1906, a decade after the Baths opened. As novelty shows and contests gave way to aquatic exhibitions and competitions, the “boneless” boys, diving dogs, and one-legged acrobats slipped into history, recalled now only in the photos, posters, and other memorabilia from the heyday of vaudeville at Sutro Baths.

To see several short films made by Thomas Edison in 1897 of Sutro Baths and its vaudeville performances, visit the Library of Congress’s “American Memory” Website, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/>, and search for “Leander Sisters,” “Cupid and Psyche,” and “Sutro Baths.”

Bob Holloway, NPS Interpretive Ranger

Welcome to the Golden Gate National Parks

Golden Gate National Recreation Area’s mission is to preserve and enhance the natural and cultural resources of the coastal lands north and south of the Golden Gate for the inspiration, education, and recreation of people today, and for future generations. We also work to protect the integrity of our parks’ fragile resources in the challenging context of an urban setting. Finally, we are committed to forging partnerships with the community to strengthen the parks’ relevance to our metropolitan neighbors and to engage the public in stewardship of the parks’ history and lands. We welcome your visit, and encourage you to take advantage of the many recreational opportunities the parklands offer, as well as to become involved as a volunteer at a favorite site.


Brian O'Neill
Superintendent



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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Cover

TOP: A complicated network of girders supported the glass ceiling of Sutro Baths.

CENTER: The Firth Wheel lifted its riders high above Merrie Way.

BOTTOM (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT): Poster advertising the Baths; baseball at East Fort Baker; children on Alcatraz took their fun where they could find—or invent—it.

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www.nps.gov/goga/parknews

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Baseball at East Fort Baker

A Gem of a Diamond

By Mark Prado, Marin Independent Journal

Under the shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge, a ballfield sits on a gently sloping green expanse where decades ago, men came to play baseball amid undulating hills, military housing, and sea air.



Baseball was so popular that soldiers used their own companies' funds to buy equipment; photo ca. 1920.

Marin's waterfront ballpark at East Fort Baker was the centerpiece of a robust municipal and military baseball league competition in the early 20th century. The field still stands today, although it's rarely used. Wild, bright-yellow poppies and magenta-tinged daisies dot the field where pitchers, shortstops, and center-fielders including Lee Pieraccini, "Smoky Joe" Woods, "Pile-driver" Soldavani, and Ducksie McDevitt once threw strikes, hit home runs, and tracked high-flys on Sunday afternoons.

While the players made the game, it was the setting for baseball at East Fort Baker that was spectacular. "It was a beautiful place to watch a ball game," said Ed Ashoff of Strawberry, who was a batboy in the 1920s for the Sausalito Merchants, a team that played at East Fort Baker. "Just a beautiful place."

Ashoff, 85, fondly remembers the field where he spent much of his youth watching the game he loves. "You always had good weather there," said Ashoff, who would later pitch for the Merchants. "The field has hills around it and it was protected from the fog and the wind. You'd look up and see thick fog rolling through the Gate, but the field was sunny." There was no wind for the same reason. "It was always calm, always warm."

MILITARY ROOTS

The field at East Fort Baker came into being after the military took control of the areas around the Golden Gate about the time of the Civil War. The area just east of the bridge in Marin was critical, military strategists believed, to the defense of the port of San Francisco. Military men from all over the country were assigned to the



Two members of the Fort Baker team, 67th Company, Coast Artillery Corps, and unidentified soldiers, prior to WW I.

region in the late 1800s, many leaving families behind. At the same time, the new game of baseball was becoming wildly popular, springing up on dusty lots everywhere, and military officials seized on the baseball fervor. The ballfield at East Fort Baker—as part of the larger parade grounds—appears in photos as early as 1903.

COUNTY LOVED BASEBALL

"It showed up and it became a fixture," said San Rafael resident John Martini, retired NPS curator for military history at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. "From the Civil War on, many forts had baseball diamonds," he said. "There was a lot of inter-regiment rivalry and competition. It was part of military life." The popularity of baseball in the military reflected society's fascination with the game. At the turn of the century, amateur teams sprouted across Marin—among them, the San Rafael Builders, San Anselmo Plumbers, Mill Valley Merchants, Tiburon Pelicans, and the Bermuda Palms. The Sausalito Merchants had no home field, but they convinced the military to allow them to use the East Fort Baker field.

So, it was the waterfront site that the Sausalito team called home for the first two decades of the 20th century, playing host to teams from around the county. "The Merchants even played the army teams," said John Pieraccini, whose Uncle Lee—a government employee and welder—pitched for the

While the teams looked professional—they wore heavy wool uniforms and fitted caps and wielded tree-like bats—for the most part, they were made up of amateurs who just liked to play ball. "The guys were bakers, laborers, night watchmen, butchers; others didn't work very much," Ashoff said with a cackle.

FIELD NOW LITTLE USED

By the time Ashoff began to pitch in the 1930s, the Merchants no longer played at East Fort Baker, instead, they barnstormed their way around the region. In recent decades the field has been used for pick-up games and picnics, but for the most part has gone largely unused. A backstop, pitching rubber, and cement home plate from a more recent era remain for anyone who wants to go out and play, but the old field is in poor shape.

The landscape that surrounds it remains intact, however. The military housing that rings the outfield—visible in 90-year-old photos—still stands. The distant hills framing the field on three sides are as picturesque as ever. From the outfield, the Golden Gate can be seen behind home plate, with the tip of the bridge's North Tower visible in the distance.

Lewis Chambers, whose father played at East Fort Baker in the early 1900s, hopes the field will be restored. "Like so many others, my father loved the game," he said. "Ball fields like that are special places."

This article originally appeared in the April 30, 2000, issue of the *Marin IJ*; slightly edited for space, it is reprinted with the newspaper's permission.

Merchants. The games at East Fort Baker could draw up to 100 people, a decent crowd considering that there was no easy way to get to the field from Sausalito; it's about two miles from downtown to the field. "It was a nice Sunday outing for people. They used to have to walk from Sausalito all the way down to the field," Ashoff said.



Merrie Way

Adolph Sutro's Forgotten Pleasure Grounds

John A. Martini, NPS Curator, Military History, Emeritus

Merrie Way overlooks the ruins of Sutro Baths, and is something of a mystery to modern-day park visitors. Although provided with a city street sign, it doesn't look much like a thoroughfare. A dead-end dirt parking lot, scoured by Pacific winds and bordered by glowering cypress trees, there certainly isn't anything about it that's "merrie." But 110 years ago, Merrie Way was the site of one of Adolph Sutro's many recreational developments near the Cliff House—Sutro's "Pleasure Grounds," a mini-amusement park, complete with rides and midway attractions.



A day at the seaside in the late 1890s wasn't complete without a visit to the many amusements assembled by Adolph Sutro in an area once called a rocky waste. Here, the Firth Wheel can be seen in the background, carrying its passengers high above the Pleasure Grounds and Sutro Baths.

DEVELOPING THE OUTSIDE LANDS

As most Sutro buffs know, Adolph Sutro developed an extensive series of attractions at the western edge of the city's "outside lands" during the 1880s and '90s. The core of his holdings was his home and gardens at Sutro Heights, but his developments eventually grew to include the Cliff House, an outdoor aquarium, Sutro Baths, numerous adjacent shops and cafés, and a street railroad that brought visitors to the area. He also owned hundreds of acres of surrounding dunes, an area known today as the Richmond District.

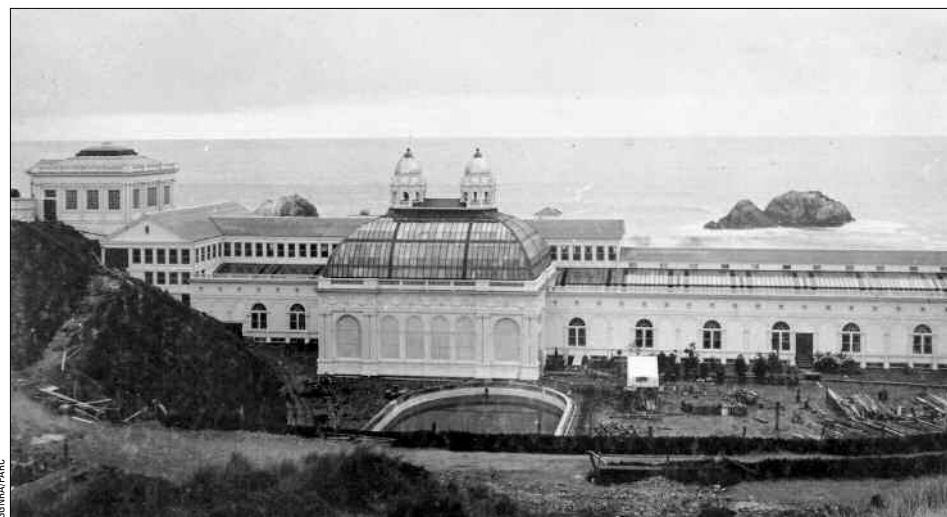
Sutro, an investor who could never quite pass up a bargain, included many recycled buildings and attractions in his growing empire. For example, when the famous Woodward's Gardens auctioned off its holdings in 1893, Sutro bought thousands of dollars worth of "stuffed beasts and birds, relics of the past, curios, bric-a-brac, etc." He also acquired all of the benches, the pipe organ, and several statues, and brought all of it over to his new Sutro Baths.

As construction of the Baths continued, Adolph Sutro found another opportunity to pick up attractions at bargain-basement rates when the 1894 Midwinter Fair sold off many of its holdings. Sutro purchased several

rides and attractions from the fair and had them moved from the fair site in Golden Gate Park to a recently cleared area just east of the Baths, today's Merrie Way. There, along a central midway, Sutro had three of the fair's most popular attractions reconstructed as the "Sutro Pleasure Grounds."

THE PLEASURE GROUNDS

The centerpiece attraction was the 100-foot-diameter "Firth Wheel" with its 16 carriages, which took passengers on 20-minute rides high over the Sutro



It took seven years to build the 3-acre, steel-and-glass palace that housed Sutro Baths. In the foreground is the future site of Merrie Way, Sutro's "Pleasure Grounds."

Baths to view the Pacific Ocean. Across the street were two indoor attractions: the "Mystic Maze," an indoor house of mirrors similar to those still found in many amusement parks, and the "Haunted Swing," a

full-scale optical illusion—visitors entered a large, furnished room, sat down on a glider-type swing in the center, and began gently swinging. Unknown to the visitors, the entire room, which was set on gimbals, would also begin swinging in the opposite direction, giving the people in the glider the illusion that the room was rotating around them. The experience was reported to be very, very unsettling.

Not much is written about the operations of Merrie Way, but its evolution can be tracked through historic photographs and maps of the area. By 1898, the midway had grown to include an embryonic roller coaster (also transplanted from the Midwinter Fair) called the "Scenic Railway," a curiously named ride called the "Springs on Platform," and a cluster of chowder stands built from kiosks also recycled from the Midwinter Fair. At some undetermined point, the Pleasure Grounds' midway was formally named "Merrie Way."

The Pleasure Grounds must not have been long-lived, though, since by 1900 the official insurance maps of the Sutro Baths showed all the Merrie

ed midway. The records don't officially record when the wheel and other attractions were torn down, but photographs of the Sutro area taken after 1923 show only cleared land where the complex once stood. The name Merrie Way persisted on city maps and street signs, though, despite the fact that the sandy roadway provided few clues to the festive attractions for which it had been christened. Around 1954, Merrie Way was enlarged by the city as part of a never-completed renovation of the area above Sutro Heights. The former midway became an open parking lot with dimensions larger than a football field. Today, the midway is a memory, joining the Bella



According to the *San Francisco Daily Report* of June 18, 1894, Adolph Sutro was a man whose "contributions to charity have been numerous and confined to no race or creed. ...He is...one of the most approachable of men."

Union Hotel, Woodward's Gardens, the Chutes on Haight, Tivoli Opera House, Seals Stadium, and Playland at the Beach on the list of lost-but-not-forgotten San Francisco pleasure sites.

21ST-CENTURY AMUSEMENTS

Future plans for Merrie Way call for the construction of a new National Park Service visitor center in the area, and the grading and paving of a parking lot designed to provide safe parking for buses and cars bringing visitors to the area. And the name at least—with its origin in a 14th-century Scottish admonition to "ave ye a goot day, und eat, drink, an make merrie"—lives on.



RECLAIMING THE GARDENS OF ALCATRAZ

“The hillside provided a refuge from disturbances of the prison, the work a release, and it became an obsession. This one thing I would do well.”

Inmate gardener Elliott Michener, Alcatraz #578



In the 1880s, a variety of roses bloomed in the well-tended gardens that flanked Alcatraz's citadel, enjoyed by off-duty soldiers, officers, and their families.

Planted in the late 1800s to soften the harsh face of the Rock, the gardens of Alcatraz were first tended by soldiers, and later, by prisoners, guards, and guards' families. For many of the island's residents, gardening was a relaxing form of recreation and a source of hours of enjoyment.

Today, the gardens are a type of botanical museum—old roses gone wild, gnarled fruit trees, brilliant seasonal bulbs, sturdy scarlet pelargoniums, and plants from around the world. They have also become the center of attention for volunteers interested in restoring this often-overlooked botanical record of the island's past.

A LONG AND COLORFUL HISTORY

The earliest Alcatraz gardens were created in the late 1800s when the US Army began fortifying this small, formerly barren island. Using soil brought from the nearby post at Angel Island, the gardens were constructed on Alcatraz's southeastern slope, below today's concrete cellhouse. Thanks to an army and civic beautification program after the turn of the century, hundreds of trees and shrubs, and pounds of clover, bluegrass, nasturtium, and poppy seeds were planted on the island.

After the federal Bureau of Prisons took control of Alcatraz in 1933, Freddie Reichel, secretary to the warden, became the gardens' guardian angel. Under his care, a beautiful rose garden flourished, and the westward face of Alcatraz was cultivated into a lawn and two terraced ornamental gardens. Flowers and shrubs were also planted around the apartments that housed the correctional officers and their families.

Unfortunately, the gardens were largely forgotten after the prison was shut down in 1963, and the harsh climate and lack of water took their toll. In an effort to address this neglect, the Parks Conservancy and National Park Service commissioned a study to help guide plans to preserve this historic landscape.

The study revealed the presence of 140 different species and hybrids on the island, including 19th-century hybrids that are virtually impossible to obtain in commercial nurseries today, and hardy old rambling roses such as 'Félicité et Pérpetue' (dating from 1828), 'Russeliana' (prior to 1837), 'Dorothy Perkins' (1901), and 'Excelsa' (1914). The study also indicated that action must soon be taken if we are to preserve this valuable horticultural resource.

GARDEN RESTORATION UNDERWAY

In 2003, the Parks Conservancy launched the Alcatraz Garden Restoration Program in partnership with the National Park Service and the Garden Conservancy, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving exceptional American gardens for public education and enjoyment.

Today, volunteer gardeners work alongside garden restoration specialists, helping restore this unique landscape to its former grandeur. Historic species are being mapped, weeds removed, old plants salvaged and nurtured, and cuttings propagated for the future. As the restoration progresses, the beauty and complexity of these once-manicured gardens will emerge, a tribute to those who tenderly cared for them more than a half-century ago as well as to those who labor to save them today.

How to Volunteer in the Gardens

Volunteers are needed Wednesdays or Fridays, from 8:45 AM to 12:30 PM, on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Training, tools, and transportation to and from Alcatraz are provided. Through the project, volunteers will be introduced to the stories of the gardens and have the opportunity to visit some areas not accessible to the public. As an added bonus, garden volunteers arrive on Alcatraz before other visitors, allowing them to experience the island during its most tranquil time of day.

For information and a volunteer application, please phone the Parks Conservancy's volunteer coordinator, Joan Chaplick, at (415) 561-3034 ext. 3429, or send an email to jchaplick@parksconservancy.org. This is not a drop-in program; we are seeking volunteers who are willing to lend a hand for a minimum of one to three months.

The Parks Conservancy is also seeking corporate and community groups of 15 to 20 adults to help restore the Alcatraz gardens. Please contact Joan Chaplick if your organization is interested in scheduling a weekday restoration project on the island.

Do You Enjoy the Parks? JOIN US!

More than ever before, the Golden Gate National Parks need the support of people like you. By joining the Conservancy—the parks' nonprofit partner—you'll become part of the effort to preserve the national parks at the Golden Gate.

Your support helps restore native habitats, maintain miles of trails, preserve historic landmarks, and develop park education programs for young people.

JOIN THE PARKS CONSERVANCY AND YOU'LL RECEIVE:

- Two membership cards plus a special gift.
- *Gateways*, the quarterly membership newsletter filled with news of the parks and tips on special places.
- *Park Adventures*, the quarterly calendar of NPS and special membership programs and events, delivered to your home.
- Free monthly e-mail newsletter.
- Invitations to members-only walks, talks, and excursions.
- Discounts at park bookstores.
- Free use of the Alcatraz and Fort Point audio tours.

Yes, I would like to join the Parks Conservancy. Enclosed is my membership contribution of:

- \$35 Park Partner — Receive all benefits of membership
- \$50 Park Sponsor — Receive the award-winning book, *Guide to the Parks*
- \$100 Park Steward — Receive a Mount Tamalpais sweatshirt

Donations are tax-deductible. For information, visit our Web site www.parksconservancy.org. To join by phone, call the Parks Conservancy at (415) 4R-PARKS.

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 Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Building 201, Fort Mason, San Francisco, CA 94123

THE GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVANCY—OUR MISSION

The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is a nonprofit membership organization created to preserve the Golden Gate National Parks, enhance the experiences of park visitors, and build a community dedicated to conserving the parks for the future.

We seek private contributions to augment federal funds for the parks, and work in collaboration with the National Park Service and the Presidio Trust to improve park sites, enlist volunteers in restoration projects, provide services and education programs for visitors and local communities, and engage diverse audiences in the national parks at the Golden Gate.





Adolph Sutro's Glass Palace

Amusements and Diversions

By Wolfgang Schubert, National Park Service Docent

Wooden-railed walkways overlooked vacant space covered by a high glass ceiling. Vast walls of seaside windows, some broken by windstorms, were saltwater-glazed by the ocean surge that almost reached into the unused pools. The noise of a loud compressor echoed up the palm-lined grand stairs, running to freeze water for the inside ice-skating rink. The roar of the sea penetrated everywhere in the white and weathered Victorian Roman-Revival building that housed the venerable Sutro Baths, its crystal waves reflecting sunlight into Adolph Sutro's glass palace.



Victorian bathing beauties. In 1898, Sutro Baths had 1,965 ladies' suits, 13,491 men's suits, and 5,000 towels for rent; its laundry was equipped to sanitize up to 20,000 suits per day.

This was Sutro Baths in the early 1960s. By 1966, the baths had been condemned, and on June 26, bulldozers smashed into its walls, clearing the way for a housing complex. That night, a fire was set in the ruins. For three days and nights, sea-scented timber burned and shattered glass fell. People watching from nearby ridgetops applauded when large portions of the roof caved in, as though they were enjoying this eerie spectacle.

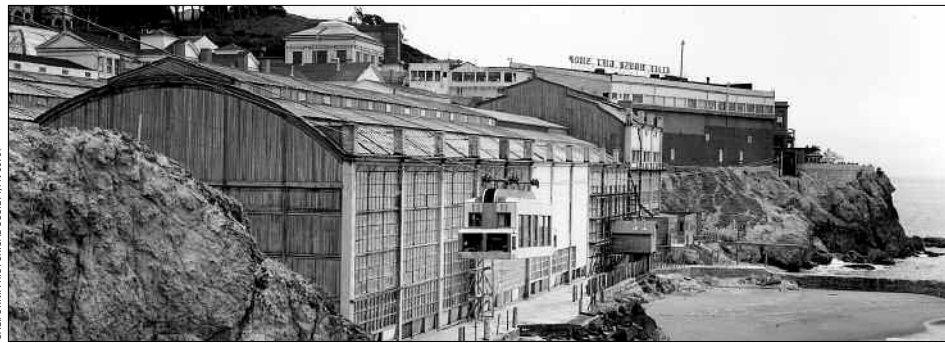
Today, nestled between the Cliff House and Point Lobos, several rectangular foundations in a large brackish pond remind us that here once stood the world's largest salt-water baths. One could compare the complex to Roman baths, the idea taken from the *caldarium* of Roman times. But Sutro Baths was much more than a public natatorium or a grand palace where the privileged gathered; it was a place for the people.

A RECREATIONAL DISTRICT EVOLVES

When Adolph Sutro bought large portions of what was then called "Outside Lands" at Rancho Punta de los Lobos, more charmingly known as the "Great Sandwaste," many thought he had lost his mind. Yet, he planned for the future; his investments were long-term. Bit by bit, improvements in the salubrious suburb of Richmond were beginning to make it an attractive place for town folk to move. The Ferries & Cliff House Railroad ran along Lands End, and the "People's Road" connected downtown to the Baths, Cliff House, and Sutro Heights.

All of them delivered the "magnificent marine view" their advertisements promised.

Earlier, in 1887, in a tunnel at Point Lobos that was 153 feet long, Adolph Sutro is said to have watched marine life and tidal movement. Was that the moment he had the idea to show nature to a larger public? Some say that initially, open pools were planned for Sutro Baths. Possibly recalling Ocean Beach's chilly weather, Sutro decided instead to build a massive three-story structure right next to the ocean, with square tanks that would be filled with seawater.



Between 1955 and 1961, a quarter bought a ride on the Sky Tram, which carried visitors above the pounding Pacific surf from the Cliff House, past the Baths, and to Point Lobos.

FOR THE PLEASURE OF BATHERS

A breakwater 700 feet long, using 750,000 cubic feet of rocks weighing almost a million pounds, was constructed. The Baths themselves were housed in a wood-and-metal structure that was an amazing 500 feet long and contained six salt-water tanks and one fresh-water basin, with a capacity of 1,804,962 gallons. Taking advantage of the tidal movement, the swimming basins were filled by combers at high tide. Tanks filled in one hour, and

emptied in five hours through a pipe vented into the sea next to Seal Rocks. Over 1,000 panes of glass covered the building that also boasted 517 changing rooms, a laundry, and even a music organ with large pipes. Chutes were installed, slides mounted, and 30 swinging rings fixed—all for the pleasure of bathers.

On March 14, 1896, after seven years of construction, Sutro Baths debuted, and the public was dazzled. The baths were open from 7 AM to 11 PM, and it cost 10 cents to enter; if the visitor wanted to swim, there was an additional 25-cent charge. (To put this in perspective, during this time, a clerk in town earned \$12 per week, and a postage stamp cost 2 cents.)

A LONG, SLOW DESCENT

The decline started in 1925, with a drop to attendance due to the closing of the railroad along Lands End. Then, in early 1930, stringent regulations by the California Board of Health made operating the pools more difficult. Finally, as the Depression gripped the nation and the state, other forms of recreation became widely available to the public. The Baths struggled financially until Adolph G. Sutro (known as

Sutro's!) On the outside, the entrance was revamped and lit by a large neon sign that blazed between two colorfully painted towers.

In 1937, in a final effort at commercial success, Gustav converted the largest pool into a skating rink. But by the 1940s, war loomed and the deficit became too high to maintain. After WWII, in need of extensive—and expensive—repair, all the tanks were closed. Finally, in 1951, Gustav offered the Sutro Baths for sale.

A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

On September 1, 1952, George K. Whitney rescued the rococo structure just hours before wreckers were scheduled to raze it. After he purchased the complex, he closed all swimming tanks, retaining only the ice rink.

Now, the baths had new attractions, a waterfall and (in 1955) the SkyTram, a 1,000 foot ride from the Cliff House to Point Lobos built by Roebling & Sons, of Brooklyn Bridge fame. The SkyTram ended up over the world's only saltwater-waterfall and was a popular means of watching the surf. The tram made its last trip in 1961, and Sutro's closed for good on March 1, 1966, and as was mentioned earlier, burned to the ground in June.

Finally, developers sold the site to the National Park Service for \$5.5 million, and the landmark ruins of the Baths become part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Very little of what Adolph Sutro built remains. His Victorian Cliff House was destroyed by fire, his private residence was torn down, and his Sutro Baths & Museum went up in smoke. Yet, his vision and legacy remain, fascinating and mesmerizing, not the least to generations of Californians who remember nostalgically the Baths' *fin de siècle* atmosphere, redolent of saltwater and musk.

Wolfgang Schubert lives in the Presidio; as a NPS docent, he leads the popular monthly "Legends of Lands End" walk. He welcomes comments on this article and may be contacted at sutrohistory@mac.com.



The Recreation Yard, USP Alcatraz

A Taste of Freedom

John Moran, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy

About the size of a regulation soccer field, USP Alcatraz's small recreation yard was a whirlwind of activity on weekends. Some convicts played half-court basketball, and others pitched horseshoes. Some spent their hours simply watching the ships navigate the bay and pass underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, off to far-away port—though many considered these views to be a subtle form of torture.



Inmates take advantage of a sunny 1940s day in the recreation yard; under the watchful eyes of the tower guards, the men converse, play baseball, and engage in lively games of bridge behind the backstop, sheltered from the wind by the yard's high concrete walls.

Even bad weather didn't deter the inmates from their time outside. If it was raining, the men wore raincoats, and if it was particularly cold, they wore surplus Navy pea coats and woolen caps. The only condition that would prevent the convicts from enjoying their time in the recreation yard was fog. If the rifle-toting guards on the catwalks could not see clearly, the yard was closed.

Today—as then—the first thing you notice when you enter the recreation yard is the wind. No matter what the season, no matter what time of day, a strong, cold wind seems to blow constantly across the yard, intensified by the high cement walls that enclose it. How could anyone enjoy themselves here? Yet, during the federal penitentiary era, time in the yard was one of the inmates' most sought-after privileges; and indeed, access to this yard was a privilege, not a right.

Part of the explanation for the yard's popularity can be found in the words of former inmate Morton Sobell, who said that it was a place where men “had a choice ... this was freedom.” Upon conviction, each man had forfeited his freedom to choose even the basic things that most of us take for granted: what and when he ate, with whom he associated, when he slept,

where he worked. All these things were determined by the prison system. But twice a week, on Saturday and Sunday, he did have a choice about what he did for recreation.

Most recreational activities on Alcatraz carried with them their own peculiar set of rules. Handball games were watched with great interest, but gambling on the outcome was strictly forbidden. Baseball was very popular, but any ball hit over the wall was ruled an out rather than a home run. And behind the baseball backstop, somewhat protected from the ever-present wind, small groups of men could be found sitting on cushions and playing bridge with wooden tiles instead of cards, worlds removed from their surroundings.

Bridge was a favorite pastime of scores of convicts on the rock—former inmate Jim Quillen noted that Culbertson's *Beginner's Book of Bridge* was the most-read book in the prison library—but the game was played differently here. Because a convict could scrape off the cellulose covering on a deck of cards and make a crude explosive, playing cards were banned. In lieu of cards, the convicts used dominoes; each tile was marked with a corresponding suit. And in truth, these wooden tiles were probably better

suited to the windy yard—a regulation playing card might wind up being blown over the fence and lost, like the baseballs.

But by far the most favored form of recreation on Alcatraz was the art of conversation. During the first four years of the federal penitentiary era (between 1934 and 1938), a rule of silence was enforced. The inmates were only allowed to speak to one another across the dining room table, while on break from their jobs, and in the recreation yard. After spending a week alone inside a small, 5-foot-by-9-foot cell, many men looked forward to going into the recreation yard and simply talking.

Some spoke of days past and of the exploits that brought them here. Others used the time to plan escapes. Some spoke about the Brooklyn (and later, Los Angeles) Dodgers, and opening of the horseracing season at Golden Gate Fields. What they spoke about was up to them, and that was their form of recreation, exercising freedom of choice.

The recreation yard on Alcatraz was small, cold, and windswept, but for the convicts on Alcatraz it was much more than that: It was their only taste of freedom.

Escape from Boredom

For Alcatraz's “involuntary inmates”—the children of the correctional officers—life was far from ordinary. Though many of the games they occupied themselves with were commonplace (marbles, touch football, riding bikes), others were inspired by the setting. Instead of “cops and robbers,” the kids played “prison,” and enacted break-outs. Even toy guns were not allowed on Alcatraz, so the gun of choice was a banana; it fit just right into a holster. If bananas weren't available, Popsicle sticks were used.

Frontier day was the biggest event of the year, along with watermelon-fests and Halloween trick-or-treating. The Officers' Club was also an area for family fun. There was a two-lane bowling alley, a soda fountain, the Alcatraz Ballet Company, dances, parties, potluck suppers, and bridge club for the adults. There were even weddings and an Alcatraz prom (couples must've behaved themselves very carefully on *that date!*).

The island itself also provided its children with some less common pastimes—fishing and seastar collecting; sailing across the Parade Ground on roller skates, propelled by wind caught in a sail made from a sheet; and playing pranks on the bay's boaters. This usually consisted of enticing boats close to the island, which earned the sailors a stern warning, issued through a bullhorn by a dock guard. In one instance, though, the stakes were raised when a warning shot was fired, hitting the boat's sail and ripping it down the middle. The kids scrambled to absent themselves, the sailor gunned the boat's auxiliary engine, and boredom was thwarted once again.

Monica Cobis

The National Parks at the Golden Gate



Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA)

This 75,500-acre national park is located where the Pacific Ocean meets San Francisco Bay. Extending north and south of the Golden Gate, the park offers a spectacular blend of natural beauty, historic features, open space, and urban development as well as a vast coastal preserve along its shoreline. Muir Woods National Monument, Fort Point National Historic Site, and the Presidio of San Francisco are within GGNRA's boundaries and are managed as part of GGNRA.

EMERGENCY (POLICE, FIRE, AMBULANCE).....911

Park Visitor/Information Centers (area code 415 unless otherwise noted)

Crissy Field	561-7761 (Center) or 561-3040 (Warming Hut)
Fort Funston	239-2366
Fort Mason/GGNRA Headquarters (Monday-Friday)	561-4700
TDD/V	556-2766
Fort Point	556-1693
TDD	561-4399
Marin Headlands	331-1540
Muir Woods	388-2596
Pacifica	(650) 355-4122
Presidio	561-4323
TTY	561-4314

If the park destination you wish to visit or learn more about does not have a corresponding phone number listed on this page, please phone GGNRA Headquarters at 561-4700 (Monday through Friday) and park staff will assist you.

ADDITIONAL USEFUL NUMBERS

(area code 415 unless otherwise noted)

Alcatraz Program Information	561-4900
Beach Chalet Visitor Center, Golden Gate Park	751-2766
Camping Reservations	331-1540 (backcountry sites) or 800-365-2267 (Kirby Cove)
Crissy Field Center	561-7690
Fort Mason Center	441-3400
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy	561-3000
Golden Gate Raptor Observatory ..	331-0730
Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary	561-6625
NPS Volunteer Information	561-4755
Nike Missile Site	331-1453
Park Archives and Records Center ..	561-4807
Point Reyes National Seashore	464-5100
Presidio Habitat Restoration Team ..	561-4848

San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

Maritime Museum	561-7100
Visitor Center	447-5000
Special Park Uses Group	561-4300
Stinson Beach Weather	868-1922

NATIONAL PARKS ON THE INTERNET

Golden Gate National Recreation Area	www.nps.gov/goga
Alcatraz	www.nps.gov/alcatraz
Fort Point	www.nps.gov/fopo
Muir Woods	www.nps.gov/muwo
Nike Missile Site	www.nps.gov/goga/mahe/nimi
Presidio	www.nps.gov/prsf

ADDITIONAL PARK-RELATED SITES

Crissy Field Center	www.crissyfield.org
Fort Mason Center	www.fortmason.org
Golden Gate Club	www.goldengateclub.com
Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy	www.parksconservancy.org
Golden Gate Raptor Observatory	www.ggro.org

Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary	www.farallones.org
Presidio Trust	www.presidio.gov
San Francisco NMHP	www.nps.gov/safr

The National Park Service Web page at www.nps.gov includes ParkNet, an online magazine providing natural and cultural history, travel and tourism information, and basic information on all national park sites.

GULF OF THE FARALLONES NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

The sanctuary comprises 948 square nautical miles of the Pacific Ocean off the California coastline, west and north of San Francisco and includes the Gulf of the Farallones and the nearshore waters of Bodega, Tomales, and Drakes bays, Estero de San Antonio, Estero Americano, Duxbury Reef, and Bolinas Lagoon. It is managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and provides special protection and management for marine areas of national significance, for the benefit of the public and the world's oceans.

Read ParkNews on the Web:
www.nps.gov/goga/parknews