



Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo is as mysterious as the waters he explored. While much is unknown, we are certain about this: Cabrillo was the first European to set foot on what is now the West Coast of the United States. His expedition brought Spain's first great era of exploration to a close.

Fifty years after Columbus landed in America, Cabrillo sailed north from Navidad in Mexico. His orders were to map the coast to the north, open trade with China and the Spice Islands, and find the Strait of Anián (a mythical passage from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic). In addition to these challenges, he was to claim any new lands for the king of Spain.

Born around 1500 on the Iberian Peninsula, Cabrillo moved to Seville, Spain's capital and major port, in 1510. He sailed to Panama as part of the Pedrarias colony in 1514 and arrived in Cuba by 1517–18. He then joined Hernán Cortés' forces in Mexico as a crossbowman in the conquest of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán (Mexico City). In 1523 he served among 270 Spanish soldiers allied with 7,000 Tlaxcalan warriors that the conquistador Pedro de Alvarado led into Guatemala. Ambitious and well educated, Cabrillo became a landowner, miner, and shipbuilder. After Alvarado died in an uprising, Antonio de Mendoza, viceroy of New Spain, gave Cabrillo command of the vessels *San Salvador*, *La Victoria*, and *San Miguel*.

Un puerto cerrado y muy bueno
On September 28, 1542, Cabrillo's armada entered a harbor that he described as "a closed and very good port." Coastal sage

scrub covered the hills and valleys. Cabrillo stepped ashore on a strand of beach near modern-day Ballast Point and named the area San Miguel. It was the site of modern San Diego. He waited out a storm, replenished his supply of fresh water, and resumed his voyage up the coast. He sighted the islands now called Santa Catalina and San Clemente and named them San Salvador and La Victoria after his vessels. A day later the expedition turned toward the mainland, into what is now San Pedro Bay. The summary log recounts that the horizon was smoky. Cabrillo named it *Bahía de Los Fumos* (Bay of Smokes), which is today's Los Angeles.

Unsolved Mystery
In November the expedition stopped for water on the island Spaniards had dubbed *Isla de la Posesión*, one of the Channel Islands. Exactly what happened is a mystery. One account says that Cabrillo, rushing to aid his men during a fight with the Chumash, broke his leg when he jumped from a boat. Another source notes that he had broken his arm near the shoulder on an earlier visit to La Posesión. Whatever happened, complications ensued. Cabrillo died on January 3, 1543, his mission unfulfilled. The likely cause of death was infection and internal bleeding.

Chief pilot Bartolomé de Ferrer (Ferrelo) took command and headed north. He may have reached the Rogue River area in Oregon. In March *La Victoria* disappeared in a storm. Reunited after three weeks, Ferrer and the crew abandoned the expedition and returned to Navidad on April 14, 1543.

Although the expedition claimed over 800 miles of coastline for Spain, it could not accomplish all the viceroy had hoped. Information gained about landmarks, winds, and currents, however, made later explorations safer. A west-to-east Pacific crossing 22 years later, based partly on Cabrillo's data, set up trade routes between New Spain and the Philippines. The expedition paved the way for the Manila galleons and helped link the world's continents. The Spanish age of exploration gave way to the Colonial era.

Bayside Trail This trail (2 miles roundtrip) descends about 300 feet through native coastal sage scrub and passes remnants of the coastal defense system that protected the harbor during World Wars I and II. No restrooms, drinking water, or beach access.

More Information
Cabrillo National Monument is one of over 425 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

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Cabrillo (statue, above left) navigated with the help of an astrolabe to calculate the positions of stars, half hourglass to measure time, and quadrant to determine position at sea (above, left to right).

Many people believe this stone (above) once marked the grave of Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo. Found on Santa Rosa Island in 1901, it is etched with a cross, the stick figure of a man, and the letters JR.

The Kumeyaay



Cabrillo knew the land he was exploring for Spain was occupied by Native peoples. Entering a harbor, he saw Kumeyaay ('Ipay and Tipay) on the shore. Some wore their long hair in braids and with feathers or shells. Some men wore capes of sea otter, seal, or deer skin. Initial interactions were tense. Cabrillo and his men withdrew but returned later with gifts.

The Kumeyaay mimicked men with lances on horseback and painted armor on themselves to explain that other Spaniards, now several days' journey inland, had killed many Native people.



Low tide along the Cabrillo coast
NPS / E. AUBREY-CORCHEA

Cabrillo's flagship was described as a 100-foot, full-rigged galleon with a 10-foot draft. It would have been quite cramped, with up to 100 officers, crew, enslaved people, and Augustinian priests. Today you can tour a modern replica built by San Diego Maritime Museum.
NPS / JOHN BACHELOR

Plan Your Visit



Enjoy the Park

Visitor Center The visitor center, open daily, has information, exhibits, films, panoramic harbor views, and alternate language and braille brochures.

Cabrillo National Monument Foundation operates the Cabrillo Store, which has publications on area cultural and military history, plants, and animals.

Seeing the Park The park is open for day use only (fee). It is an easy walk from the visitor center to the Cabrillo statue, military history exhibit, Old Point Loma Lighthouse, assistant keeper's quarters and

Self-guiding exhibits along walkways and at overlooks explain the area's plants, animals, and history. There is no food other than vending machines, but you may picnic on park benches.

For a Safe Visit

Theft Theft can happen wherever you travel. Don't tempt thieves—lock your valuables out of sight or keep them with you.

Pets Please leave pets at home. If you bring them, they are allowed only on the Coastal Trail and must be on a six-foot leash at all times. Pets left in vehicles even for a short time may suffer heat stroke and die.

Waste Take your trash and recyclables with you when you leave or put them in the bins provided.

Cliffs and Tide Pools Sandstone cliffs are very dangerous. Stay back from edges—they can give way, and falls can be fatal. Tidepool rocks are slippery and barnacles sharp; wear sturdy, non-slip shoes.

Trails Stay on trails to prevent erosion and protect sensitive plants.

Wildlife Beware of rattlesnakes and biting animals. Do not put your hands or feet in places you cannot see. Do not feed wildlife.

Additional Regulations Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park. Do not release plants or animals.

For other regulations, including firearms and drones, check the park website.

Emergencies call 911

Getting Here The park is in San Diego at the end of Point Loma (map, right).

By Bus: Public buses make limited trips to and from the park (but not to the tidepool area) from the Old

Town Transit Center, transferring at Shelter Island. Check sdmts.com for current schedule.

By Vehicle:
• From southbound I-5 take Rosecrans St. (CA 209) exit; turn right on Cañon St.; turn left onto Catalina Blvd.
• From northbound I-5 take Pacific Hwy. to Barnett; turn left on Rosecrans St.
• From westbound I-8 take Rosecrans St. exit; turn right on Cañon St.; turn left onto Catalina Blvd. Follow the signs to the park.



Exploring Cabrillo Today



Tide pools support diverse life forms that are sensitive to handling and trampling by humans and other animals.

TIDE POOL—NPS.
BAT STAR—© PHILLIP ROULLARD

Life on the Edge: The Rocky Intertidal Zone

Tides control the rhythm of life along the ocean's shore. Marine plants and animals living in the rocky intertidal zone have adapted to harsh conditions of pounding surf, intermittent exposure to sun and drying wind, and sharp changes in temperature, oxygen, and salinity. Here you find shore crabs, spongy dead man's fingers, bat stars (left), surf grass, sea hares, and other plants and animals.

Cabrillo National Monument has one of the best-preserved rocky intertidal areas open to the public on southern California's coast. This marine habitat's survival depends on the health of the

ocean and land around it. Changes in one environment alter the other: Oil spills, erosion and sediment buildup, trash, and polluted runoff can destroy the tide pools.

Survival of the plants and animals in the rocky intertidal zone also depends on you. Please walk gently. Removing a plant or animal from its environment or even moving it from one side of a tide pool to the other could kill it. All forms of life in tide pools are protected by federal law and should not be disturbed or removed. Please observe the natural behavior of these animals in their native environment and do not handle them.



Sea anemones are predatory marine invertebrates that use their tentacles to catch prey.
NPS / DAN RICHARDS



Adult gray whales weigh from 20 to 45 tons and may grow to 50 feet long. Their cruising speed is two to four miles per hour. They can dive deeper than 200 feet and stay underwater for as long as 20 minutes.

NPS / SALVADOR BRU

Watching Gray Whales

Gray whales pass Point Loma on their yearly roundtrip migration of 12,000 miles. They leave summer feeding grounds in the Arctic in September and return to the Baja California Sur bays, where females bear calves.

In spring they head north. Cows with calves are last to leave the lagoons. The herd that passes here was so heavily hunted that by the 1920s only a few thousand remained. National appeals and protection by international treaties saved them from extinction. Now over 20,000 gray whales migrate this route. Viewing is best in January and February. Watch for their spout, or blow, beyond the kelp beds. When a whale surfaces to breathe, it exhales a plume of air and water about 15 feet into the air.

A Coastal Mediterranean Ecotype

Plant communities on Point Loma—coastal sage succulent scrub, southern maritime chaparral, southern coastal bluff scrub, and southern foredune scrub—are among the few remaining protected stands of this ecotype. This blend of aromatic sages, low-growing shrubs, succulents, flowers, and grasses is home for abundant native mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles.

Development has swallowed over 70 percent of this ecotype in southern California. Hundreds of native species are endangered, threatened, or extinct. The National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Navy, US Coast Guard, Department of Veterans Affairs, and City of San Diego work to preserve these rare, sensitive communities. The resulting Point Loma Ecological Conservation Area hosts diverse wildlife: peregrine falcon, red-tailed hawk, gray fox, California ground squirrel, cottontail, western fence and side-blotched lizards, Anna's hummingbird, southern Pacific rattlesnake, coyote, western red bat, and California trapdoor spider as well as plants like wart-stemmed *Ceanothus*.



Bayside Trail follows a former US Army roadway through the coastal Mediterranean ecotype. This plant community is unusual here because it has many succulents like prickly pear and dudleya. Toyon, lemonade berry, encelia, black sage, and chaparral broom also grow along the trail. Native plants are often unable to compete with nonnative invaders; do not release plants or animals into the park.

NPS



Buckwheat adds variety to the colors of the hill-sides all year.

NPS



Costa's (above), rufous, and Allen's hummingbirds may be seen during migration. Anna's hummingbirds live here year-round.

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Indian paintbrush grows in the sandstone cliffs.

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Defending the Harbor

Point Loma forms a natural protective barrier at the entrance of San Diego Bay. A sandstone rampart jutting into the sea, the peninsula rises 422 feet and provides strategic views of the harbor and ocean. In 1852 the US government recognized this important landmark and designated the area as a military reserve. In 1899 the War Department dedicated Fort Rosecrans and, over the years, built a series of gun batteries.

During World Wars I and II military facilities on the point provided vital coast and harbor defense systems. Between 1918 and 1943, the US Army built searchlight bunkers, fire-control stations (right), and gun batteries. The largest guns were at Battery Ashburn, west of the park entrance, where two 16-inch guns could fire 2,300-pound shells nearly 30 miles out to sea. The military also painted the Old Point Loma Lighthouse olive green. They used it as a command post, radio station, and quarters for enlisted service members and their families.



Fire-control stations helped batteries direct their gunfire. The top bunker served as a battery command post. The bottom bunker was used as a base-end station, where observers could track enemy targets and relay their positions to the command posts and gun batteries. This information was used to aim the guns accurately.

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Robert Israel was the lighthouse keeper for 20 years. He worked 70 hours a week to operate and maintain the light, leaving little leisure time. He often spent his free time with cards and conversation in the kitchen.

© CLIFF DICKEY



Kerosene oil lamps gave light for long evenings.

© CLIFF DICKEY



The parlor served as the lighthouse keeper's office. The family also entertained guests here.

The round shell picture by Maria Israel above the mantel is typical of many she sold to earn extra income.

© CLIFF DICKEY

The assistant lighthouse keeper's quarters (right) and old Point Loma lighthouse (far right)

© STEVEN C. TIETSWORTH

Old Point Loma Lighthouse

It is a reminder of different times: of sailing ships and oil lamps and the people who tended these isolated coastal lights. It was a demanding job. A dedicated keeper was on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with no vacations. In 1851 the US Coastal Survey selected this headland as the site for a navigational aid. The crest stood 422 feet above sea level and over-

looked the bay and ocean. At the time it was the highest-elevation lighthouse in the United States and seemed like the ideal location.

Builders completed the lighthouse in 1854. In 1855 they installed a Third Order Fresnel lens, the best technology of that day. At dusk on November 15, 1855, keeper James P. Keating lit the oil lamp for the first time. For the next 36 years, except on foggy nights, the light welcomed sailors to San Diego harbor. The light was visible 26 to 28 miles, but mariners reported masthead sightings of the light from 30 to 32 miles. One unconfirmed report claimed to see the light from 39 miles away. Eleven keepers and 22 assistant keepers, including two women, Eliza Jenkins and Maria Israel, tended the light.

But what seemed like the right location had a serious flaw. Fog and low clouds often obscured the light. On March 23, 1891, keeper Robert Israel extinguished the lamp for the last time. Boarding up the lighthouse, Israel, with his wife Maria and their family, moved into a new light station at the bottom of the hill.

