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POINT SUR LIGHTSTATION

PARK REOPENED AND RESTORING

Landmark park set back by pandemic is welcoming visitors again



PHOTOS BY MCKENZIE PRILLAMAN — HERALD CORRESPONDENT

John and Carol O'Neil in front of Point Sur lighthouse. They are the chair and historian of the Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers, respectively, and have been volunteering at Point Sur Historic State Park since 1994.

By McKenzie Prillaman
newsroom
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In early March 2020, Point Sur Lightstation welcomed its largest volunteer training class in years. Approximately 80 people were ready to give their time to the historic site. But the first day of training took an unexpected turn.

"We were introducing ourselves to each other, and the (state park) ranger came in and said, 'You can't meet'" because of COVID-19 safety protocols, recalled Carol O'Neil, a volunteer at Point Sur Lightstation and historian of the Central Coast Lighthouse Keepers. California State Parks owns Point Sur Historic State Park and manages volunteers while the nonprofit CCLK supports activities.

Right before the pandemic, the light station was ready to greet visitors once

again after a 14-month closure. Three bridges on the road leading up to the site had required repairs. But COVID-19 forced a shutdown that Point Sur Lightstation, like so many other destinations, hasn't fully recovered from.

"It's been three years since we closed with the bridges, and we still haven't brought back the number of tours we would normally have," Carol O'Neil said. Currently, volunteers lead three-hour tours twice per week: Saturdays at 10 a.m. and Wednesdays at 1 p.m. They would typically host five in that timespan.

Today, the lighthouse flashes every 15 seconds at night thanks to a solar-powered LED. But between 1889 and 1972, lightkeepers had to constantly maintain a kerosene lamp at the heart of the building's 18-foot-tall, 7,000-pound Fresnel lens. Highway 1 didn't exist



Point Sur lighthouse flashes at 270 feet above sea level and sits on a mound of volcanic rock.

ist when the flame was first ignited, so lightkeepers and their families lived in a little community atop the volcanic hill where the lighthouse resides. Now, Point Sur Lightstation is California's only complete turn-of-the-century light station open to the public.

The number of available tours depends on how many volunteers the light station has. These passionate individuals drive nearly all operations there — from running the gift shop to repairing buildings.

Carol O'Neil and her husband
LIGHTHOUSE » PAGE 3

RUSSIA

Putin readies nuclear forces

By Yuras Karmanau, Jim Heintz, Vladimir Isachenkov and Dasha Litvinova
The Associated Press

KYIV, UKRAINE » President Vladimir Putin dramatically escalated East-West tensions by ordering Russian nuclear forces put on high alert Sunday, while Ukraine's embattled leader agreed to talks with Moscow as Putin's troops and tanks drove deeper into the country.

Putin cited "aggressive statements" by NATO in issuing a directive to increase the readiness of his country's nuclear weapons — a step that raised fears that the invasion of Ukraine could boil over into nuclear war, whether by design or mistake.

The Russian leader is "potentially putting in play forces that, if there's a miscalculation, could make things much, much more dangerous," said a senior U.S. defense official, speaking on condition.

RUSSIA » PAGE 4

ECONOMY

Biden's sanctions may allow Moscow profit from oil, gas

By Josh Boak
The Associated Press

There is a glaring carve-out in President Joe Biden's sanctions against Russia: Oil and natural gas from that country will continue to flow freely to the rest of the world and money will keep flowing into Russia.


Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Biden defended his decision to preserve access to Russian energy in order "to limit the pain the American people are feeling at the gas pump." But some academics, lawmakers and other analysts say that excluding an industry at the heart of the Russian economy essentially limits the sanctions and could embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin.

SANCTIONS » PAGE 4

<p>ASIA North Korea tests ballistic missile North Korea launched a missile into the sea in a resumption of weapons tests while focus is on Ukraine. PAGE A7</p>		<p>EUROPE Germany arms Ukraine in a historic shift Germany's decision to send weapons to Ukraine, citing a "new reality," is a break from its recent policies. PAGE A6</p>	<p>STATE OF THE UNION State of disunity on cusp of Biden speech America's strength is being sharply tested from both within and afar, making Biden a wartime president. PAGE A5</p>	<p>COVID-19 Don't know how to make a booster appointment? Visit Monterey County Health Department webpage at https://bit.ly/3qtjYUO for links to schedules and registration.</p>
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Lighthouse

FROM PAGE 1

band John, the chair of the Lighthouse Keepers, have been volunteering at Point Sur Lightstation since 1994. Before then, John O'Neil was in the military, so the couple had lived in various locations around the world.

"When we retired, we came back to Monterey where we had been stationed once," he said. "And we needed something to do."

"So here we are," Carol O'Neil added.

The pair quickly fell in love with the light station. They briefly moved overseas after starting their volunteer work, but even then, Carol O'Neil continued writing for the Lighthouse Keepers' quarterly newsletter. After two years, they returned to Monterey.

"It's the people that we get to volunteer with," she explained. "That's why we keep coming back."

The light station has opened and closed at various times throughout the pandemic, and volunteers have come and gone. But those who remained have kept themselves busy.

"We did a lot of work during that closure," John O'Neil said. Today, a group of about 20 people takes care of maintenance, preservation and restoration of the light station's numerous historical buildings.

At the communal apartments where assistant lightkeepers once lived, volunteers have been updating the stonework and converting a door to a window. These renovations aim to reflect the building's appearance in 1929, the year all of the light station's building exteriors will represent when fully renovated. Volunteers have also been slowly but surely restoring the apartment's interior to show what the rooms looked like during a few different eras — 1889, 1907



PHOTOS BY MCKENZIE PRILLAMAN — HERALD CORRESPONDENT
John O'Neil describes how the Point Sur lighthouse's original Fresnel lens cast its beam of light out to sea. This lens was in use from 1889 to 1972 and is slated to return to the lighthouse in the next few years.



The main bedroom in the head lightkeeper's house. This building's interior reflects the 1950s.

and the 1920s. John O'Neil hopes the building will be finished and ready for tours in the next three to four years.

"We don't move real fast," he said. "But in that sense, we do a better job and make fewer mistakes."

Over the last two years, volunteers have also been busy painting structures and fences, replacing windows in another building and testing the strength of the lighthouse's stone, brick and mortar in preparation for the original

Fresnel lens's return.

The Fresnel lens sat on display in the Maritime Museum of Monterey, which later became the Dalí Museum, from 1992 to 2017. Now, it lies disassembled in storage, awaiting its reinstallation in Point Sur lighthouse.

But the several-thousand-pound lens requires heavy machinery to carry it to its old home, and two bridges leading up to the lighthouse still need repairs. One bridge currently cannot even hold the weight of a car. The

weak structures also prohibit restoration efforts to the lighthouse building itself.

Last year, however, state officials budgeted \$4.5 million for renovations to Point Sur State Historic Park to repair the bridges. Contracts with construction companies are still pending, but John O'Neil estimates the road will be ready for the Fresnel lens to be transported in 2024.

The O'Neils have remained passionate about restoring and sharing the wonders of Point Sur Lightstation for nearly three decades. They hope visitors walk away from the historical place having learned about life during the turn of the century.

"In many ways," Carol O'Neil says, "it represents the history of technology, maritime, the United States, family life, California, Big Sur."

The solar-powered LED within Point Sur lighthouse. At night, the light flashes every 15 seconds.

McKenzie Prillaman — Herald Correspondent

Books

FROM PAGE 2

1961. Not only does he talk about geology and geography in its pages; he weaves in personal experiences, giving his reader the taste of strong cheese on the tongue, the fizz of champagne on the lip, and an exploration of castles and cathedrals, bearing the weight of royalty and religion.

"I was able to get trip notes from someone I worked with at the University of Delft, which is where I'm from and where I earned my master's degree in mining and engineering," he said. "My father was an engineer as well, having studied at the same school. Once I decided I wanted to be an engineer in the field of geology, I chose a degree that supported my interests."

"An Egyptian Diary," also released in January, is based on his exploration of Egypt in 2000. Once again, the images the author creates through his storytelling give readers an "as if they were there" vantage on his travels.

"My wife, Maiiike, and I kept detailed diaries of our experiences," he said, mindful that the trip might warrant a book. "And Maiiike made a lot of wonderful pictures, which bring the reader into the experience."

Influences and inspirations

Born and raised in Holland, van Bommel, trained first as a physicist, went to work for Chevron Oil, a career path that moved him to the United States. After visiting potential locations where he might be sent to work, among them San Francisco, Los Angeles, Houston, and New Orleans, he asked to be assigned to San Francisco. He was promptly told he'd be headed to Houston.

The van Bommels hadn't aspired to build their life in Houston, and they definitely didn't want to retire there, says van Bommel, who promised himself and his wife they wouldn't stay long. Af-

ter 40 years, they finally left the heat of Houston and retired into the mists of Pacific Grove.

"The climate in Houston is not very hospitable," he said. "It's so hot and humid; you can't live without a swimming pool. I couldn't walk down the street without getting drenched in sweat. Houston has a lot of culture, and we vowed to make it work, but we'd always wanted to go to California."

In Pacific Grove, van Bommel found his new hometown, close to the ocean, and characterized by nice neighbors, a lot of dogs, and a community of authors. He doesn't mind the climate and conditions, shifting between mild temps, blue skies, and a riot of fuchsia-colored ice plant framing the bay — and the bleak midsummer, when his hamlet, shrouded in the kind of fog that inspires the writing or reading of a brooding novel, disappears like Brigadoon.

Perhaps most intriguing is van Bommel's most recent release, "Insulinde." Published in late January, this book explores van Bommel's recollections and impressions of the former Dutch colony in Indonesia, to which he was exposed as a child.

"This book," said van Bommel, "is the story of the group of exotic islands around the equator in Southeast Asia, as seen through the eyes of my friends, painters, novelists, and activists. Although Insulinde still remained when I was growing up there, the islands, forged together under Dutch rule for more than three centuries, now comprise the Republic of Indonesia."

When not writing at his Pacific Grove home or out walking nearby, Peter van Bommel typically is thinking about his next book. His collected works are available on Amazon.



Peter van Bommel

Garden

FROM PAGE 2

ers.

Veitch contracted with a young Biology teacher, Ernest Henry Wilson, to travel to China to hunt for seeds of this attractive tree. Wilson achieved that goal and then became a life-long plant hunter working for Veitch and later for Harvard University's Arnold Arboretum.

Wilson called China "the Kingdom of Flowers," and eventually also hunted plants in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. By 1930, he had introduced more than 1,000 Asian plant species to western gardens.

Today, California gardeners enjoy a vast number of plants that originated in various areas of Asia, including both native species and cultivars developed by hybridizers.

Much-appreciated plants from Asia in my garden include Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum*); the genus *Cotoneaster*, with varied species; Japanese Iris (*Iris ensata*), the very large genus *Rhododendron* and its subgenus *Azalea*; the large genus *Clematis*; Giant Rockfoil, also called Pigsqueak (*Bergenias cordifolia*); Chinese Fringe Flower (*Loropetalum chinense*); and Variegated Winter Daphne (*Daphne odora* 'Aureomarginata').

Here are examples of other Asian plants from my garden.

Chinese Ground Orchid/Hyacinth Orchid (*Bletilla striata*). This bulbous plant flowers from May to June, growing with minimal care outdoors in soil. Plants for a Future (www.pfaf.org) reports that this is an important wound herb in China, where it has been used medicinally for more

than 1,500 years.

Variegated Weigela (*Weigela florida* 'Variegata'). This old-fashioned deciduous shrub grows in full sun to 6 feet tall and 8 feet wide, with flowers blooming in summer. It's a favorite of hummingbirds.

Kahili Ginger/Ginger Lily (*Hedychium gardenianum*). This member of the Ginger family is native to the Himalayas in India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Under the right conditions, it can reach 8 ft. tall with flower spikes rising above the foliage.

Tree Peony (*Paeonia suffruticosa*) comes from China, Tibet, and Bhutan. It grows in full sun to part shade, and benefits from a winter chill. It takes several years to establish deep roots and is best not relocated or disturbed.

Japanese Anemone (*Anemone hupehensis*) grows readily. Popular hybrids include 'Alice', with pink blossoms, and 'Honorine Jobert' with white blossoms. This plant grows in full sun but appreciates light shade during the day's hottest hours. It can propagate vigorously by underground runners, so it needs either room to spread or regular management.

Advance your knowledge

The history of plant hunting throughout the world's sources of exotic garden plants, and the stories of individual plant hunters, can be an intriguing study for gardeners. Carolyn Fry's book, "The Plant Hunters: The Adventures of the World's Greatest Botanical Explorers" (2009) is an exceptional publication with inserted folders with reproductions of original notes. A quick search of the in-

ternet for "plant hunters" will yield links to several more books to explore.

Dan Hinckly, a modern-day plant hunter in China, Korea, Nepal, and other areas, has introduced and cultivated numerous plants, and written about his travels and favorite plants in several books, including "The Explorer's Garden: Rare and Unusual Perennials" (Timber Press, 2009).

Enrich your gardening days

China and other Asia nations that are often included in current events, including the Olympics, very recently, have many centuries of horticultural history that have produced a great array of plants that can be successful and very pleasing features in the residential garden. The traditional Japanese garden design could provide unique qualities to the home landscape, but Asian plants also fit quite well into either formal or casual versions of typically Western landscapes.

Tom Karwin is past president of Friends of the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, Monterey Bay Area Cactus & Succulent Society, and Monterey Bay Iris Society, and a Lifetime UC Master Gardener (Certified 19992009). He is now a board member and garden coach for the Santa Cruz Hostel Society. To view daily photos from his garden, <https://www.facebook.com/ongardening.com/566511763375123/>. For garden coaching info and an archive of previous On Gardening columns, visit <http://ongardening.com>. Contact him with comments or questions at tom@karwin.com.



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