

# Seacliff & New Brighton State Beaches



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (831) 685-6500. This publication can be made available in alternate formats. Contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov) or call (916) 654-2249.

### CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

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Discover the many states of California.™

### Seacliff State Beach

201 State Park Drive, Aptos, CA 95003

(831) 685-6500

### New Brighton State Beach

Park Avenue off Hwy 1, Capitola, CA 95010

(831) 464-6329

Cover photo courtesy of Joyce Tarter Rideout

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*Long stretches of bluff-  
backed sandy beaches  
invite visitors to sit back  
and watch a glorious  
sunset or stroll peacefully  
along the shore.*



**A**t Seacliff State Beach, a mile-long expanse of soft sands

connects this popular recreation spot with New Brighton State Beach, where high wooded bluffs provide a matchless view of Monterey Bay.

### SEACLIFF STATE BEACH

During the mid-1920s, landowners built summer homes on the bluffs above the beach at Seacliff and the area to its south, Rio del Mar. On the north side of Seacliff, tourists enjoyed deluxe camping facilities.

Seacliff became one of California's first state beaches in 1931. For more than 80 years, beachfront camping, picnicking, fishing and docent-led walks have been among the park's most popular activities.

### THE CEMENT SHIP

Seacliff's famous fishing pier extends out to a unique concrete tanker, the *SS Palo Alto*. It was built during World War I, when wartime steel shortages created a demand for alternate shipbuilding materials. However, when the war ended, so did the desperate need for ships, and the *Palo Alto* was never used in wartime.

In 1930 the Seacliff Amusement Corporation bought the ship and turned it into an elaborate amusement center. The *Palo Alto* was brought to rest in shallow water near the beach, and a pier was built leading to the ship's main deck.

A neon sign at the top of the bluff at Seacliff simply read *The Ship*. Thousands dined at the Fish Palace, with its spectacular ocean view on three sides. In the elegant Rainbow Ballroom, diners then danced on a new white ash floor. Unfortunately, the Seacliff Amusement



*SS Palo Alto*

Corporation went bankrupt after only two seasons of dining and dancing, thwarting future plans for expansion. Today, the stripped and abandoned *Palo Alto* is unsafe and closed to the public, but the pier leading to the ship is open for fishing.

### NEW BRIGHTON STATE BEACH

New Brighton, once known as China Beach, was the site of a Chinese fishing village during the 1870s and 1880s. The village inhabitants proved invaluable in the building of the California railroad, and provided Santa Cruz with fish, produce, laundries, chefs and laborers. Other settlers took over the village from the Chinese, who moved to Monterey. Commercial fishing slowed after dragnet fishing was outlawed in 1915, and New Brighton became a state beach in 1933.

Fishing, camping, hiking and swimming are favorite family activities at New Brighton State Beach.

### PARK HISTORY

The Ohlone Indians thrived for thousands of years on the area's natural resources. The riches of the ocean, rivers and forests provided plentiful

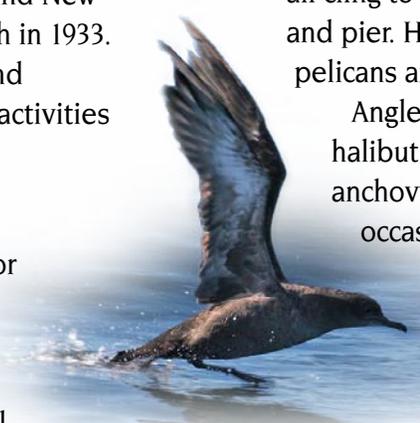
sources of food, from fish, shellfish and game to edible plants and seeds. The Ohlone, creative craftspeople known for ornate shell and feather adornments, continue their ancient crafts and traditions today.

Spanish colonization led to the establishment of Mission Santa Cruz. After Mexico broke away from Spain in 1821, the land was subdivided into Mexican land grants (ranchos). Seacliff, known by 1833 as Rancho Aptos, developed into a bustling shipping port with the building of the Castro-Spreckels wharf. In the 1850s, Thomas Fallon acquired part of Rancho Soquel and turned it into a resort he named New Brighton, in honor of his favorite English seaside retreat.

### WILDLIFE HABITATS

Much as a reef does, the *SS Palo Alto* attracts an immense variety of marine life within its concrete wreckage, and many of the same animals found on rocky shores live on its concrete sides. Mussels, barnacles, sea stars, sea anemones, ocean worms and rock crabs all cling to the sides and insides of the ship and pier. Harbor seals line the deck, while pelicans and cormorants perch on the bow.

Anglers catch sole, flounder, mackerel, halibut, lingcod, cabezon, jacksmelt, perch, anchovy, bocaccio (tomcod), kingfish, and occasionally salmon and steelhead from the pier. During summer and early fall, sooty shearwaters



*Sooty shearwater*

Photo courtesy of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

(small, dark seabirds) arrive by the tens of thousands from as far south as New Zealand, soaring in figure eights over the water, searching for anchovies. Sea lions, dolphins, sea otters and migrating whales are often spotted in the water.

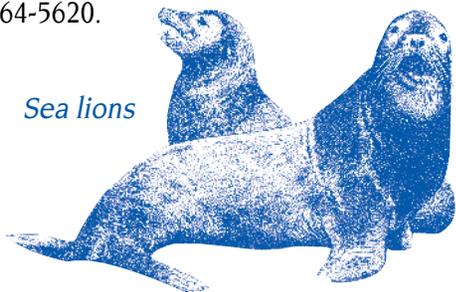
## RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Seacliff visitor center features natural and cultural history interpretive exhibits—including a tidepool tank and an aquarium. Beachfront camping at Seacliff is for recreational vehicles only. Picnicking, fishing, and docent-led fossil, history or beach walks are among the most popular activities. Children's arts and crafts programs highlight Seacliff's story.

The New Brighton visitor center tells the story of Pacific wildlife migrations and offers museum exhibits and educational programs. Campfire and Junior Ranger programs are offered at New Brighton during the summer. More than 100 family, group, bicycle and RV campsites make this a special vacation spot.

Site-specific camping reservations for both beaches may be made by calling (800) 444-7275 or visiting [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov). To schedule educational programs at Seacliff, call (831) 685-6444. For New Brighton's educational programs, call (831) 464-5620.

Sea lions



*New Brighton State Beach in 1947 and today*

## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Both parks have beach wheelchairs for loan from the camp host.

**Seacliff State Beach**—The visitor center and some RV hookup campsites are accessible, as are several shady picnic sites and restrooms.

**New Brighton State Beach** has accessible visitor and campfire centers, family, group and RV campsites, and restrooms.

Accessibility is continually improving. For updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

## NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Sunset State Beach, 201 Sunset Beach Road Watsonville 95076 (831) 763-7062
- Manresa State Beach, Sand Dollar Lane Watsonville 95076 (831) 761-1795
- Twin Lakes State Beach, Near the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor (831) 427-4868

This park is supported in part through a nonprofit organization. For more information, contact Friends of Santa Cruz State Parks, 144 School Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060 (831) 429-1840 • [www.thatsmypark.org](http://www.thatsmypark.org)

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- Day-use hours are from 8 a.m. to sunset.
- The speed limit is 15 mph.
- Climbing the unstable sandstone cliffs is prohibited.
- All park natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be removed or disturbed.
- Dogs must always be on a leash no longer than six feet and attended by humans.
- Do not feed or leave food out for wildlife.
- A fishing license is not required to fish from the pier, but Department of Fish and Game limits apply. See [www.dfg.ca.gov](http://www.dfg.ca.gov).
- Consuming alcohol is not allowed on the beach or in the day-use areas—only within campsites.
- Fires are not allowed on Seacliff's main beach. At New Brighton and Rio del Mar, fires must be confined to fire rings provided and attended at all times.
- Vehicles must park on pavement and not on gravel or dirt walkways.

# Seacliff & New Brighton State Beaches

## Legend

-  Freeway
-  Paved road
-  Trail
-  Accessible Feature
-  Campground
-  Group Campground
-  Bike Campground
-  Campfire Center
-  111 Campsites
-  Fishing
-  Picnic Area
-  RV Campground
-  Restrooms
-  Showers
-  RV Sanitation Station
-  Swimming

