

THE POINT LOBOS LOG

28 December 2011

Point Lobos State Reserve, California

Happy New Year

Winter surf at Point Lobos State Reserve, Carmel, Monterey County

- Story overleaf





A harbor seal catches some rays in Whalers Cove, Point Lobos State Reserve.

Winter comes to the coast

Winter doesn't look wintry in pictures along California's Central Coast.

The trees are evergreens – Monterey pines, Monterey cypress and coast redwoods – that look the same year round. The bare mountainsides turn green from winter rains and go brown from summer drought.

The low sun could be a summer morning or sunset if the picture caption didn't clue you in.

Don't look for winter on the coastal land. Look for it in the water, where it's winter 12 months a year.

The average ocean temperature in winter at Point Lobos, south of Monterey Bay, is 53 degrees. In summer it oddly averages a degree cooler.

Blame Alaska, where the cold water current that runs the length of the California coast begins. It brings snow to the Sierra, fog to cool the summer, salmon to the rivers and marine mammals like seals, sea lions and sea otters to the coast.

In 1762 and for the next 155 years, the cold water also brought the Russians, who established a series of settlements down the West Coast from Alaska down to San Francisco Bay.

Alone among the Old World powers, the Russians didn't come to take land from the native inhabitants, convert them to a new religion or exterminate them altogether.

They wanted the fur from the sea otters who swam in coastal waters.

– Continued overleaf



Sea otters, once coveted for their fur, are beloved today because of their playful, human-like behavior. They spend very little time ashore, preferring to float on their backs to sleep or play with their pups when not diving for shellfish. Often when otters sleep, one will wrap him/herself in a strand of kelp growing from the ocean bottom and then others will gather, holding hands (below) to keep from drifting apart. *(I did not shoot the otter pictures; they came from the internet)*



Winter comes to the coast

– *Continued from previous*

But even though otter fur – the densest of any animal at nearly a million hairs per square inch – brought high prices among the wealthy in St. Petersburg and Moscow, the sales still didn't support the expenses of defending New World settlements from the Spanish and British plus shipping the furs across the Pacific and Siberia.

So the Russians sold Alaska to the least threatening potential buyer, the United States, and abandoned their more southerly outposts.

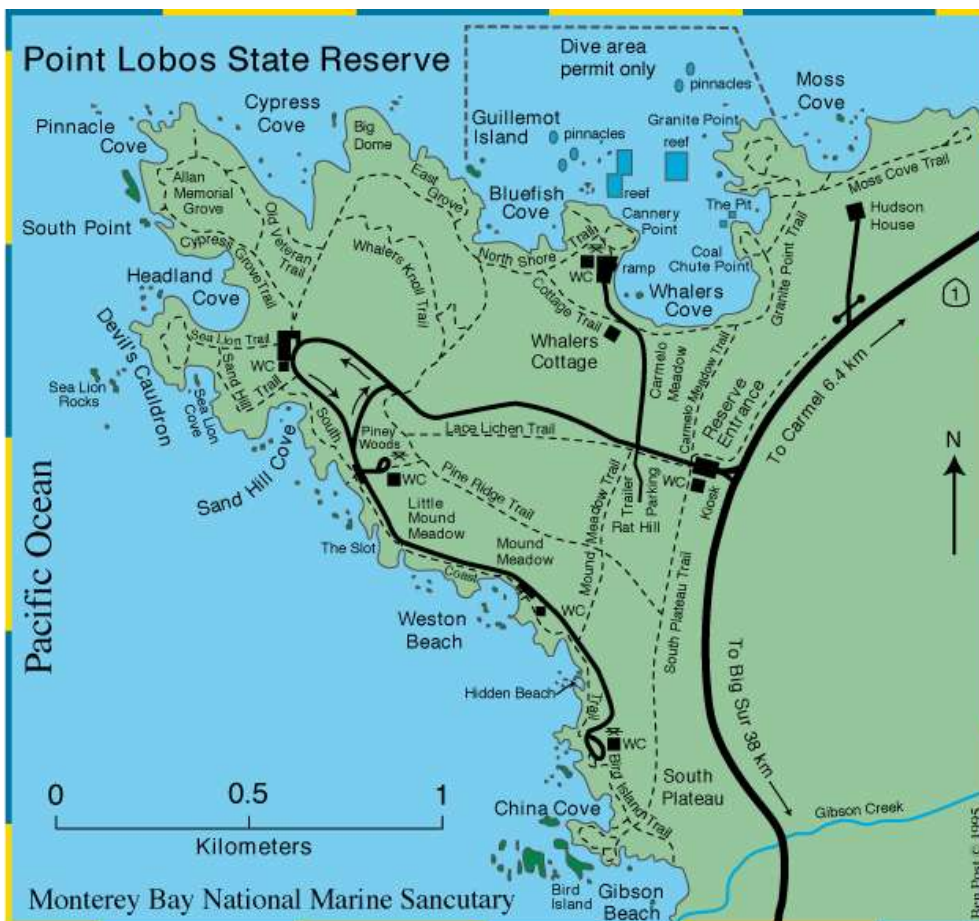
In the Bay Area, that left us with Fort Ross in Sonoma County, the Russian River and a decimated sea otter population that now numbers around 1,500, down from 300,000. I saw several at Point Lobos, but couldn't get close enough for my own picture without a kayak.

Point Lobos State Reserve

Point Lobos State Reserve, about 90 minutes south of San Jose, is a California park that protects a small, rocky spit of coastal land near the Monterey Peninsula. The name means "wolf point" for the barking of the sea lions (sea wolves) heard by the Spanish discoverers.

Today's picture pages

Portuguese whalers built a series of whaling stations along the California coast, including this one at Point Lobos, during the late 18th Century that lasted until the discovery of petroleum ended the use of whale oil as an energy source.



Most of the hiking trails at Point Lobos are gentle, even the ones that climb, and can be walked by most ages.



Hikers at Pinnacle Cove in futile search of a bad picture

Two mule deer bucks lock horns. Yep, there was a woman nearby (below).





Evening fog rolls in over Headland Cove, *Punta de los Lobos Marinos* and Big Sur beyond.



Carmel Highlands south of Point Lobos

**Cliff top hiker moves into forest of
Monterey cypress.**



Storms twist cypress into gnarled shapes



Deep, cold, scenic.





Goodbye
from
Point Lobos

Sunset from Headland Cove, *Punta de los Lobos Marinos*