



# THE GUIDEPOST

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## THE FARALLON ISLANDS – SENTINALS OF THE GOLDEN GATE

By Ulla Kaprielian

The Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary was established in 1981, one of thirteen such sanctuaries in the nation. It is situated between the Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary in the north and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary in the south.

It is likely that the islands were first discovered in 1543 by the Spanish expedition under the command of *Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo*. In 1579 *Francis Drake* sent some of his men ashore to collect seal meat, birds and eggs; he named them “Islands of St. James.” *Sebastian Vizcaino* named them “*Frailes*” (the friars) in 1603 to honor the Carmelite monks on board. A chart was discovered on a Spanish galleon that, in 1743, referred to the islands as “*Los Farallones*” (small rocky islands). *Juan Francisco de la Bodega* in 1775 combined the two names to “*Los Farallones de los Frailes*.” It is very likely that skirting these rocky shores contributed to the Golden Gate remaining undiscovered by ships for over 200 years.

Some claim there are seven Farallon Islands, some of them just large rocks. If every rock were counted, the number would be even greater. The largest of the islands (Southeast Farallon) lies 27 miles west of Point Bonitas and 20.5 miles south of Point Reyes. Tower Hill, its highest point, rises 348 feet above the water and is topped by a lighthouse that is now fully automated.

The Middle Farallon, 2 ¾ miles north of Southeast Farallon, is a single black rock 22 feet high and 50 feet across. Eighteen miles southwest of Point Reyes is a group of islands commonly known as the North Farallones. This group consists of four blocks of granite, between 78 and 113 feet tall, along with lesser exposed rocks and reefs. Landing on these rocks, even on the calmest of days, is nearly impossible. Three miles northwest of the North Farallones is Noonday Rock, a sharp pinnacle that rises abruptly from Fanny Shoal to within a few feet of the ocean surface. It is named after the clipper ship *Noonday* that struck the rock and sank in 1863.

The treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, signed in February 1848, ceded California to the United States. It coincided with the beginning of the California Gold Rush. Thousands of Argonauts arrived on hundreds of ships. The influx of population brought on a food shortage. Ever enterprising, six men landed on the Farallones and declared themselves owners. They were there to harvest eggs, common murre eggs specifically. It is estimated that in the mid-1800s these islands were home to hundreds of thousands of these birds. Their eggs are about twice the size of a chicken egg. The race was on. Soon there were several egg gathering companies and the egg war was in full swing.

Cont'd page 4

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## Message from the Board of Trustees

### ICE – is it a code, yes it is!

What does it mean? In Case of Emergency! This is a fact that I learned from the paramedics but it is also a practice of the SFPD and the SFFD. Almost all of us have a cell phone or PDA or some other communication device. Did you ever think to put all your “In Case of Emergency” numbers and contacts in it?

When someone has a medical emergency and that could be an accident where you may have had a fall, a broken bone or worse a heart attack such as our friend and fellow member Chuck Frady had in the earlier part of April.

The first thing that the paramedics do when they arrive on the scene is to take your cell phone or any other PDA or Blackberry, punch in ICE to see if you have listed all numbers for your emergency contact, their contact numbers, your doctor’s name and number, your hospital, your medical ID # and information that would make it easier for our friends, families or loved ones to be contacted should you fall ill and/or unconscious. What do they do if we don’t have those special ICE numbers in our phone – well they start to scroll down not knowing if the person they contacted is even in town. Please take a moment and do this for yourself and all those who you hold dear so in case of emergency we will have immediate contact. This is a very important step that all of us in this industry should be thinking about. Yes, you’ll get around to it sometime but WHAT IF?

We are heading into the summer months and the summer fog. Summer 2006 was so busy for mostly all of us (that was an anomaly). But through the SFCVB calendar we can see a tremendous amount of business coming back in September, October and November.

We will be posting the board descriptions and responsibilities on the SFTGG web site soon so that everyone can see if maybe they, too, would want to serve on our board. Think about it, we will be thinking about you.

Barbara White  
Board President

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**Remember “Eucalyptus in California” from the previous issue of the Guidepost? We promised to bring it to a conclusion in this issue. Here it is.**

Getting back to the vices and virtues of eucalyptus trees, its virtues are many; its vices are two, perhaps three – its failure as the miracle solution to the impending shortage



of hardwood and its role in the sometimes catastrophic urban-forest interface fires. Its third vice, the aggressive displacement of native plants, is often the centerpiece of highly

audible public debate (e.g., controversy about Angel Island eucalyptus), but hasn't occasioned the enormous financial losses incurred with the first two.

When European immigrants first settled Australia, they were stunned by the superior quality of the timber obtained from the native trees, particularly the blue gum eucalyptus. There was practically no limit to its uses. What a pleasant surprise then it was for the rest of the world that eucalyptus was so adaptable to a large variety of soils and climates. It grows in deserts, swampland, valleys and alpine regions. It thrives where few other species grow, blue gum being the champion of rapid growth. Moreover, in California there were no endemic pests and, because they were propagated from seed, the trees were free of disease. Initial plantings of eucalyptus in California were an unqualified success.



Not surprisingly, blue gum was perceived by botanists and businessmen alike as the ideal replacement for the vanishing hardwood forests, thereby unleashing the eucalyptus boom of 1905 – 1912. Large plantations sprang up overnight. The promotional literature was so over-the-top that the authorities investigated some companies' ethics. Speculators included Eastern furniture companies, East Bay real estate tycoon Frank Havens and Beauty Ranch owner Jack London.

However, in the rush to riches, a crucial distinction was overlooked. The excellent Australian timber had been manufactured from centuries-old eucalyptus from the virgin forests instead of the young trees cultivated in California. The hardwood from the young trees was different; its high water content caused it to crack, shrink and warp. By the time proper seasoning methods were developed, the boom was over. Despite the development of a successful curing process, eucalyptus wood was forever stigmatized.

What was left of the blue gum's reputation went up in smoke with the Berkeley-Oakland hills fire of 1991. While the presence of eucalyptus certainly didn't help, the intensity and sweep of the fire were caused by a combination of factors with human complacency not being the least.

By virtue of location and topography, the East Bay hills are prone to wildfires whenever dried vegetation is present. In the 1880s eucalyptus planting in the hills suppressed the growth of ground vegetation and thus proved an effective measure against the annually recurring grass fires. However, this seemingly simple solution wasn't quite so simple. Eucalyptus is a “dirty” tree; it drops tons of litter (bark, leaves, branches, seed pods) containing oil that slows the decomposition process and increases its flammability. As early as 1907, the U.S. Forest Service warned about eucalyptus litter as a fire hazard. If piled high, the oily litter burns so fiercely that it reaches the crowns of the trees. Add a stiff breeze and the fire becomes unstoppable.

Despite the undeniable role played by eucalyptus, the 1991 hills fire was really the culmination of inattention and complacency. Few people had paid attention to cleaning up eucalyptus groves. The problem had been compounded by the presence of countless dead trees killed by periodic winter freezes. To make things much worse, Monterey pines had been planted all over the hills to improve real estate values. Without a steady supply of moisture from coastal fog, the pines turn into kindling every autumn. To complete the artificial environment, more and more houses had been built and every bare spot covered with greenery, often drought-sensitive species. All it needed was a spark!

In the aftermath, eucalyptus was much vilified, but its complete removal from the hills is neither feasible nor advisable. Responsible vegetation management is the only answer at this point.

#### Sidebar

There are more than 600 species of eucalyptus growing in Australia; more than 100 of them thrive in California. Here are seven examples of the most prevalent species:



(1) **Blue gum** (*E. globulus*) is a native of Victoria and Tasmania. Some trees in the virgin forest were over 300 feet tall. Because of its very rapid growth, it was the most popular species in California.

Eucalyptus, cont'd page 7

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Farallones, cont'd from page 1

It is estimated that as many as 600,000 eggs were harvested annually, a practice that went on for some 30 years. In January 1881, an Executive Order finally gave the federal government title to the Farallones. The large scale operation ended with the eviction of the egg hunters in May of that year. The lighthouse keepers, however, continued gathering and selling eggs for quite some time thereafter to supplement their income.



The hazards of sailing into San Francisco Bay were enormous. It became apparent that lighthouses were desperately needed all along the west coast. Congress authorized the construction of 16 lighthouses along the Pacific shore, four around the entrance to the Golden Gate: Fort Point, Point Bonita, Alcatraz Island and the Farallones.

Building the Farallon lighthouse was a challenge to say the very least. There is no landing site for the boats, so everything had to be wrestled ashore somehow. The lighthouse and the quarters of the keepers and their assistants were completed in August 1853; all that was needed was the Fresnel lens to arrive from France. Finally, in December 1854, 73 crates of brass and glass pieces arrived in San Francisco. The lens had to be assembled on location. It soon became apparent that the lens was too big for the newly built tower, so a new tower had to be built. The lighthouse was finally ready for business in December 1855. Beginning at sundown the oil lamp within the Fresnel lens was lit. The flame was only two inches high but the magnifying effect of the lens made the light visible for miles. Each light along the coast has a unique time interval; the Farallon's blinks every 15 seconds.

The US Weather Bureau operated a radio station on the Farallones between 1902 and 1913. Ships could now be advised of weather conditions and merchants alerted as to the names and cargos of inbound vessels. The Navy built their own station in 1905. After the 1906 earthquake, the Farallon radio station was the only connection to the outside world. Messages from San Francisco were relayed through the Farallones to Point Arguello and from there continued on land wires. During WWI, this powerful station could relay messages to the mainland from submarines and other vessels. When the navy started to bring young men and their families to the island, it became quite a lively social scene. Efforts to plant trees on the islands

resulted in one stunted Monterey Pine and three Cypresses, the "Farallon Forest."

Even though the North and Middle Farallones were declared a National Wildlife Refuge in 1909, humans were still living on the Southeast Island, bringing with them animals like rabbits, mules, cats, turkeys, goats, chickens and, of course, their children. The custom began in the 1860s when lonely light keepers started bringing their families. The human impact on this desolate area was enormous. During WWII some 70 people lived there in 20 homes. Only recently have the last rabbits been removed, but the rats are still scurrying about.

The US Coast Guard took over the lighthouse operation in 1939. After WWII the human population declined and in 1965 the last family left the islands. The lighthouse was modernized in 1969 and shortly thereafter a fully automated system of monitoring navigational aids by radio from the Coast Guard station at Yerba Buena Island was established.

In 1967, biologists from the Point Reyes Bird Observatory began to visit. They have become a permanent presence on the Farallones with a far different mission than all the people before them. The researchers collect data on the effect of weather conditions on the marine wildlife. The data from the Farallones research projects is already showing how changing ocean climate is affecting the bird population. In addition, they have determined that the El Nino weather conditions have influenced the migration patterns of California sea lions and other marine mammals.



This island group and the water surrounding it are teeming with life. California sea lions, northern elephant seals, Steller sea lions, and harbor seals can be observed, along with thousands of birds including tufted puffins (my personal favorite), pigeon guillemots, auklets, murres, and cormorants; also great white sharks, dolphins, and humpback and blue whales.

The Farallones are a breeding and resting area for thousands of seals and sea lions. It is the largest seabird breeding colony in the contiguous US with tens of thousands of auklets, petrels, gulls, murres and cormorants nesting on the islands' rocks.

Farallones, cont'd page 5



Only five miles separate the islands from the edge of the continental shelf where the ocean floor plunges from 300 feet to over two miles below the water surface. It is this topography that causes a deep upwelling of cold and nutrient rich water which attracts thousands of marine mammals and birds. For humans, however, this is a less than ideal place to live.

Can you imagine the noise level with all these animals? Wind, fog and storms are the norm and only during the fall season are the waters calm and the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge visible on occasion. At present, a maximum of eight people, researchers, volunteers from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, as well as the Point Reyes Bird Observatory, are allowed at any one time to live in this wild place for observation and research.

There is good news – after 170 years the northern fur seals have returned to the Farallones. They were hunted to near extinction in the early 1800s when about 200,000 were slaughtered; the remaining abandoned their rookeries. In 1996 the first females returned, and in 2006 eighty pups were born. Of course, this kind of success might have a devastating effect on other mammals and birds, especially the Cassin's auklets. They nest in the same kind of habitat that the fur seals prefer. I trust Mother Nature to work out this problem. Most northern fur seals breed on the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea and many of the newcomers have Pribilof tags. Fur seals only spend a very short time on isolated islands rearing their young. Worldwide, the fur seals are considered vulnerable to extinction. Elephant seals, on the other hand, can spend several months in their rookeries, breeding and rearing their pups. Great White sharks can be observed in this area preying on young elephant seals, their favorite food.



There is bad news -- it appears that large numbers of seabirds are dying off our coast, probably due to starvation. Scientists fear that fluctuating currents in the North Pacific are changing the influx of cold, nutrient rich water to the coastal areas, resulting in a decline in zooplankton and small fish, the main diet of marine birds.

Waste disposal in the Gulf of the Farallones goes back to the California Gold Rush. Vast quantities of contaminated sediment and water from mining activity

in the Sierra Nevada were carried by rivers into San Francisco Bay and some out through the Golden Gate.

Since then, hundreds of millions of tons of waste have been dumped into the Gulf of the Farallones, including sediments dredged from shipping channels, waste from oil refineries and fruit canneries, acids from steel production, surplus munitions and ships from World War II, other unwanted vessels and approximately 47,800 barrels of low-level radioactive waste. Beginning in 1990, the Long Term Management Strategy (LTMS) for the San Francisco Bay has been working to develop a long-range plan for meeting the Bay Area's need to dispose of an estimated 300 million cubic yards of dredged material over the next 50 years. As a result, a San Francisco Deep-Ocean Disposal Site was designated in 1994. It is 55 miles beyond the Golden Gate and five miles outside of the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary in 8,200 to 9,800 feet of water.

So, on the next clear day when you can see the Farallones, think about the impact this archipelago had on people and the impact people had on the environment of the Farallones.

There are boat tours to the islands for a first hand look at all this activity. Further information can be had at the Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary Visitor Center located in the old Coast Guard Station at Crissy Field (open Wednesday through Sunday).

Sources:  
Peter White:  
*The Farallon Islands, Sentinels of the Golden Gate*,  
Scottwall Associates, Publishers San Francisco 1995

Glen Martin, Chronicle Environment Writer:  
articles of September 11, 2006 and April 3, 2007

USGS Circular 1198: Beyond the Golden Gate –  
Oceanography, Geology, Biology, and Environmental  
Issues in the Gulf of the Farallones.



## Just the Facts!

By Jason Cohen

In this column we publish questions on subjects that have potential for confusion or misinformation. Here are the questions from the last Guidepost, and the answers we have found (with sources cited). Please send questions for future columns to Jason at [jcohen1@pacbell.net](mailto:jcohen1@pacbell.net) (don't forget the "1" in the address).

**1. What causes our fog?** I thought it's when the hot inland air hits the cold ocean, but something I read seemed to say otherwise.

Hot air causes the fog to move inland from the ocean, but is not responsible for its formation! The



air over the Pacific is moist and relatively warm, but it cools when it hits the cold ocean just offshore. Cool air can't hold as much moisture as warm air, so the excess moisture changes from gas (water vapor) to liquid and forms droplets around salt particles in the air, causing the fog. The hot inland air rises (the same process that causes hot air balloons to rise), which creates a slight vacuum that sucks the fog inland through coastal openings like the Golden Gate.

The reason there is more fog in the summer is that the ocean near California is actually colder in the summer! Why? Because there is an ocean current called the California Current which moves away from shore during the summer, allowing cold waters from deeper in the sea to "well up." Besides causing the summer fog, this nutrient-rich, upwelled water is also what provides such good habitat for wildlife.

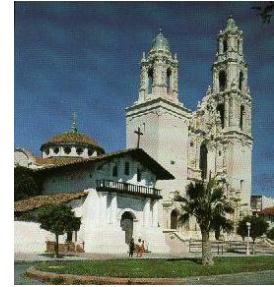
So, in summary, the fog is formed by moist ocean air being cooled as it passes over cold water just offshore. It is then sucked inland as the hot inland air rises.

Two main sources:

An article by Scott Starratt of the US Geological Survey and UC Berkeley's Department of Geography (<http://geopubs.wr.usgs.gov/bulletin/b2188/b2188ch7.pdf>.) and the Exploratorium's website (<http://www.exploratorium.edu/wsw/projects/fog/index.html>).

**2. Why is the Mission San Francisco de Asís commonly referred to as Mission Dolores (we're looking for more than just a translation of *dolores*)?** (submitted by Renate Coombs)

Mission Dolores derives its name from Dolores Creek (Arroyo de los Dolores), so named by Father Pedro Font on Friday, March 29, 1776 when he was part of a small group selected by Juan



Bautista de Anza to explore the Bay Area for the most suitable place of settlement (while the other members of the expedition were cooling their heels in Monterey). Both de Anza and Font thought the fertile area surrounding the beautiful creek would be a splendid site for a mission. According to Father Font's diary, they named the creek Dolores because they thought it was Good Friday (called "Viernes de Dolores," Spanish for "Friday of Sorrows"). While this is no longer the case (in modern times the Catholic Church has been celebrating that day on September 15), it was true in 1776. An alternate explanation is that they used the name because the Friday before Good Friday was the feast day of Our Lady of Sorrow. No matter how plausible these explanations sound, they do not appear to match Father Font's diary, at least not modern translations of the arcane Spanish.

Renate developed this answer from the diary of Father Font, the official chaplain for the second de Anza expedition as excerpted in Vladimir Guerrero's book *The Anza Trail and the Settling of California*. The information is confirmed in a 1926 article by Edward F. O'Day, adopted in 1997 by Gladys Hansen in the Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco at <http://www.sfmuseum.org/hist6/founding.html>.

**3. Is Fort Ord, located in Monterey, the same as the Presidio in Monterey, or is the Presidio (historic from the Spanish era) located somewhere else in Monterey and a separate entity?** (submitted by Donna West)



The original Presidio of Monterey was erected by Gaspar de Portola in 1770 (during the Spanish era) and included the mission founded by Junipero Serra that was later moved to Carmel. The present building in downtown Monterey that is called the Royal Presidio Chapel was erected in 1791 and has been used continuously as a church ever since. It is the one remaining structure from the Spanish Presidio of Monterey. The others were abandoned in the 1830s.

Facts, cont'd page 7

Excellent Australian timber derived from very old trees misled early Californians into expecting the same qualities from young trees.

(2) **Red gum** (*E. rostrata*) is the most versatile, tolerating frost, heat and drought; it can grow in all types of soil and environments. It is as hard as iron when dried. It grows extensively in California and is used for a multitude of products.

(3) **Lemon-scented gum** (*E. citriodora*) carries a strong lemon scent; its oil produces citronella. It doesn't take frost well, which makes it a coastal tree in California. There are some fine examples on the UC Berkeley campus.

(4) **Jarrah** (*E. marginata*) was considered to be the most valuable lumber for wharves and pilings because of its ability to resist the teredo worm. It grows slowly and is mostly found in southern California.

(5) **Black peppermint** (*E. amygdalina*) is among the tallest recorded trees, measuring up to 475 feet in its native Tasmania. (No tree of comparable height appears to have survived.) Its bark has a distinctive peppermint scent. It grows well in most of California, even in the frosty inland valleys.



(6) **Red ironbark** (*E. sideroxylon*), like the red gum, comes from southeast Australia and is both frost and heat resistant. It is used extensively throughout California, especially along highways.



(7) **Manna gum** (*E. viminalis*) is not very durable, but can tolerate frost. It secretes a gum that becomes thin white flakes eaten by Aborigines and the children of Australian settlers. Its leaves are the favorite food of koalas.

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The only direct relationship between the original Spanish Presidio site and the present U.S. Army Presidio is an earthwork at the latter location for cannons overlooking Monterey's harbor. The U.S. constructed Fort Mervine at the location of the present Presidio, but from 1865 to 1902 the post was inactive. It was officially redesignated the Presidio of Monterey in 1904 in honor of the original Spanish fort. It played various roles for the U.S. Army in the twentieth century, and since the 1940s has gradually become the military's primary location for foreign language training, housing the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center.

The Presidio was a sub-installation of the nearby Fort Ord, which was established in 1917 as a training base for infantry troops. Fort Ord was closed in September 1994, although the Army retained approximately 5 percent of the property for a Presidio of Monterey annex and reserve center. At that time, the Presidio of Monterey became a separate installation again. CSU-Monterey Bay is one of the new occupants of the Fort Ord site.

This answer was derived from the U.S. Army's website for the Defense Language Institute at <http://dli-www.army.mil/staff/HISTORIAN/main.htm>, plus information about Fort Ord from the California State Military Museum at <http://www.militarymuseum.org/>

**Here are three new questions. If you think you have the answer (or a good story), please write to Jason.**



1. What are the proper pronunciations of Boudin, Ghirardelli, Agoston Harazthy, and André Tchelistcheff?

2. Is it true that James Lick bought the Conservatory of Flowers with the intent of using it as a playhouse for his children?



3. Did Mark Twain really say "The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco"?

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**SFTGG PROGRAMS**

- May 21 Barbary Coast Trail Walk with Daniel Bacon. Meet at Portsmouth Square.  
2-4 pm \$15; RSVP Madelon van Lier
- June 7 Certification Test – St. Mary’s Cathedral, Monsignor Room  
6:30 pm Nancy McCormick is ready to help verify requirements.
- June 11 General Meeting, Farallon Room, PIER 39  
6 pm
- July 18 Chinatown Walk with Francis Chiu. Meet at Pagoda Gate (Bush & Grant)  
10 – noon \$25 - includes lunch; RSVP Madelon van Lier

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For detailed information and registration, check our website at [www.sftgg.org/programs](http://www.sftgg.org/programs).

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