Lands End

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Sutro District

At first glance, the western tip of San Francisco appears to be an urban wilderness. Its rugged cliffs, windblown forests, tiny beaches, and endless breakers rolling in from the Pacific give the impression that natural forces are in control and humans are outsiders. But Lands End with its spectacular views and wild character has drawn visitors for centuries.

The First People

The Yelamu, a subgroup of the Ohlone tribe, inhabited San Francisco before Europeans arrived. The Yelamu collected shellfish, gathered eggs, made salt, and hunted seabirds and marine mammals in the Lands End area. When the Spanish arrived in 1776, they forced the Yelamu to move to Mission Dolores, where diseases such as measles and influenza took a high toll. Within a few decades the Yelamu had virtually disappeared. Shell mounds (called *middens*) at Lands End contain shells, bones, and seeds left behind by the Yalamu.

Cover: Photo of Golden Gate Bridge above Cypress trees. NPS/George Su.
Right: Ohlone Indians illustration. Linda Yamane.

Above: Ocean Terrace cars, 1903. John O'Neill Collection.
Left: Clliffhouse. John O'Neill Collection

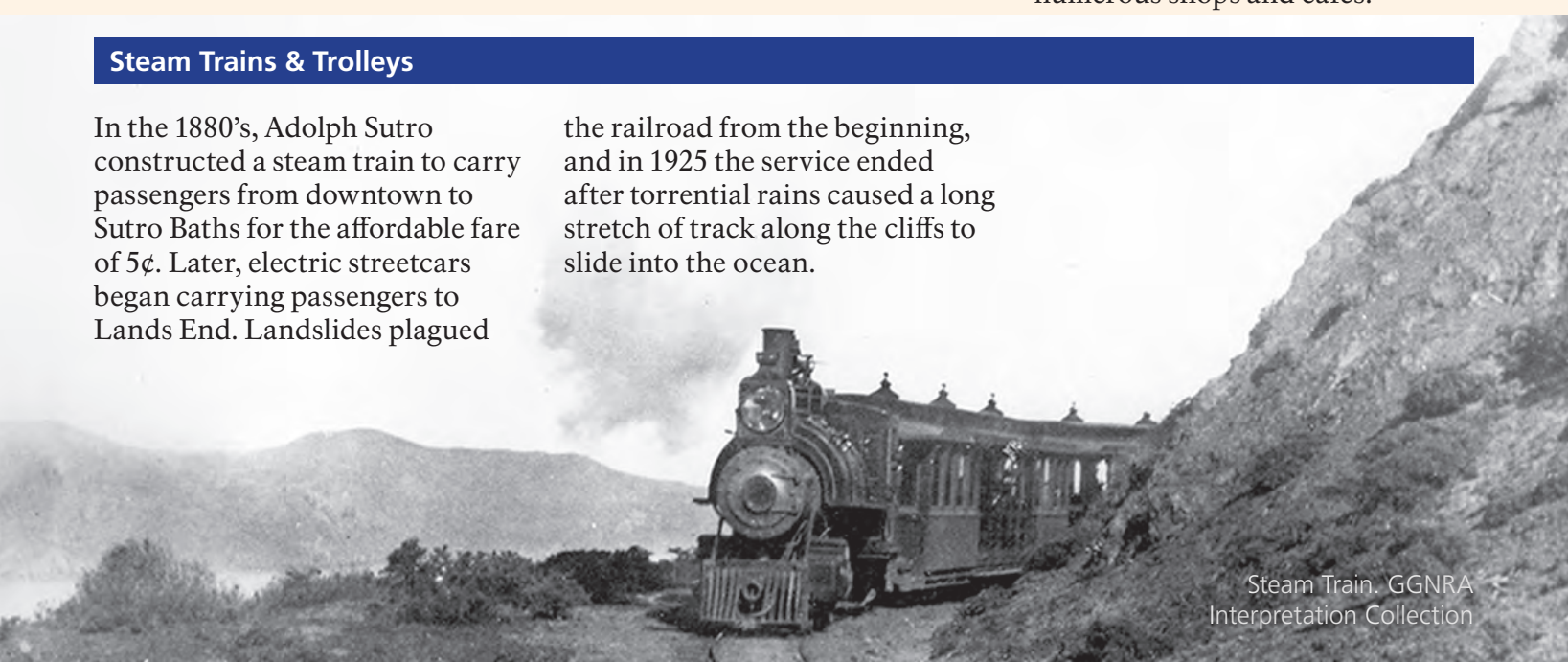
A Recreation Destination

Shortly after the Gold Rush, Lands End became a destination for San Franciscans who were intrepid enough to take a buggy ride over miles of sand dunes to the ocean. In 1863, the famous Cliff House opened for business atop a rocky promontory overlooking Seal Rocks.

Starting in the early 1880s, silver mining millionaire Adolph Sutro bought the Cliff House and surrounding areas and developed an extensive set of attractions. These grew to include a spectacularly rebuilt Cliff House, an outdoor aquarium, the sprawling Sutro Baths, and numerous shops and cafes.

Steam Trains & Trolleys

In the 1880's, Adolph Sutro constructed a steam train to carry passengers from downtown to Sutro Baths for the affordable fare of 5¢. Later, electric streetcars began carrying passengers to Lands End. Landslides plagued the railroad from the beginning, and in 1925 the service ended after torrential rains caused a long stretch of track along the cliffs to slide into the ocean.



Steam Train. GGNRA Interpretation Collection

Exploring Lands End

Merrie Way

What is now the Lands End parking lot was originally part of a "pleasure ground" and "midway" known as Merrie Way when it was constructed in 1895. Merrie Way held several rides and sideshows transplanted from the 1894 Midwinter Exhibition in Golden Gate Park. Later, a ferris wheel, a roller coaster, an indoor mirror maze, and a "Haunted Swing" were added. Merrie Way was never a financial success and shut down within a few years.

Merrie Way & Firth Wheel, circa 1896 GGNRA W.C. Billington Photo

Shipwrecks

The rocky shores, swift tides, submerged rocks, and dense fog of Lands End have always made the Golden Gate strait difficult to navigate. Since the 1850s, at least a dozen ships have failed to make the passage and sank in the cold, treacherous waters. These include the *City of Rio de Janeiro*, which sank near Land's End in 1901, with a loss of 128 lives.

Frank H. Buck shipwreck, 1937. GGNRA Interpretation Collection.

Above: Lands End, circa 1935. California Historical Society.

The Cultural Forest

Lands End was originally a nearly treeless expanse of dunes and rocky hills covered with low-lying coastal scrub and grasses and a few sheltered pockets of willow and live oak trees. After the arrival of Europeans, livestock grazed the grasses and scrub brush, and the trees were cut for firewood. By the 20th century, the only trees in the area were ornamentals growing on the private grounds of Sutro Heights.

Beginning in 1933, the City of San Francisco and the federal government's Civilian Works Administration (CWA) planted thousands of Monterey Cypress around Lands End to 'beautify' the area. After years of neglect, efforts are underway to prune and thin the trees of Lands End to create a healthy forest.

Overlook, 2008. Stephen Wheeler.

Lands End Today

Lands End is undergoing major changes to restore its grand views and make it a cherished San Francisco destination area. For more information on volunteer opportunities, please contact the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy at (415) 561-3077 or *volunteer@parksconservancy.org.*

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