

# Cape Disappointment State Park

The 1,882-acre park features a 250-site campground, two miles of ocean beach, two lighthouses, the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center and six miles of hiking trails. Visitors can walk on the beach, explore the area's rich natural and cultural history and stop over at the nearby coastal towns of Ilwaco and Long Beach for special events and festivals from spring through fall.

## North Head Lighthouse

The 65-foot-tall North Head Lighthouse, designed by German-born engineer C.W. Leick, sits on solid basalt more than 190 feet above sea level. The lighthouse initially used a first-order Fresnel lens, invented at the turn of the 19th century by Augustin Jean Fresnel. The lens originally was stationed in 1841 at the Navesink Lighthouse in New Jersey. In later years, it moved to lighthouses in San Francisco, Cape Disappointment and North Head. The lens burned five gallons of kerosene per night and produced a light that could be seen 20 miles out to sea. The five-ton lens, purchased for approximately \$4,500, would cost \$6 million to build today.

A smaller fourth-order Fresnel lens replaced the first-order lens in 1937. Rotated with electricity, the smaller lens generated a more powerful light and alternately flashed a one-second bright white light every 6.5 and 21.5 seconds. This rotation is a unique characteristic that identifies the lighthouse to passing ships.

A revolving Crouse-Hinds searchlight replaced the Fresnel lens in 1950, and in 1998, the present marine rotating beacon light was installed. The existing light can be seen 17 miles out to sea.

## Rent a unique vacation house

North Head Lighthouse is complemented by the charm of lighthouse keepers' residences, which offer stunning ocean views and a great base from which to explore the area.

The residences are available to rent for overnight stays. For reservations, call (888) 226-7688.

*Lighthouse keeper's residence*

**Cape Disappointment State Park**  
**P.O. Box 488**  
**Ilwaco, WA 98624**  
**(360) 642-3078**



## Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

P.O. Box 42650  
 Olympia, WA 98504-2650  
 (360) 902-8500 • TDD (360) 664-3133  
 www.parks.wa.gov



### Commission members:

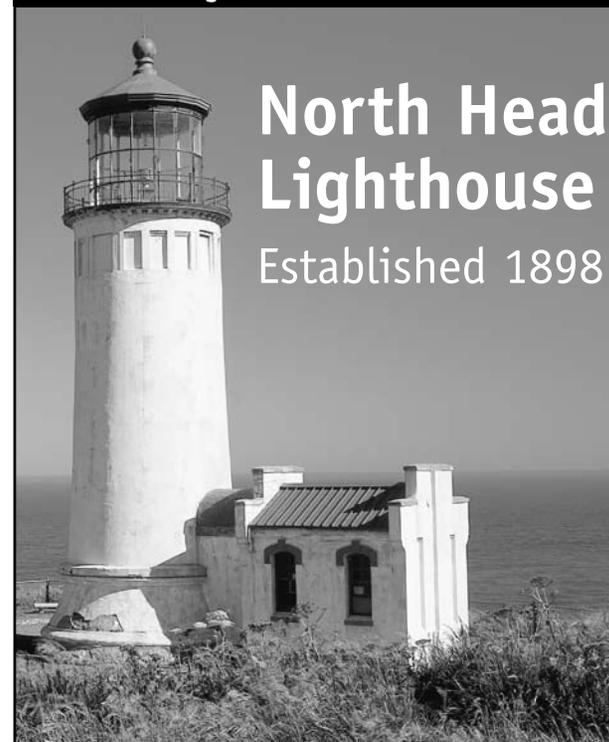
Mickey Fearn	Joe Taller
Fred Olson	Joan Thomas
Bob Petersen	Cecilia Vogt
Eliot Scull	

**Agency director: Rex Derr**

*All Washington state parks are developed and maintained for the enjoyment of all people, regardless of age, sex, creed, ethnic origin or physical limitation.*

To request this brochure in an alternative format, call (360) 902-8844 or the Washington Telecommunications Relay Service at (800) 833-6388.

P&R 45-43000-3 (5/07) ♻️



# North Head Lighthouse

Established 1898



## A day in the life of a lighthouse keeper

The United States Lighthouse Service was run with military exactness. For example, to reflect the lighthouse keepers' hierarchy, the chandelier in the head keeper's residence had six candles, while the first and second assistants had five and four candles respectively. The keepers also were required to wash laundry on a certain day and received demerits if sheets were hung to dry on the wrong day.

The three lighthouse keepers each worked an eight-hour shift to provide 24-hour coverage and to ensure that the light remained visible. They carried

30 pounds of kerosene up the stairs, trimmed the wicks and cleaned the lens – the most time-consuming

task. Lighthouse keepers cleaned off soot and burnt oil from the lens with rags or pieces of softwood, used wine to clean the entire lens every 60 days and polished it with a jeweler's rouge once a year.

When not manning the light, keepers could read books from the portable library, including a new Bible and prayer book issued every quarter.



## Women of the lighthouse

Lighthouse keeping also has touched the lives of women; many cared for residential households while their husbands managed the lighthouse. One dramatic story tells of a head keeper's wife who was "unable to bear the howling of the winds" and flung herself off the cliff into Beard's Hollow.

Another woman, Mabel Bretherton, demonstrated that lighthouse keeping wasn't just a man's job. She transferred to North Head from the lighthouse in Cape Blanco, Ore., and served as a lighthouse keeper for many years until her resignation in 1907.

## Interesting facts

- In 1788, British fur trader John Meares named the area Cape Disappointment after his inability to locate the river's mouth.
- In 1792, Captain Robert Gray named the Columbia River after his ship, the Columbia Rediviva.
- In 1932, a duck was blown off course, crashed through the lighthouse window and chipped the lens.
- A U.S. weather station sat on the hill above North Head from 1902 to 1955.
- The Cape Disappointment and North Head lighthouses are both functional and are operated by the U.S. Coast Guard.
- North Head Lighthouse's original first-order Fresnel lens may be viewed at the Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center.
- North Head is one of the windiest locations on the West Coast. Winds of 120 miles per hour have been recorded at the site.



## The lighthouse era

Throughout the centuries, lighthouses have guided ships to their destinations. They have protected ships and their crews in America since 1716, when the first lighthouse was built in Boston Harbor.

The U.S. Congress recognized the need for construction of more lighthouses on the nation's coastlines and authorized the Light House Establishment. By the late 1800s, the agency constructed nearly 300 lighthouses on the East Coast and 19 in Washington and Oregon, including Cape Disappointment and North Head lighthouses in Washington.

## A light on the Pacific

Many ships and thousands of lives perished due to the high waves and shifting sandbars in the area that came to be known as the "Graveyard of the Pacific." Even after construction of the Cape Disappointment Lighthouse, shipwrecks continued because ships traveling from the North couldn't see Cape Disappointment's light. So, the North Head Lighthouse was built two miles north of Cape Disappointment and went into operation on May 16, 1898.