

Interpretive exploration

STUDYING THE PACIFIC GRAY WHALE IS POINT VICENTE CENTER'S FOCUS

By Greg Hitchcock
Contributor

As the years have passed, the Point Vicente Interpretive Center has undergone many changes, but its mission has remained the same: to focus on the Pacific gray whale while showcasing the area's history.

The Point was named in 1790 by Capt. George Vancouver, who explored the Pacific Coast for England. He named the site for his friend, Friar Vicente of the Mission Buenaventura, according to the website, www.palos-verdes.com

Since that time, the area has seen many changes.

"The Point has seen many groups inhabiting the area, including Native Americans, Spanish, Mexican and Portuguese," said Diana McIntyre, docent coordinator and curator at the center. "In the late 1800s, these shores were used for coastal shore whaling."

Point Vicente was a launching place for Portuguese whalers in the 19th and 20th centuries, when whale oil was used for heating and lighting.

According to McIntyre, the Portuguese came to the area as part of the Gold Rush, and when they didn't strike gold, they turned to the sea.

The local history is rich, and because the Point is also the area's prime whale-watching spot, the city of Los Angeles built the center.

Adjacent to the Point Vicente Lighthouse, the center was constructed on the grounds of a firing range used by troops at nearby Fort MacArthur.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

The Point Vicente Interpretive Center building holds many exhibits highlighting the geology, flora and fauna of the Palos Verdes Peninsula.



Watching Pacific gray whales is one of the highlights at the Point Vicente Interpretive Center.

Not realizing this at the time, the Army Corps of Engineers had to demolish the original center to remove lead left by the firing range.

"We put a trailer - what we like

to call an annex - on the grounds to keep the interpretive center going," McIntyre said.

On July 15, 2006, the expanded interpretive center reopened with a sunset room for private parties, an amphitheater and three times the exhibit space.

"We want people to know the history of the area," McIntyre said. "This is the place where people can also see dolphins, and occasionally some humpbacks."

The Point Vicente Interpretive Center is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily at 31501 Palos Verdes Drive W.

For more information, call 310-377-5370.