

Statement Of Significance

The Sutro historic district, a historic designed landscape, is managed by the park as being locally significant for the years between 1863 and 1937, which includes the initial development of both Point Lobos Road and the first Cliff House by Charles Butler and the development of Sutro Baths and Sutro Heights Park by Adolph Sutro. In 1937, Gustav Sutro, Adolph Sutro's grandson, was unable to maintain the Sutro Baths due to declined attendance and the stringent regulations regarding the construction, operation, and maintenance of public swimming pools issued by the California Board of Health and was forced to close operations and sell the property. At that time, Emma Merrit, Sutro's daughter, was also unable to maintain the Sutro Heights Park. The Whitney brothers, George K. and Leo C., purchased the Cliff House and were unable to restore the level of popularity and economic viability of achieved during the Sutro era. The district represents early recreational developments on the West Coast by Sutro.

The Sutro historic district has local significance under National Register Criterion A because of its association with the history of recreation in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The development of Sutro's recreational complex represents a response to rapid industrialization occurring in the United States during the late nineteenth century and the subsequent increase in the disposable income and leisure time available to the average American worker. Desires for new forms of entertainment and recreation in American cities influenced the development of a wide variety of leisure time facilities including large urban parks, athletic clubs, public swimming pools, museums and exhibit halls, and amusement parks. The development of Sutro Baths, Cliff House, and the Sutro Heights gardens relate to this larger recreational context.

The newly created Golden Gate Park was the only public recreational facility of note in late-nineteenth-century San Francisco, with a burgeoning population, the need for accessible and inexpensive recreation and entertainment was particularly pressing. Adolph Sutro responded to this need with his development of Sutro Heights, Sutro Baths, and Cliff House, and the provision of inexpensive rail service to the area. In addition to swimming, Sutro Baths provided a variety of educational and recreational activities including exhibits, contests, band concerts, and athletic displays. Similarly, Sutro Heights provided a pleasant garden setting for strolling and relaxing, and was the site of botanical displays, concerts, picnics, and charitable events.

The Sutro historic district has local significance under National Register Criterion B because of its close association with Adolph Sutro. Sutro, a German-born engineer who immigrated to the United States in his childhood, achieved national recognition for the design and construction of the Sutro Tunnel, which drained and ventilated the deep silver mines of Nevada's Comstock Lode. Following the completion of the tunnel in 1879, Sutro moved to San Francisco, where he made his mark through a variety of notable civic works, including directing a city-wide tree planting campaign, serving a term as mayor, and developing the Sutro Library, which he left to the State of California.

However, Sutro's role in the development of the Point Lobos area of San Francisco as a recreational facility for public enjoyment was more significant locally. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, Sutro developed the gardens at Sutro Heights, oversaw the construction of the massive Sutro Baths, rebuilt the Cliff House as a chateau-style palace, and provided inexpensive passenger railroad service from downtown to Point Lobos. Sutro's oceanside complex was extremely popular in its heyday. By the time of his death in 1898, Sutro had fulfilled his dream of providing accessible, inexpensive, and educational recreational facilities for the general public.

The Sutro historic district has local significance under National Register Criterion C both for skillful site

engineering and for its design as a major West Coast oceanside recreational complex. The unique placement of buildings and structures, the skillful response to existing topography and landforms, and the accentuation of vistas contribute to its significance.

The district also represents the work of Adolph Sutro as both engineer and skilled amateur garden designer. The design and construction of the massive Sutro Baths represent a feat of engineering nearly unmatched in the late nineteenth century. The construction of Sutro Baths taxed even engineer Adolph Sutro's ingenuity and expertise; built on a sandy beach and into the surrounding cliffs, fortified with hundreds of thousands of cubic feet of rock, and fed by the tides through a tunnel blasted into an adjacent cliff wall.

Sutro historic district possesses local significance in the areas of site planning and garden design. Although not a landscape architect or designer by profession, his layout of the heights consciously used the site topography to its best advantage. Sutro's design emphasized the many vista opportunities and natural circulation routes inherent in the site, and resulted in a unique blend of formal and naturalistic garden styles. His experimentation with plant materials and their cultural requirements, as well as his mass plantings for site stabilization and climate control were pioneering efforts in their day.

Finally, the layout of the route of the Cliff House and Ferries Rail Line has local significance for its unique and daring siting. Until completion of the Cliff House and Ferries Rail Line in 1888, passenger rail lines within the city of San Francisco ran along urban streets, conforming to the city's grid. Sited to hug the coast closely as it passed Point Lobos, the rail line departed from the grid to provide its passengers with a unique and thrilling experience that enhanced their perception of the area's scenery. Passage on the Cliff House and Ferries Rail Line was not merely beach transportation, but an actual highlight of a visit to the Point Lobos area.

The Sutro historic district has local significance under National Register Criterion D because it has the potential to yield information concerning archeological resources significant to the development of Sutro Heights. At Sutro Heights Park, remains of the original garden are thought to lie beneath fill material and vegetative debris that have accumulated on the site. The discovery and documentation of the unique road edging along the Esplanade and the observatory's tiled walkway buried beneath the lawn suggest considerable potential for significant additional archeological remains throughout the site. The visible topographic outlines of a number of the path alignments and "Garden Rooms" lend additional evidence of this potential. To date the Sutro historic district has not been investigated for significant nineteenth century archeological resources. The Point Lobos Archeological sites, consisting of three Native American shell mounds (middens), are located at the site of Sutro Baths and were listed in the National Register in November 1976, however, these resources are not associated with the significance of Sutro historic district.

Although some structures, vegetation, and small scale features characteristics have changed since the period of significance, the Sutro historic district still retains essential characteristics of natural systems and features, spatial organization, land use, topography, circulation, cluster arrangement, views and vistas, and archeological sites that defined its general character during the period of significance.

Integrity:

In 1979, NPS staff prepared a preliminary National Register nomination for this area. A lack of national and regional standards, however, resulted in a nomination that was not listed in the National Register at that time. In 1999, a nomination form was completed for "Sutro Heights, Cliff House, Sutro Baths, Lands End, Point Lobos Avenue/Great Highway" by Denis Bradley and Michael R. Corbett. The California State Historic Preservation Officer once again found the district ineligible for listing on the

National Register.

Location: The aspect of location is demonstrated in all the major extant elements included in the Sutro historic district.

Design: Although significant alteration and deterioration have occurred in all areas of the district, the aspect of design is still apparent in the siting and layout of buildings, structures, and other elements (including the remaining rail road grade); the retention of grading and landforms; the placement of circulation networks; and the accentuation of vistas throughout the site.

Setting: In general, the physical setting and scenic resources surrounding the district are intact according to the aspect of setting. Despite the encroachment of residential development on the eastern and southern sides of the site, the overall views of the ocean, Seal Rocks, and surrounding coast remain relatively unchanged.

Feeling: The remaining landscape elements at Sutro Heights, the sheer scale of the ruins at Sutro Baths, and the siting and preservation efforts at the Cliff House contribute to an overall aspect of feeling. The relatively scant amount of twentieth-century development in the area also enhances the integrity of feeling, as do the ocean sounds and smells apparent from almost all points within the district.

Association: The Sutro historic district retains the aspect of association through its continued use as a public recreational facility. Though many of the attractions historically offered in the area are no longer available, the district continues to provide a scenic open space within the larger urban context of the city of San Francisco.

Materials/Workmanship: The aspect of materials and workmanship varies throughout the district. Both Sutro Heights and the current Cliff House retain a significant level of integrity of workmanship and materials. At Sutro Baths, which is largely a ruin, the major remaining material is the concrete used in the foundation, and the rocks used to create the seawall. Although the grading and excavation required creating the tunnel and building the baths remains clearly visible, little evidence of craft or workmanship remains.