

HISTORY OF ALCATRAZ

Alcatraz was originally named "La Isla de los Alcatraces" meaning the Island of the Pelicans by the Spanish. Alcatraz had a long and useful history even before it became a famous prison. Initially, it was used as a military fortification and as the first Pacific lighthouse, both operated by the Army.

In 1868 it was designated by the military as a place of confinement for military prisoners, a position it held until 1934 when it became a Federal Penitentiary. On March 21, 1963, Alcatraz closed its doors for the last time with the remaining 27 prisoners being transferred to other Federal prisons. The property was transferred to the National Park Service in 1973 after being reported surplus by the Federal Prison Board.

The island has served as a tourist attraction for the last three to five years while ideas for its future use were discussed. Some ideas included such suggestions as using the island for a crab farm to a United Nations Memorial. The island will always be famous for its prison days. Many have said "its a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there". Many have given it the nickname of "the Rock".

Today, Alcatraz is a small rocky island filled with broken down buildings and piles of debris from the lack of use and caretaking during 1963 and 1973. Much of the destruction and grafetti on the walls and towers was done during the famous Indian occupation of the island several years ago, but the Park Rangers feel that the damage was done by hangers-on and thrill seekers and not the Indians.