



Gibraltar Reservoir Turns 100

The City of Santa Barbara's Gibraltar Reservoir is 100 years old! Construction of Gibraltar was completed on January 26, 1920. The reservoir is located nine miles north of the City, along the Santa Ynez River. Gibraltar has served an important role in providing the City with affordable drinking water for the past ten decades.

In 1903, the City employed J.B. Lippincott of the U.S. Geological Survey to examine Santa Barbara's growing water supply problem. A dam in the drainage basin of the Santa Ynez River was one of Lippincott's recommendations, and a potential site was named. A month after submitting his report, Lippincott, searching for a lost mule, came upon the Gibraltar site, which became his ultimate recommendation. The construction bid for Gibraltar was \$342,981, which was funded by bonds. Bent Construction began the project in May 1918 and was completed on January 26, 1920.

Gibraltar Dam impounds Santa Ynez River water in Gibraltar Reservoir which conveys water through 3.7-mile-long Mission Tunnel to the City. Mission Tunnel was completed in 1912, eight years prior to the construction of Gibraltar Dam, "If they couldn't build a tunnel through the Santa Ynez Mountains, the dam would not have done us any good," said Joshua Haggmark, City Water Resources Manager. At the time it was built, Mission Tunnel was the longest irrigation tunnel in the world, passing under La Cumbre Peak the tunnel is nearly 3,000 feet underground. Water from Gibraltar flows through Mission Tunnel to Lauro Reservoir, and on to Cater Water Treatment Plant (Cater) entirely under gravity. In fact, the water dropping down from Gibraltar is capable of powering a small hydroelectric plant located at Lauro Reservoir, and in a good year it nearly covers all the electrical demand at Cater. The engineers for the Gibraltar - Mission Tunnel system designed a truly green energy project with a minimal carbon footprint. When full, Gibraltar has the capability to release water during torrential rain a rate of 40 million gallons per minute flowing downstream into Cachuma Reservoir.

Prior to constructing Gibraltar, Santa Barbara relied entirely upon groundwater sources. Gibraltar, along with Mission Tunnel, introduced a much needed water supply that enabled Santa Barbara to grow and develop into a City. "To be able to tap into this pristine watershed was huge," said Joshua Haggmark. "Gibraltar was the first step in diversifying the City's water supply portfolio, and has continued to provide benefits for the past hundred years."

Gibraltar is an important component of the City's water portfolio, which includes Lake Cachuma, recycled water, imported state water, desalinated water, and groundwater. All of the City's water supplies, along with the community's extraordinary water conservation efforts, were essential with ensuring the City had sufficient drinking water supplies throughout the recent drought.

For more information on Gibraltar visit SantaBarbaraCA.gov/WaterSources

Happy 100th Birthday, Gibraltar!