

Cape Agulhas Lighthouse

A lighthouse at Cape Agulhas was first suggested by Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Collier Michell, the Surveyor-General of the Cape, in March 1837. A public meeting in Cape Town on the 11th of July 1840 resolved to raise funds for the construction of the lighthouse, and Michiel van Breda, the founder of Bredasdorp, offered to donate the land on which it was to be built. Michell made several expeditions to the site, and enlisted the services of Thomas Maclear, Her Majesty's Astronomer at the Cape, to identify the most advantageous position.

Perhaps with a nod to the famous Pharos of Alexandria, Michell produced a design in the "Egyptian Revival" style, consisting of a central tower flanked by two lesser turrets linked to the center by the keepers' accommodation. The foundation stone was laid on the 8th of January 1848 in the presence of the Governor, Sir Harry Smith; Michell, who was beginning to show signs of impending heart disease, did not attend.

The construction of the lighthouse was entrusted to William Martin from Cape Town. His workforce of some 90 men lived on the site, and equipment and provisions were ferried from the Cape to Struisbaai. Some of the workers were employed from the nearby Elim Mission, and limestone blocks for the structure were quarried from the hillside behind the site. Building proceeded at an excellent pace; the lighthouse was completed in December 1848, and commissioned on the 1st of March 1849.

In 1960, the lighthouse tower was condemned, as it was believed that the limestone blocks from which it had been constructed were decaying. Demolition plans were opposed by the Bredasdorp Divisional Council because of the historic significance of the building, so it was agreed that the lighthouse would be spared. A new aluminum lattice tower was erected in 1968 behind the old building to temporarily take over the lighthouse functions, and maintenance work began. Progress was extremely slow, and even though the fears about unsound materials proved to be unfounded, it still took another 20 years for the restoration to be completed. The lighthouse was reinaugurated on the 25th of March 1988.

The Cape Agulhas Lighthouse is today one of the most famous landmarks in South Africa, and was declared a national monument on the 2nd of March 1973. The old keeper's quarters now house a museum, the only one of its kind in Africa. Visitors can browse through the many interesting artifacts, and also climb up the steep 71 steps which lead to the lantern gallery, a vantage point which provides magnificent views over the shoreline, the adjacent interior, and the town of L'Agulhas.

Cape Agulhas Lighthouse Fact File

LSA Number	23
Name	Cape Agulhas
Province	Western Cape
Location	L'Agulhas
GPS Coordinates	S34.829379 E20.008980 34°49'45.8"S 20°00'32.3"E
ARLHS Number	SAF-004
Admiralty Number	D6370
NGA Number	32208
Active	Yes
First Established	1849
Commission Date	1 March 1849
Decommission Date	Not applicable
Construction Type	Round limestone tower
Daymark	Tower painted red with a single white horizontal band; lantern painted white.
Tower Height	27 meters (89 feet)
Focal Plane	31 meters (102 feet)
Luminous Intensity	7,500,000 candelas
Nominal Range	30 nautical miles
Characteristic	Fl.W.
Period	5 seconds
Pattern	Fl. 0.3s, ec. 4.7s
Pattern Description	1 white flash every 5 seconds.
Manned	TBC
Site Open	Yes
Fenced	No
Tower Open	Yes
Accommodation	No
Access Method	Car
Access Notes	All access roads are tarred.