

# Cape Columbine Lighthouse

The West Coast of South Africa, particularly the Paternoster region, is often plagued by fog, rough seas, and heavy gales. In the era leading up to the start of the 20th century, it had become the graveyard of many a fine ship, and a government commission assembled in 1906 recognized the need for a lighthouse. But other locations were deemed to be more urgent, and it was only in 1935 that final approval for the build was granted. The chosen site was a granite outcrop named Castle Rock, situated on a prominent headland called Cape Columbine which juts out into the Atlantic Ocean about 5 kilometers (3 miles) south of Paternoster. The headland was named after a British ship, the "Columbine", which was on a voyage from London to Australia when she ran aground just north of this location on the 31st of March 1829.

The design and construction of the lighthouse was entrusted to Harry Claude Lee Cooper, Lighthouse Engineer to the SAR & H from 1902 until 1941. Cooper had been involved in the improvement, upgrade and building of many lighthouses in South Africa (Cooper Lighthouse on the Bluff in Durban is named after him), but this would turn out to be his last big project before retirement. Perhaps for this reason, he chose a very unique design; instead of the usual round tower, Cape Columbine was planned to have a square tower, slightly tapered towards the top, with the outer faces of the walls recessed to form heavy buttresses on all four corners.

After waiting for more than 30 years, there was a lot of anticipation when the build was finally completed. Many dignitaries from the surrounding area attended the opening ceremony, and all of them held their breath as Mrs. Cooper, wife of the designer, flipped the switches to light the lamp just after sundown on the 1st of October 1936. To everyone's relief, a brilliant white beam immediately penetrated the evening air, and the lighthouse has continued to play its guardian role ever since.

Besides its architecture, there are a few additional features which distinguish Cape Columbine from other lighthouses. It was the first lighthouse in South Africa to be equipped with all three navigational safety devices, i.e. a light, a fog signal, and a radio beacon. The optical apparatus, supplied by Chance Brothers and Company, was the first lens system designed for use with a 4-kilowatt incandescent electric lamp. It was the last manned lighthouse to be built in South Africa, but this fact is often misunderstood; it doesn't mean that it was the last lighthouse to have a permanent keeper (at least 8 others still do), it just means that all subsequent lighthouses built after 1936 were automated. It is also only one of two lighthouses in South Africa to be named after a ship (the other is Cape Hermes, in Port St. Johns).

Cape Columbine is one of 5 lighthouses in South Africa which offer onsite accommodation. There are 3 cottages; Blue Bells and Tumbleweed both have 3 bedrooms and sleep 6, and Forget Me Not has 1 bedroom and sleeps 2. All of the cottages are self-catering, and are equipped with bedroom and bathroom linen, full kitchen facilities, satellite television, indoor fireplaces, and outdoor braai areas. There is also a swimming pool, conference center and gift shop located on the premises.

## Cape Columbine Lighthouse Fact File

LSA Number	07
Name	Cape Columbine
Province	Western Cape
Location	Near Paternoster
GPS Coordinates	S32.827786 E17.855520 32°49'40.0"S 17°51'19.9"E
ARLHS Number	SAF-034
Admiralty Number	D5810
NGA Number	25892
Active	Yes
First Established	1936
Commission Date	1 October 1936
Decommission Date	Not applicable
Construction Type	Square masonry tower
Daymark	Tower painted white; lantern painted red.
Tower Height	15 meters (49 feet)
Focal Plane	80 meters (262 feet)
Luminous Intensity	5,040,000 candelas
Nominal Range	30 nautical miles
Characteristic	Fl.W.
Period	15 seconds
Pattern	Fl. 0.2s, ec. 14.8s
Pattern Description	1 white flash every 15 seconds.
Manned	Yes
Site Open	Yes
Fenced	Yes
Tower Open	Yes
Accommodation	Yes
Access Method	Car / 4x4
Access Notes	There is a graveled road of 3.5 kilometers (2.2 miles) from the outskirts of Paternoster to the lighthouse complex. It is recommended that a vehicle with high clearance be used. In wet weather, a 4x4 might be required.