

# Cape Point Lighthouse (New)

After many years of complaints from sailors that the lighthouse on top of Cape Point Peak was often obscured by clouds or fog, the authorities eventually decided that a new lighthouse, located at a much lower altitude, should be erected. Another factor which hastened this decision was the wreck of the SS Lusitania, a Portuguese passenger liner which sank after striking Bellows Rock, a treacherous submerged reef some 3 kilometers south of Cape Point. The main reason for the disaster, which occurred on the 18th of April 1911, was that the lighthouse had been shrouded in low-hanging clouds.

The design and build was entrusted to Harry Claude Lee Cooper, who, in his capacity as Lighthouse Engineer to the SAR & H, had been an enthusiastic supporter of building more lighthouses in South Africa. He selected a site near the tip of the peninsular, 79 meters (259 feet) above sea level; it was low enough to avoid the issues associated with clouds and fog, but with sufficient altitude to ensure maximum visibility.

Construction work commenced in 1913. A large pinnacle of rock, some 15 meters high and known as Dias Point, was blasted away to make room for the foundations. The cleared area was still too small, so buttresses had to be built to support two of the corners. To gain access to the site, a path was cut along the ridge and a 450 millimeter gauge tramway was laid, allowing trolleys to transport raw materials and equipment. At the end of the track, a crane was installed to lower the trolleys another 50 meters further down the cliff, where a 2nd tramway ran the remaining distance to the build. Stone for the tower was quarried and dressed on site, and sand was excavated from a cave at sea level and carried in bags up a winding path.

The build was completed towards the end of 1915, but the official opening was delayed until after the end of World War I. The lamp was lit for the first time on the evening of the 11th of March 1919 by Thurl Cooper, the three-year-old daughter of the designer and builder. This had to be done manually, because the lamp was powered by paraffin which was piped down to the site from tanks located near the old lighthouse.

The original lantern consisted of a Chance Brothers first-order lens housing equipped with an incandescent petroleum vapor burner, rotated by a weight-driven mechanical clockwork apparatus. The light was electrified on the 1st of September 1936, which increased the luminosity from 500,000 candelas to 19,000,000 candelas, and then changed again to a 1.5 kilowatt lamp a few years later. The current light source is a 400-watt metal-halide lamp with an intensity of 10,000,000 candelas, making it the most powerful lighthouse in South Africa, and one of the most powerful in the world.

The lighthouse site is not open to the public, but a good view of the building can be obtained from a lookout point on the Lighthouse Keeper's Trail, a 700 meter long walk which starts at the old lighthouse. Although fairly steep and strenuous, it is worth doing; the views are spectacular, and the remains of a World War II bunker and radar station can also be seen along the way. The path is fairly narrow and very exposed to the wind, but it is completely safe. Hikers should not carry a pack, as this could attract the attention of the numerous baboons which live and forage in the area.

## Cape Point Lighthouse (New) Fact File

LSA Number	17
Name	Cape Point (New)
Province	Western Cape
Location	Cape Point
GPS Coordinates	S34.357060 E18.497190 34°21'25.4"S 18°29'49.9"E
ARLHS Number	SAF-007
Admiralty Number	D6120
NGA Number	32324
Active	Yes
First Established	1919
Commission Date	11 March 1919
Decommission Date	Not applicable
Construction Type	Square stone tower
Daymark	Tower is unpainted stone; lantern painted white.
Tower Height	9 meters (30 feet)
Focal Plane	87 meters (285 feet)
Luminous Intensity	10,000,000 candelas
Nominal Range	32 nautical miles
Characteristic	Fl.(2+1)W.
Period	30 seconds
Pattern	Fl. 0.6s, ec. 3.6s; Fl. 0.6s, ec. 12.3s; Fl. 0.6s, ec. 12.3s
Pattern Description	3 white flashes in a 2+1 pattern every 30 seconds.
Manned	No
Site Open	No
Fenced	No
Tower Open	No
Accommodation	No
Access Method	Car + Hike
Access Notes	It is possible to reach a viewpoint approximately 200 meters from the lighthouse which provides a good sighting. The walk to this point is long and fairly strenuous (about 1.4 kilometers), but the first 700 meters can be avoided by using the Flying Dutchman funicular railway (for a fee).