

# Cape Recife Lighthouse

Requests for a lighthouse at Cape Recife date back to 1811, when various harbor officials began to push for a navigational aid to safeguard the coastal trade. The issue was taken a step further in August 1827, when a petition requesting that a lighthouse be built on the western shore of Algoa Bay at public expense was submitted. Frederick Korsten offered to donate the necessary land, and the idea was supported by the 1828 Commission of Inquiry Report on Cape trade and harbor facilities.

There was no further progress until 1835, when another proposal was put forward. The local authorities cunningly timed their petition to coincide with a visit to Port Elizabeth by Governor Benjamin D'Urban, going so far as to organize an elaborate picnic for him at the proposed site. D'Urban refused to commit to the project, but did allow Captain Charles Selwyn of the Royal Engineers to erect a marker on a hillock in the center of the peninsular. It consisted of a white-painted spar with a black cask mounted on top of it, and became known – unsurprisingly – as “Selwyn’s Beacon”.

Back in the Cape Colony, Chief Engineer Charles Mitchell had begun to actively campaign for the erection of lighthouses at Mouille Point, Cape Agulhas, Simon’s Town, and Cape Recife. The reluctance of the authorities to proceed with the build of a lighthouse at Cape Recife was finally overcome by the wreck of the HMS Thunderbolt, a British wooden-hulled paddle-driven steam-powered warship which struck an uncharted reef off the headland on the 3rd of February 1847. The project eventually got off the ground in February 1848, when Colonial Secretary John Montagu personally chose a site and commissioned a local architect to draft a plan.

Construction started in August 1849, under the supervision of G.W. Pilkington, son of George Pilkington, Civil Engineer for the Colony. The build was completed in March 1851, and the lighthouse was finally commissioned on the 1st of April 1851. The structure originally consisted of a 24 meter (79 feet) octagonal masonry tower adjoined by two keeper’s quarters, but these dwellings were demolished in 1960 and replaced with two double-story blocks of flats. The tower was first painted with four alternate bands of white and red, but the red bands were changed to black in 1929.

The original first-order Henri Lepaute lens is still in use today. It comprises 2 sections, a revolving portion and a fixed drum portion, consisting of upper and lower refracting prisms. The revolving portion comprises 8 panels of dioptric lenses, rotating on a set of 6 vertical steel rollers guided by 2 sets of 6 horizontal brass rollers. In 1930, a Chance Brothers 110 millimeter burner was installed, but a 400 watt metal-halide lamp is currently in use. During 1988 the characteristic was changed from one flash every 60 seconds to one flash every 30 seconds, when complaints were received about the long eclipse. On the 18th of August 1998, in a deliberate act of vandalism, the bull’s eye and a few prisms of one of the lens panels were smashed when a bullet was fired at the lighthouse. After numerous attempts the conclusion was reached that the damaged lens panel could not be repaired, and the pattern had to be permanently changed to a 3-flash group every 117 seconds in November 2000.

## Cape Recife Lighthouse Fact File

LSA Number	29
Name	Cape Recife
Province	Eastern Cape
Location	Gqeberha (Port Elizabeth)
GPS Coordinates	S34.028991 E25.700586 34°01'44.4"S 25°42'02.1"E
ARLHS Number	SAF-009
Admiralty Number	D6390
NGA Number	32144
Active	Yes
First Established	1851
Commission Date	1 April 1851
Decommission Date	Not applicable
Construction Type	Octagonal masonry tower
Daymark	Tower painted with black and white horizontal bands; lantern painted white with a red dome.
Tower Height	24 meters (79 feet)
Focal Plane	28 meters (92 feet)
Luminous Intensity	4,000,000 candelas
Nominal Range	29 nautical miles
Characteristic	L.Fl.(3)W.R.
Period	117 seconds
Pattern	Fl. 2.8s, ec. 27s; Fl. 2.8s, ec. 27s; Fl. 2.8s, ec. 54.6s
Pattern Description	3 long white flashes every 117 seconds.
Manned	TBC
Site Open	Yes
Fenced	Yes
Tower Open	No
Accommodation	No
Access Method	Car
Access Notes	All access roads are tarred.