

Cape St. Francis Lighthouse

There is often confusion about the name and location of the Cape St. Francis Lighthouse. The headland which defines the southern end of St. Francis Bay is officially called Cape St. Francis, but locals refer to it as Shark Point. The lighthouse is actually situated on a rocky headland named Seal Point about 3.7 kilometers (2.3 miles) to the south-west, so many sources refer to it as the Seal Point Lighthouse. But if these two names are inadvertently combined, it becomes really confusing; "Cape Seal" is the name of a completely different lighthouse, located not too far away on the Robberg Peninsular near Plettenberg Bay.

After at least 13 vessels had been wrecked in the vicinity, a commission appointed by the Governor of the Cape Colony identified the need for a lighthouse at Cape St. Francis. In November 1871, a 3-man party was dispatched to the area to search for a suitable location, and they selected Seal Point because it provided the widest possible range of visibility. The site was almost immediately approved by Colonial Engineer Murrell Robinson, and events moved quickly from that time onwards, even to the point where a new lantern intended for Cape Agulhas was diverted to the project.

Construction commenced on the 17th of March 1876, under the supervision of Clerk of the Works Joseph Flack. Most of the materials were sourced from the immediate area, using stone blasted from the reefs east of the site and cut and dressed to size and shape on the spot. Flack, who had also been involved in the construction of the Robben Island Lighthouse, was destined never to see the end of the project; he died on the 14th of November 1876, and was buried in the Humansdorp cemetery. His replacement, William Bennett Hays, took over on the 29th of November, and completed the build about a year later. The lighthouse was eventually commissioned on the 4th of July 1878.

Because of its location on the shoreline only 7 meters (23 feet) above sea level, the tower was built to a height of 27.75 meters (91 feet), making it the tallest masonry tower in South Africa, and the 3rd tallest overall (both the Dassen Island and Slangkop Point towers were constructed using cast iron segments). The original optic was a second-order dioptric apparatus consisting of 8 lenses with upper and lower refracting prisms, equipped with a 3-wick Trinity House burner producing a light beam with an intensity of 15,000 candelas. A petroleum vapor burner was installed in May 1906, increasing the output to 120,000 candelas, and then replaced with a 4-kilowatt incandescent lamp when the station was electrified in 1931. The present illuminant is a 400-watt metal-halide lamp with an output of 2,750,000 candelas, giving it a range of 28 nautical miles.

A project to renovate and revitalize the lighthouse was completed recently, and it has been reopened to the public (only on weekends) after being closed for more than 10 years. A licensed restaurant called "Nevermind" has been established in the complex, serving friendly and approachable meals sourced from local suppliers, and the old keeper's cottages have been renovated and upgraded into two luxurious apartments which are available for rental.

Cape St. Francis Lighthouse Fact File

LSA Number	28
Name	Cape St. Francis
Province	Eastern Cape
Location	Cape St. Francis
GPS Coordinates	S34.212544 E24.836215 34°12'45.2"S 24°50'10.4"E
ARLHS Number	SAF-039
Admiralty Number	D6386
NGA Number	32148
Active	Yes
First Established	1878
Commission Date	4 July 1878
Decommission Date	Not applicable
Construction Type	Round masonry tower
Daymark	Tower painted white; lantern painted white.
Tower Height	28 meters (92 feet)
Focal Plane	36 meters (118 feet)
Luminous Intensity	2,750,000 candelas
Nominal Range	28 nautical miles
Characteristic	Fl.W.
Period	5 seconds
Pattern	Fl. 0.2s, ec. 4.8s
Pattern Description	1 white flash every 5 seconds.
Manned	TBC
Site Open	Yes
Fenced	Yes
Tower Open	Yes
Accommodation	Yes
Access Method	Car
Access Notes	All access roads are tarred.