

Great Fish Point Lighthouse

There are many shallow reefs along this stretch of the coastline near the mouth of the Great Fish River, which resulted in a number of shipwrecks during the 18th and 19th centuries. In a rudimentary attempt to alleviate the dangers, signals were relayed to ships offshore from two lanterns erected on a pole, but this proved to be relatively ineffective.

In 1890, a Lighthouse Commission appointed by the Governor of the Cape Colony recommended that a lighthouse be established in the area. Although lighthouses are usually located close to the shoreline, in this case it was decided to construct the tower on a prominent headland 76 meters above sea level and approximately 800 meters away from the shore, in an attempt to make the light more visible. The chosen site was about 4 kilometers to the south-west of the river mouth.

It took another 8 years before the lighthouse was finally completed, using handmade parts shipped out to the colony from Birmingham in England. Each brass joint was numbered to match the next, allowing local workmen to recreate the original design. The lamp was lit for the first time on the 1st of July 1898.

The tower is one of the most distinctive in South Africa. Because it is located so high above sea level, there was no need for a very tall structure, so it is only 9 meters in height. It is octagonal, rather than cylindrical or square, and each alternate vertical face is painted black and white. The lantern is painted white with a red dome, prompting some of the locals to refer to the lighthouse as “a short red-headed fellow in a tuxedo”, a nickname which is not entirely without merit.

The lighthouse still requires the services of a full-time keeper, although it is fully automated and monitored from Port Elizabeth. Both the site and the tower are open to visitors, and the neat and well-kept grounds offer not only excellent photographic opportunities of the lighthouse itself, but also magnificent views of the adjoining beaches and coastline.

This is one of only 5 lighthouse complexes in South Africa which offer on-site accommodation, in the form of 2 fully equipped self-catering cottages each sleeping up to 6 people. Guests can enjoy fishing or swimming, whale-watching from the patio, using the lighthouse as a base to visit some of the many attractions in the area, or just indulging in the peace and quiet of this isolated location. Braai facilities are provided, as well as a swimming pool to offer some cooling relief during the hot summer months.

Great Fish Point Lighthouse Fact File

LSA Number	33
Name	Great Fish Point
Province	Eastern Cape
Location	Near Port Alfred
GPS Coordinates	S33.519637 E27.105981 33°31'10.7"S 27°06'21.5"E
ARLHS Number	SAF-046
Admiralty Number	D6416
NGA Number	32096
Active	Yes
First Established	1898
Commission Date	1 July 1898
Decommission Date	Not applicable
Construction Type	Octagonal masonry tower
Daymark	Vertical faces of the tower painted alternately black and white; lantern painted white with a red dome.
Tower Height	9 meters (30 feet)
Focal Plane	85 meters (279 feet)
Luminous Intensity	5,000,000 candelas
Nominal Range	30 nautical miles
Characteristic	Fl.W.
Period	10 seconds
Pattern	Fl. 0.5s, ec. 9.5s
Pattern Description	1 white flash every 10 seconds.
Manned	Yes
Site Open	Yes
Fenced	TBC
Tower Open	Yes
Accommodation	Yes
Access Method	Car / 4x4
Access Notes	There is a graveled road of 4.4 kilometers (2.7 miles) from the R72 to the lighthouse complex. It is recommended that a vehicle with high clearance be used. In wet weather, a 4x4 might be required.