

Slangkop Point Lighthouse

The western coastline along the peninsular between Cape Town and Cape Point has many reefs and headlands that extend far out into the Atlantic Ocean, resulting in huge waves which have caused a number of shipwrecks. A spate of these occurred in the Kommetjie area in the early 20th century; some of the more famous wrecks included the SS Kakapo (1900), the SS Clan Munroe (1905), the Oakburn (1906), and the SS Maori (1909).

This prompted a commission appointed by Sir Walter Francis Hely-Hutchinson, the last Governor of the Cape Colony, to approve plans for the construction of a lighthouse at Slangkop Point. But there was another reason behind the decision as well. Ships that were navigating southwards from Cape Town could see the “old” lighthouse at Cape Point, even though it was often obscured by clouds or mist. A proposal to build a “new” Cape Point lighthouse at a much lower altitude meant that it would no longer be visible to ships approaching from the north-west, and so it became a matter of urgency to provide an intermediate navigational aid in the area.

A tender to supply and construct a cast-iron tower, lantern, optical apparatus, living quarters, stores, etc. was issued by Mr. W.T. Douglass, consulting engineer to the High Commissioner of the Union of South Africa, in 1913. The contract was awarded to Chance Brothers and Company of Birmingham, England, and they completed the build in 1914. The onset of World War I, which started on the 28th of July of that same year, delayed the opening of the lighthouse, and it was only officially commissioned on the 4th of March 1919. There is recorded evidence that it was in use before that date; a sighting of the lighthouse was noted in the log of the HMS Himalaya on the 19th of July 1917.

The tower itself was constructed from 272 prefabricated cast iron segments, each weighing 500 kilograms, that were bolted together on site. Because of its location right on the shoreline only 9 meters (30 feet) above sea level, it needed to be very tall; with a total height of 33 meters (108 feet), it is in fact the tallest lighthouse tower in South Africa. There are 139 steps arranged in an internal spiral staircase leading up to the lantern level, separated by 5 landings. The weight-driven mechanical clockwork mechanism that once turned the lens hasn't been used since 1936, when the original oil burners were changed to a 4-kilowatt electric lamp. The lighting apparatus was replaced again in 1974, and became fully automated in 1979.

Slangkop Point is one of the few lighthouses in South Africa that is open to the public, and tours are usually conducted by the resident keeper. There is a gift shop and conference center located on the premises, and it can also be used for special events such as weddings and music festivals. It is an extremely popular site for photographers.

Slangkop Point Lighthouse Fact File

LSA Number	15
Name	Slangkop Point
Province	Western Cape
Location	Kommetjie
GPS Coordinates	S34.148646 E18.319274 34°08'55.1"S 18°19'09.4"E
ARLHS Number	SAF-026
Admiralty Number	D6110
NGA Number	26064
Active	Yes
First Established	1919
Commission Date	4 March 1919
Decommission Date	Not applicable
Construction Type	Round cast iron tower
Daymark	Tower painted white; lantern painted white.
Tower Height	33 meters (108 feet)
Focal Plane	40 meters (131 feet)
Luminous Intensity	5,000,000 candelas
Nominal Range	30 nautical miles
Characteristic	Fl.(4)W.
Period	30 seconds
Pattern	Fl. 0.6s, ec. 3.9s; Fl. 0.6s, ec. 3.9s; Fl. 0.6s, ec. 3.9s; Fl. 0.6s, ec. 15.9s
Pattern Description	4 white flashes every 30 seconds.
Manned	Yes
Site Open	Yes
Fenced	Yes
Tower Open	Yes
Accommodation	No
Access Method	Car
Access Notes	All access roads are tarred.