



Wilsons Promontory

Lightstation

150TH ANNIVERSARY

JULY 2009

ORIGINAL INHABITANTS

Wilsons Promontory is the spiritual land of the Gunai / Kurnai and Boonerwung / Bunerong people.

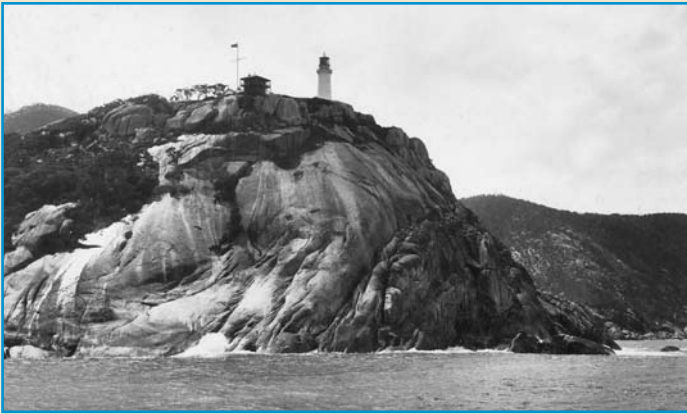
To the Gunai / Kurnai people, who lived to the east, “the Prom” is Yiruk.

To the Boonerwung / Bunerong people, who lived to the west, it is Wamoon.

Yiruk / Wamoon is a living place of special meaning. The Gunai / Kurnai and Boonerwung / Bunerong still maintain a strong cultural and spiritual link with the country, and welcome all to Yiruk / Wamoon.



HISTORY



Wilsons Promontory is the southern most extremity of the Australian mainland and is located approximately 240 kilometres south-east of Melbourne. The Wilsons Promontory lightstation is situated at South East Point, within the Wilsons Promontory National Park.



The Promontory was sighted on 2nd January 1798 by Matthew Flinders and George Bass, who named it Furneaux land in the mistaken belief that it had first been seen by Captain Tobias Furneaux in 1773.

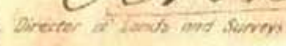


Following his return from the whaleboat voyage, Bass sailed with Matthew Flinders on the sloop *Norfolk* with the intention of circumnavigating Van Diemen's land thus proving the existence of a strait. This voyage was successfully accomplished and following his return to Port Jackson, Flinders recommended to Governor Hunter that the promontory marking the southernmost point of the mainland be named Wilsons Promontory after Thomas Wilson of London, a friend of Flinders and a merchant engaged in the Australia trade.



The Commonwealth acquired Wilsons Promontory lightstation from the state on the 1st July 1915 when the *Commonwealth Lighthouse Service* assumed responsibility for all Ocean lighthouses.

Scale 6 chains to one inch

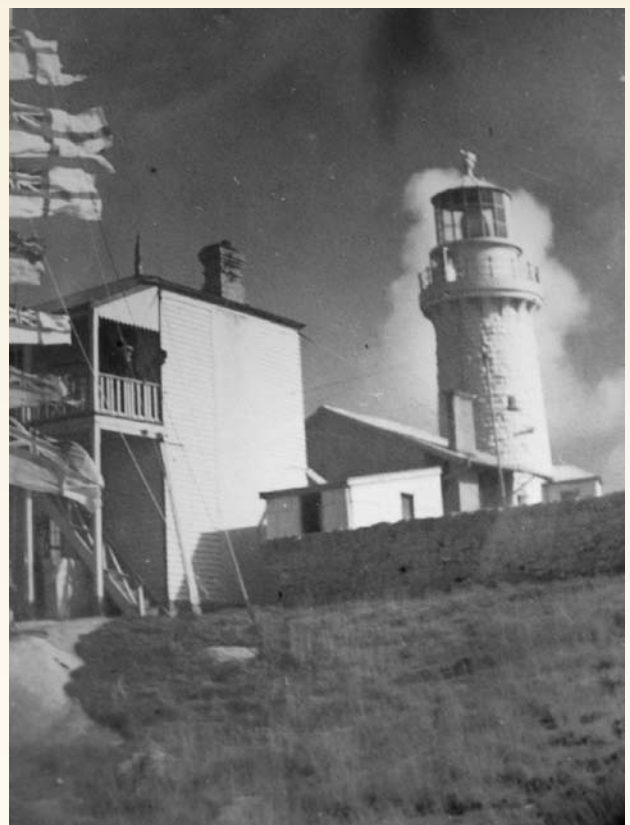


Misc. 1295

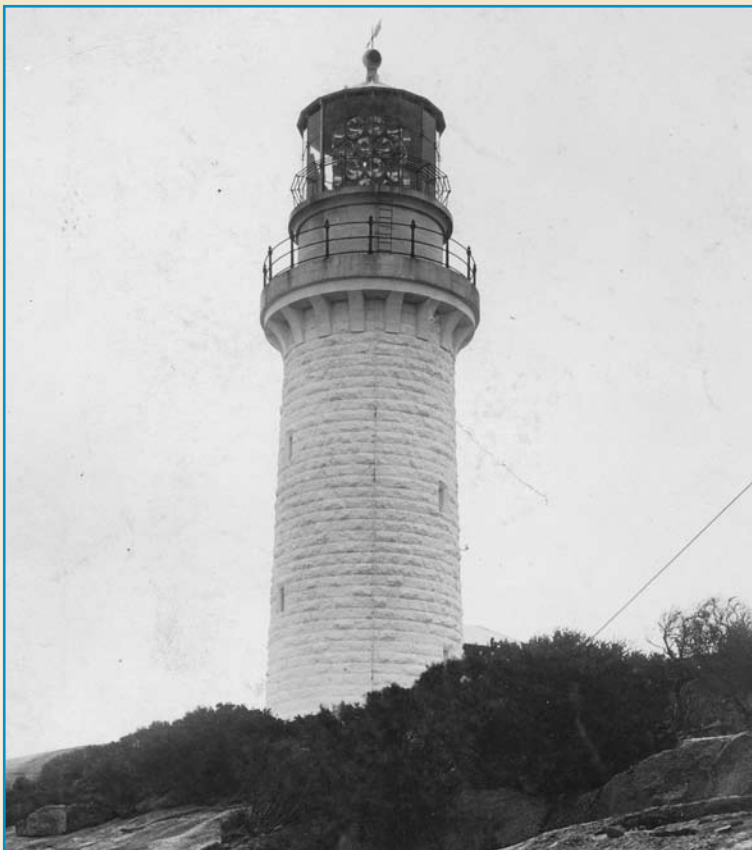
WARTIME OCCUPATION



From about 1938 until the end of the Second World War the national park was closed to the public and a small naval contingent and commando units trained there. A radar station was constructed at the lightstation.



SIGNIFICANCE



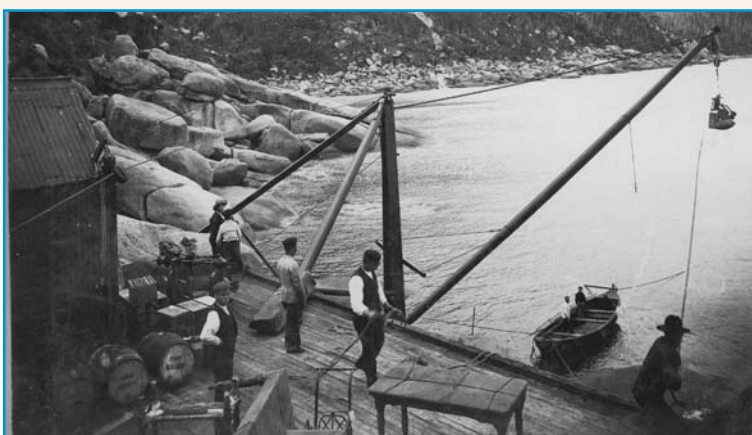
The lighthouse and buildings are heritage listed.

The following statement of cultural significance from the Victorian Heritage Register explains why the Wilsons Promontory lightstation is significant:

Historically it is important as one of the key navigational aides established to make Bass Strait safe following recommendation of the 1856 Intercolonial Conference and as a station that has continued to provide for the safety of shipping since it was constructed.

Architecturally it is important for its design. Designed by Maplestone, who was responsible for early lighthouses in Victoria, it retains much of its important early fabric.

Archaeologically it is important for its potential to reveal building remnants from the earlier light station, signal station and remnants of a military radar station.



THE LIGHTSTATION



Dangers to shipping in this area soon became apparent and in 1856 an intercolonial conference recommended a lighthouse be built.

Later that year James Balmain, Colonial Architect of the Victorian Public Works Office, inspected the area for possible sites and selected South East Point.

Construction of the lighthouse commenced in 1857 and was completed in 1859.

In February 1951 fire destroyed the original number 2 and 3 lightkeeper's quarters which had been built in 1859 and these buildings were rebuilt in 1952 and 1953.

The tower is 19 metres high and was painted white until 1987 when it was returned to its original stonework. It will remain in that state. Colonial architect James Balmain concluded that the granite at the site was good enough for rubble work only, and that the whole of the tower should be faced in another stone for greater durability, probably Melbourne bluestone. However no bluestone was ever used and the building is constructed entirely of local granite quarried on site.

The total cost of constructing the tower and quarters was £19,500 and was funded jointly by the New South Wales and Victorian Governments.

This is approximately \$4 million in today's terms.

The tower is now surmounted by a 7' AMSA generic fibreglass lantern house.



LIGHT SOURCE



The lighthouse was initially illuminated by 32 burning lamps individually fitted with parabolic reflectors. The reflectors were arranged on a circular frame in four tiers and the light was non revolving.

The apparatus was manufactured by Thomas Wilkins and Sons of London. Colza (or rape-seed) oil, a vegetable extract from the wild cabbage (genus *Brassica*) was used as an illuminant during the 1870's. Whale oil was also burnt. Captain C Brewis reported upon the lighting of the Australian Coast 1911-1913 and in his report states the Wilsons Promontory Light as being 'One, white, catoptric. Fixed. About 2,000 candle power illuminant, kerosene.' This indicates kerosene was in use before the conversion to the dioptric system.

In 1912 Commander Brewis was appointed to examine all lights on the coast and he recommended that the optic be replaced with vapourised kerosene and a rotating lens. This was done in 1913 when the original apparatus was replaced by a more efficient system comprising a group flashing third order Fresnel lens driven by a clockwork mechanism, and illuminated by a Chance vapourised kerosene 55 millimeter diameter incandescent mantle.

In 1922 the incandescent apparatus was replaced by auto form mantles.

In 1975 the lantern, lens and pedestal were removed, and a fibreglass lantern house and sealed beam lamp array installed.

In 1993 a solar powered, automatic PRB46 was installed.

Today a Vega VRB25 low voltage lantern is in use. This lantern utilises 12 volt 35 watt globes giving a range of 18 nautical miles. Adjacent to the tower base is the modern power source comprising of solar panels and a stainless steel cabinet holding a battery bank.



LIGHTSTATION STAFF



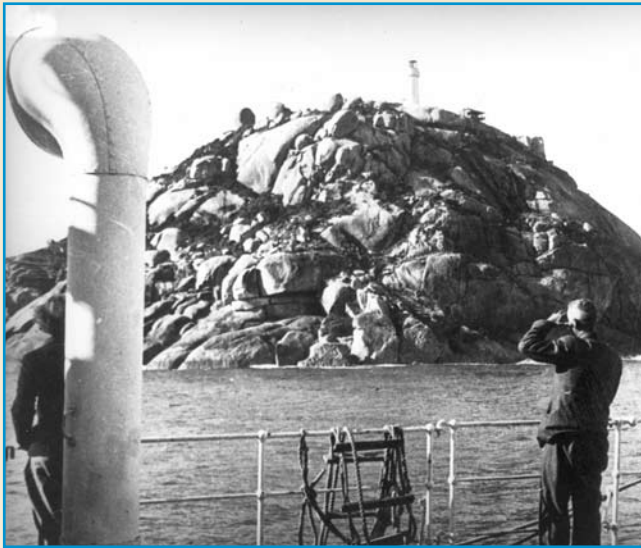
The Wilsons Promontory light began operation in 1859 with a head keeper and two assistants and their families. The importance of the Wilsons Promontory lightstation was augmented by the provision of a signalling station which Brewis regarded of sufficient importance to recommend the appointment of an additional lightkeeper. In March 1884 tenders were called for the erection of the signallers' quarters.

In November 1890 a contract was awarded to David Gorrie and Andrew Sharp for repairs, alteration and additions at the lightstations. The work involved the construction of some fencing and either the construction of, or an addition to, an assistant signaller's quarters. There are foundations of two houses to the north of the existing houses which indicate the location of these two signallers' quarters. (So this suggests there could have been three lightkeepers plus two signallers at the station – at least up until World War One when the Navy commandeered the signal station.)

Four keepers manned this station until 1951 when this was reduced to three.

Lightkeeper's wives and children stayed on station and in later years the children completed their primary and secondary schooling by utilising the services of the Distance Education Centre, Melbourne.

In April 1880, WM Fish, lighthouse keeper at Wilsons Promontory, reported that he and Messieurs Loudon and Kilby would contribute a total of 14 pounds per annum if a school were established. Chief harbourmaster Charles H Payne supported the request. The 14ft x 14ft general storeroom at the lighthouse was leased for a nominal sum and the school



opened on the 13th of September 1880. Head Teacher Mary Dwyer travelled down on the government steamer *Pharos*. Although 14 children initially enrolled, by November Ms Dwyer reported that, because of the dismissal of some of the parents, only six children remained. The Department then closed SS2278 Wilsons Promontory on 31st December 1880. A proposal to reopen Wilsons Promontory in 1910 half time with SS3657 Cliffy Island (three months at each alternatively) was abandoned when normal transfers left no children at Cliffy Island and only three at Wilsons Promontory.



'I know from the experience of teaching our girls via Distance Education (Correspondence 'Corro' School, as it was called when our eldest daughter started school in 1982), that opening the mail bag on "stores day" (when the mail ketch / helicopter arrived) was a highlight of the fortnight. The previous completed lessons, being returned by the Corro teachers, would be nestled in the mail bag waiting for eager hands and eyes to open and absorb. The "corrected" pages would be adorned with stamps and stickers interspersed with numerous comments of encouragement. A letter from the teacher was usually attached describing some anecdote about themselves and their experiences, which helped to keep us in touch with the world outside lightstation life'.

*Ailsa Richter
Lightkeeper's wife*



SERVICING THE LIGHT



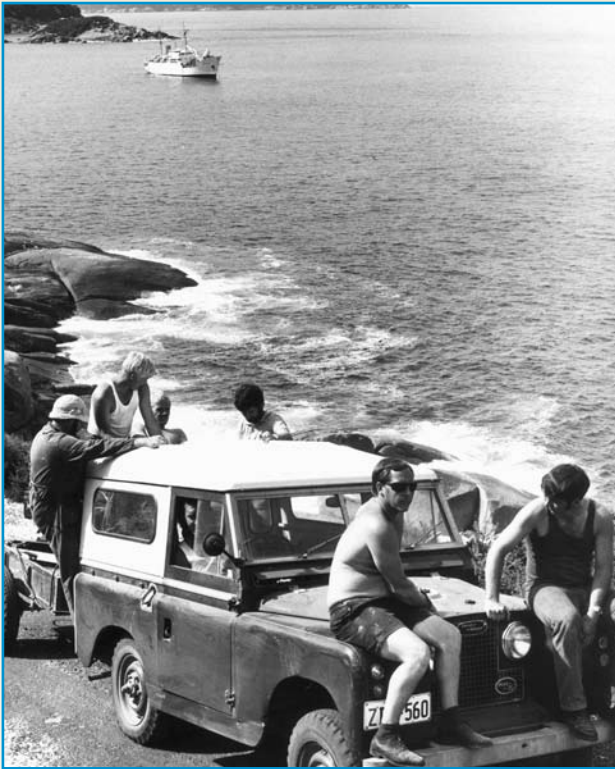
Lightships such as *Lady Loch* and *Cape Pillar* were used to service the lightstation from the 1850s to 1980s. Supplies were ferried from the ship to a landing platform on shore. Prior to 1951 a flying fox was in operation for transportation from the landing to the station. Once 4WD vehicles were introduced, the flying fox became obsolete. An amphibious LARC (Lighter, Amphibious, Resupply, Cargo vehicle) was utilised for a short period in the 1980s but due to the steep terrain proved to be unsuccessful. Helicopters were introduced for transporting personnel between lightstations in the 1970s and soon became the main method of providing supplies.

Goats were popular as a means of providing milk and meat as they were easy to feed and handle. Fresh vegetables were often in short supply.

'We always tried to grow a vegie garden (weather and sandy soil permitting), to supplement food supplies and have discovered evidence of several vegie garden sites that have been cultivated by lightkeepers throughout the history of this station'.

Ailsa Richter

The Light was automated in August 1993. After automation one lightkeeper maintained the lightstation from August 1974 until Dec 1995 when the land was transferred to Parks Victoria.



RECENT TIMES



The Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) was established in January 1991 as a statutory authority to enhance efficiency in the delivery of safety and other services to the Australian maritime industry.

Under legislation, AMSA coordinates Australia's national and international responsibilities in relation to ship safety, protection of the marine environment and maritime and aviation search and rescue.

AMSA also coordinates Australia's involvement in world maritime forums.

Management of AMSA is the responsibility of a eight member Board of Directors, including the Chief Executive. Members are drawn from industry and Government and bring appropriate skills and expertise to the conduct of AMSA's important commercial and safety functions.

Wilsons Promontory Lightstation is one of a network of over 470 aids to navigation maintained by AMSA around the 37,600 kilometres of Australia's coastline.

These aids to navigation are funded by the commercial shipping industry through the Marine Navigation Levy.



Since the Commonwealth handover to the state in the 1990s the lightstation has been managed by Parks Victoria. The lightstation is within the Wilsons Promontory National Park. A Heritage Victoria grant enabled the restoration of the lightkeepers residences for accommodation use.

WILSONS PROMONTORY LIGHT - VIC

(Established: 1859)

IALA AVAILABILITY CATEGORY:	1	
POSITION:	Latitude:	39° 07.7910' S
	Longitude:	146° 25.4630' E
	Datum:	WGS84
CHARTS:	AUS 350, 801	
DAYMARK:	Grey stone tower, white lantern and dwellings, 19 metres high	
CHARACTER:	Flashing	7.50 sec
	Flash:	0.06 sec
	Eclipse:	7.46 sec
COLOUR OF LIGHT:	White	
ARC OF VISIBILITY:	201° - 082° (241°), except where obscured by adjacent islands.	
TRUE BEARINGS FROM SEAWARD		
BEACON:	Vega VRB-25 located inside lantern	
LENS SPEED:	1.33 RPM	
LIGHT SOURCE:	Lamp:	12V 35W C8 Halogen LP PR30s
	Lampchanger:	VLC-153
	Flasher:	Calc-20
	Daylight Control Switch:	Vega
POWER SOURCE:	Solar Panels:	10 x Solarex MSX60 (Inclined 60° to horizontal)
	Solar Control Board;	2 consisting
	Regulator:	5 x Plasmatrix PL20
	Diodes:	Schottky barrier 5A, 30PRV 10 for battery modules
	Battery:	12V, 1000Ah (10 x 100Ah modules) 20 x Yuasa EN100-6, 6V, 100Ah
REMOTE MONITOR:	Autodialler:	EDAC SMS85 CDMA
	Modem:	MAXON MM-5100
	Modem ESN:	3B012282
	Telephone Number:	0427 899 414
	Data Number:	
	Power Supply:	Common to Light
STRUCTURE:	Grey stone tower, 13 metres high to balcony.	
INTENSITY:	48,430 cd	
ELEVATION:	117 metres	
RANGE:	Nominal:	18 nmiles
	Geographical:	17 nmiles



Produced by the Australian Maritime Safety Authority
to celebrate 150 years of operation of the
Wilson's Promontory lighthouse, July 2009.



Australian Government

Australian Maritime Safety Authority

