

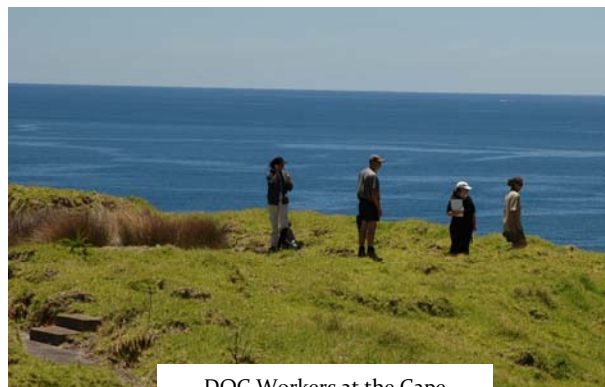
# Friends of Cape Brett Newsletter

Number 1

March 2008



The lighthouse and kerosene store



DOC Workers at the Cape

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Roman Coin showing world's first lighthouse

## Introduction

The Cape Brett Lighthouse was first lit on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1910 under the watchful eyes of Robert McIver (Principal Keeper) and Frances Earnest Lee (Assistant Keeper). The light then proceeded to act as a guide to vessels for the next 68 years until the tower was decommissioned in 1978.

Constructed at an approximate cost of £11,237 3s 5d (approximately \$1.77million today) this light was unique in that it was the first light of three in New Zealand to utilize mercury bath technology. This allowed the light to revolve with less resistance at a rate of two flashes every 30 seconds with a visibility of up to 30miles (48km) away.

The more than 100 keepers who looked after the station over its lifetime not only acted as lighthouse keepers but also as postmasters, weathermen, butchers, gardeners, carpenters, painters and as the general fix-it men the majority were also family men.

### **Some of the major events in the history of Cape Brett:**

- 1908 Marine Dept votes to construct light at Cape Brett.
- 1909 Station under construction.
- 1910 Light switched on, Connected telegraph for signalling.
- 1940 Signal Station est (manned by 2 Naval Reserves).
- 1942 (March) Naval radar station established.
- 1955 (May) Converted to diesel electric operation.
- 1967 Connected to power mains.
- 1978 Fully automated beacon replaced the tower & keepers were withdrawn.
- 2005 (October) DOC takes over management from Maritime Safety Association.
- 2007 (May) Lighthouse receives facelift (a fresh coat of paint care of DOC).

The number of different people and aspects involved in both the construction and day to day running of the station make the history of Cape Brett quite complex. The Department of Conservation is currently in the process of conducting a more in-depth investigation into the settlement's history.

The current focus of the research is in gathering together as many different photos taken at or of the settlement, while it was in operation, in order to provide an insight into the changes that occurred. We are also aiming to create a complete keeper chronology and create a list of their families, the contractors and visitors to the site while it is still possible to do so.

Other work DOC is planning in relation to the lighthouse settlement is the clearing of the tramway, some of the structures and other tracks. There are also plans for the clean up and painting of the internal of the lighthouse and the establishment of a Community Group to aid in the maintenance of the station.

## An Update from DOC



### **The December Trip**

From December 3-6 last year a group of three DOC staff and a guest headed off to the Cape for a week of work. The team consisted of Andrew Blanshard, Christen McAlpine, Andi Crown and Vic Proebstal, the youngest daughter of the light's last keeper.

The aim of the trip was to produce a series of maps and plans of the current state of the lighthouse settlement. These would include a GPS (Global Positioning System) map showing the locations of building foundations, the position of the lighthouse, the tramway and tracks, just to mention a few features. It was also hoped that we could map the foundations of the keepers' houses marking in the foundations, exterior buildings and tanks, etc.

The first day at the Cape was spent orientating Andi (a student from the Anthropology Department at the University of Auckland hired to work for the Historic team for 4 weeks during the summer) and walking around with Vic and a few of the other DOC staff. Also out for the day were the Russell Recreation team members and their volunteers to clean the hut in preparation for the summer. The exploration during the day was brilliant, as was the weather. The whim was rediscovered at the top of the tramway after much bush bashing through the manuka scrub. There was a general inspection of the different building sites as we made our way through the kikuyu grass, some of it more than a metre deep.





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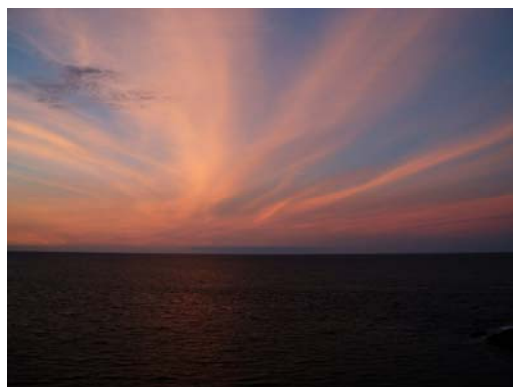
The next day was also great weather wise and Andrew, with the help of Andi, managed to GPS most of the major features of the settlement, such as the land extent and the tramway, before they located the old vege garden up on the southwest aspect of the settlement. Christen set about taking comparative photos for the hut book armed with a booklet of historic photos to replicate.



Above: The landing in 1934  
Below: In December 2007



With the beautiful weather that day and all the walking up and down the hill the team did, it was only fitting that we all got to relax with a spot of fishing and an amazing sunset over the Bay of Islands.



The weather on the third day took a turn for the worse so we turned to the lighthouse to provide some shelter while we worked. This meant cleaning the rats' nests out of the spares cupboard and mopping the bottom floor of the lighthouse.



It may have been a dirty job, but once it was completed it looked much better. All the parts that were found with the cupboard were cleaned up as best as they could be and photographed for identification (most are easily identifiable) and to keep a record of what was left behind.



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Once this was all completed it was back down to the hut to clean up, have some lunch and pack up before deciding whether we were going to be boated out before the weather got as bad as the reports were predicting. But the landing was already too rough so it was another night in the hut.

The next morning saw even rougher seas with the white water at the landing putting on an impressive spectacle for us (most likely extremely tame for those of you who have lived out there).



So a wet walk to Deep Water Cove was definitely on the cards for the day as even the campers on Urupukapuka Island were being evacuated because the weather was going to get even worse over the weekend. So after packing all our day packs with the bare essentials, wet proofing everything in our bags and piling in drinking water and muesli bars, we left the hut on the wet journey to catch our ride from Deep Water Cove.



With the view past the lighthouse non-existent and the fact that we were all drenched before we even got past the old Naval Station at the top of the hill, the walk was looking to be a long one. I am glad to say we all made it safely with no injuries or illness to speak of and were provided with excellent views and a good story to tell once we returned.



At Deep Water Cove – Andi, Andrew & Christen

And that was the trip – Productive and Wet. ☺



### **The Second Wellington Research Trip**

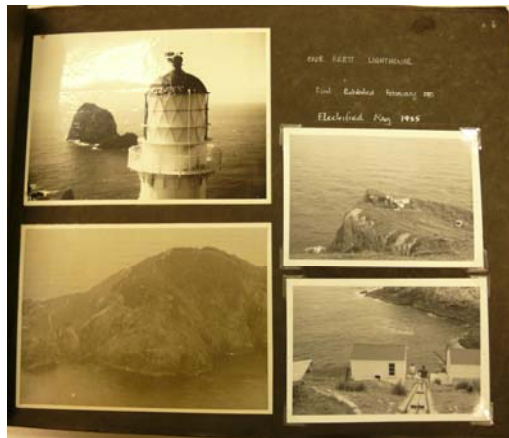
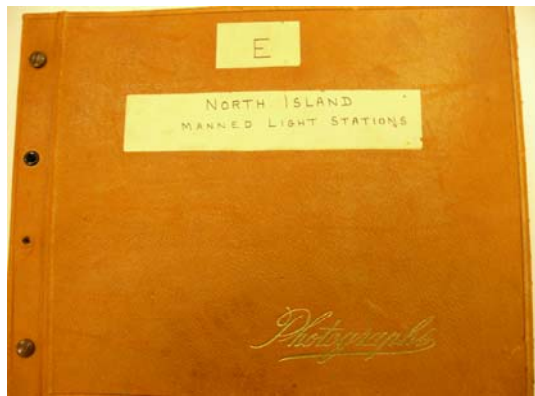
During the weeks either side of Christmas in December and January of 2007-08 Christen travelled to Wellington for a second time to find more information on the settlement's history. The aim was to visit:

- The National Archives,
- The Alexander Turnbull Library,
- The New Zealand Film Archive,
- Maritime New Zealand &
- The Wellington Museum of City and Sea

The National Archives yielded a great wealth of photos this time and Christen was able to see the rest of the files of the light settlement. Amongst the photos collected from the Marine Department photo albums were pictures of the schoolhouse/power house/workshop and storage building (the function of the building changing depending on when you were there), the corrugated iron boat house, the fowl house for the second assistant keepers house and a great copy of a Whites Aviation aerial photo showing not only all the usual features of the settlement but a great perspective on both the signal station and the naval radar station.

The correspondence files that were found were all photographed to be read when back in Kerikeri. Included amongst these files was information about the light apparatus, the horse and keepers wireless sets.





**MARINE DEPT.**

File No. **456/4**  
Volume No. **TWO**

**SUBJECT (or NAME):** **LIGHT HOUSES**  
**MONTHLY REPORTS.**  
**CAPE BRETT**

**FILED**

File Opened **15/1/72** File Closed: **DEC. 977**  
Previous File: **PART ONE** Subsequent File: **VOL. 3**

**OTHER RELEVANT FILES** **ATTENTION**  
This File No. is a copy of  
the file No. 456/4  
for activity 8  
on 17/1/72

**FILED**

**DISPOSAL CATEGORY**

The Turnbull Library was extremely useful with their collection containing nearly all books on New Zealand lighthouses that have been produced. They also hold in their collection unpublished gems such as Eric Creamers 'The Tall White Tower' and the letters from the lighthouse Division of the League of Mothers. Creamers father was an assistant keeper at Cape Brett at about 1912-14 and Eric shares some of his own memories from his childhood at Cape Brett – including how he managed to cause himself great pain when he was playing around with the trolley on the tramway and got his fingers jammed in between the rope and trolley.

The New Zealand Film archive was a little disappointing in terms of what was available for viewing as two of the films of Joe Cotton – a Marine Department painter – were unavailable for viewing. There were however a few seconds of footage on two of the other films (filmed by people visiting the Hole In the Rock) which showed some of the building details not seen in photos already collected by DOC.

Maritime New Zealand, and particularly Jim Foye, were a big help. Maritime NZ had copies of several of the manuals, were temporarily holding copies of old files for our viewing pleasure and had many interesting and useful comments for us to take on board. The manuals included the 1974/5 versions of the 'Standing Orders for Lightkeepers' and the 'Technical Manual and Maintenance Instructions.' We were also gifted with copies of the plans for the 1953 Crane.

The City and Sea Museum Staff were helpful and a look around the museum was educational, though it was just a shame that there was not more information held that could be of use.

While in Wellington it was also a great pleasure to meet up with Bill and Kitty Kemp – a big thanks to you both for making the time during your busy holiday schedule.

All in all the Wellington trip yielded a great wealth of new information that has been integrated with that already held by DOC in the Bay of Islands. 😊



## The Office Work

The office work has been coming along nicely especially the Keepers Chronology that has come leaps and bounds in the last few months with the aid of the monthly reports and the correspondence to and from the Marine Department contained in the national archive files.

We have also received most of your returned forms from the information pack and several people have been sending us

letters and photos – which we absolutely love to read during our day.

Also well underway is the Cape Brett history book being produced by our researcher Christen. The plan for this book is to contain as much information as we have collected and we would love to see even more input from the ex keepers and their families – stories, photos, etc. So far a short history of lighthouses has been written and includes information about the Lighthouse at Alexandria (The roman coin on page 1 is a representation of this ancient wonder of the world).

**Cape Brett Lighthouse**  
**1910-1978**



Christen McAlpine  
2008



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

**Future Newsletters**

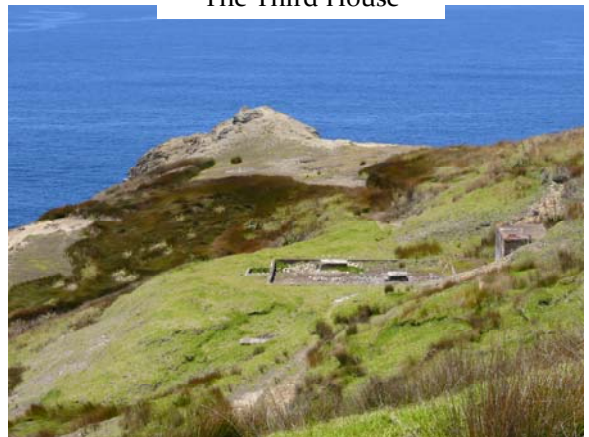
We would love to receive input from you for future newsletters – so send in anything you wish to share about the Cape Brett Lighthouse could be photos, stories, etc. – we don't mind  
Send Christen your contributions at the address at the end of the newsletter. ☺



The Principal Keepers House



The Third House





## Future Plans

### *Open Days*

The planned open days have had to be pushed back for several reasons – including the amount of other projects underway and plans within the Department. The weather has also been a factor in our own work plans with several large weather fronts before, during and after Christmas that has so far prevented us from getting back out to finish our mapping.

### *The Book*

Will continue being written for the next few months yet.

### *Newsletters*

Will continue with your input.

### *Tracks*

Have been put on hold until further planning can be undertaken.



## Credits



**Whites Aviation Photo of Cape Brett**

Written by Christen McAlpine

Photos taken by Andrew Blanshard, Christen McAlpine and Vic Proebstal.

Historic Photos obtained from Files held at the National Archives in Wellington.

Roman Coin Picture obtained from the website 'Forum Ancient Coins':

[http://www.forumancientcoins.com/moonmoth/coins/ant\\_pi\\_us\\_022.html](http://www.forumancientcoins.com/moonmoth/coins/ant_pi_us_022.html)

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