10312

AUSTRALIA

LIGHTHOUSES:
Do we keep the keepers ?

Report from the House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Expenditure

December 1983

627.92:331
.13(94)
AUS V.1
V.11

nt of the Commonwealth of Australia

26. ALTHORPE ISLAND

General Description[1]

456. History, Location: Althorpe Island lightstation was established in 1879. Two small white crosses on the island mark the graves of mariners drowned in the wrecks of the 'S.S. Pareora' (1919) and the cutter 'Rapid' (1936).

457. Althorpe Island is located off the south west of Yorke Peninsula in South Australia. The island adjoins the Althorpe Islands Conservation Park. The lightstation reserve is 91.5 ha in size. Access to Althorpe Island is by ship or light aircraft.

458. The Light and Tower: The light source is a 120 volt tungsten halogen lamp with a Chance Bros 920 mm focal radius rotating lens. The lantern is a Chance Bros (12' dia). The front leadlight is a 120 volt tungsten halogen lamp with a Chance Bros 250 mm focal radius drum lens segment. The lantern for the front leadlight is a Butler and Co (5'8") lantern.

459. The tower was constructed in 1879 of limestone. It is 13 m high with slate stairs and landing. The tower is circular and is painted white.

460. Other Buildings: There are three keepers' quarters built of limestone in 1880. A timber jetty was built prior to the construction of the lightstation. The jetty is used in conjunction with an aerial haulageway for annual resupply from a Department of Transport Cape class vessel.

461. Staff: The lightstation is attended by 2 Department of Transport lightkeepers.

Cost Savings of Unmanning

462. The Department of Transport has supplied indicative costs associated with manned lightstations. This information which covers Althorpe Island is at Attachment I of this appendix. Transport has calculated the indicative benefits of unmanning Althorpe Island at $1.12 m. This gives Althorpe Island No. 8 ranking in respect of financial savings which would accrue from unmanning. This figure represents the net present value of the difference in costs over the next 20 years between manned and unmanned operations discounted at 10%.[2]

463. At the request of the Committee, the Department of Transport provided additional information on the indicative annual net savings achievable from unmanning for each of the 41 manned lightstations.

464. The indicative annual saving following unmanning of Althorpe Island is calculated at $92 000.

Benefits of Continued Manning

(a) Sea-based functions of keepers

465. Coastal Surveillance: The submission from the South Australian Government advises that the four manned lightstations in South Australia provide the State Department of Fisheries with information on the positioning of foreign fishing vessels. This information assists the Department in monitoring ship movements and fish stocks.[3]

466. Search and Rescue: The submission from the South Australian Government makes the general comment that with improved marine navigational technology ' ... the likelihood of lightstation keepers taking part in the rescue of persons is extremely remote' (an exception to this general statement is the Cape Borda lightstation).[4]

467. A submission from the City of Port Lincoln advises that the staff at Althorpe Island lightstation ' ... has only recently been of assistance in a sea rescue'.[5]

468. Weather Reporting: Althorpe Island lightstation does not provide any observations for the Bureau of Meteorology. The lightstation does, however, provide local weather reports and sea strata data for the South Australian Department of Fisheries.[6]

(b) Land-based functions of keepers

469. Cultural Environment: Althorpe Island lightstation and lightkeepers' cottages are listed in the Register of the National Estate.[7] The lightstation group is also listed in the South Australian Register of State Heritage items.[8] The South Australian Government submission states that ' ... demanning of lightstations has been a significant factor in accelerating acts of vandalism and natural decay, with the subsequent escalation of maintenance costs'.[9]

470. Natural Environment: Althorpe Island lightstation is within the Althorpe Islands Conservation Reserve. The Reserve is a major breeding colony of the short-tailed shearwater and at least 7 other breeding bird species. The Reserve is also inhabited by penguins. The Department of Home Affairs and Environment assesses the area as environmentally vulnerable and considers that the danger of feral pests is a factor to take into consideration.[10]

(c) Other

471. Nil.

Reasons for Unmanning/Continued Manning

472. The Department of Transport includes Althorpe Island in a group of 24 lightstations where 'it appears that the financial benefits from unmanning outweigh the social and other unquantifiable benefits', so that the '....removal of the departmental manned presence would appear to be most justified'.[11]

473. The general thrust of the submission from the City of Port Lincoln is to oppose demanning but the City states ' ... it is conceded by the Council that Althorpe Island lighthouse has debatable value as a manned station'.[12] The City was making a comparison between Althorpe Island lightstation and the station on South Neptune Island. The latter station is considered by the City to play a significant role in search and rescue.

474. The Department of Home Affairs and Environment says that if the station is unmanned the likely supervision requirements of the portfolio would be a full-time residential management presence at Althorpe Island.[13]

MANNED LIGHTHOUSES JULY 1983

ATTACHMENT 2

Althorpe Island Lighthouse Station - 120th Commemoration

Michiel Lucker.

Described during the mid 1880's, as an island whose birth was created from being eroded away from the mainland during the time Australia's interior sea was draining, Althorpe Island now sits firmly, 4.5 nautical miles from Cape Spencer. On the other hand, another explanation was given by the famous explore Charles Sturt, who believed another cause to be from a "force by an upheaval of land in the north of the continent". With a little imagination, anyone viewing Althorpe Island's awesome cliff face,could easily create the plausible 19th Century theories.

Named in 1802, by Matthew Flinders as 'Omicron Island', or as the French Explorers, Baudin and Freycinet had known the island as "Isles Vauban", it was the English explorer who renamed the 91 hec. island in 1814, in honour of the powerful naval Spencer family, as 'Althorpe Island'.

The first recorded evidence of contact on Althorpe Island was with the burial of a seal hunter in 1838 , just two years after South Australia began its colonisation. And as the young colony began to expand further, the South Australian Parliament held an inquiry in 1876, contemplating the construction of a Lighthouse Station on the island. Three years later, on February 14,1879, permanent island occupancy began with the first exhibited warning light on Althorpe Island.

One hundred and twenty years later, anyone visiting the island could easily imagine the arduous task of constructing the 68 m. jetty. The long practice of arriving by boat was the only means to Althorpe Island until the mid 1960's, when the airstrip provided the quicker means of personnel transfers or for more frequent means to supply island dwellers with the 'fortnightly stores'. However, those arriving by boat, may be in fact repeating history by duplicating the seafaring methods of jetty docking and considering the 'conditions of the bay', just as the pioneers and subsequent island dwellers did, when they stepped onto the island.

Initially, 16 men were employed during Lighthouse construction projects. Amongst these, the digging of a cutting into the large vertical sandstone cliff face whilst hanging on slings at a height of 70-90 meters, must rate as one of the most difficult and challenging. The mechanism that ran the ladder/railway system in 'the cutting', had to accommodate the means of building supplies or materials to reach a height of 92m. and became the forerunner of the current flying fox. However, if labour/management disputes were not resolved, the lighthouse station construction in 1877/78, was on the way of becoming one of the most expensive in South Australia. Eventually, 11 men finished the task and subsequently, when the Marine Board arrived on February 14th, 1879, they announced it as a "model station".

The historic zig-zag path provides the means to reach the summit, whilst the old 'roadway' surveyed on October 14th, 1884 by Inspector Brown, bears evidence of the strenuous construction efforts. Either way, the visitor's determination to reach the summit would be rewarded with a spectacular panoramic view that includes the clear waters in the only turquoise bay of Althorpe Island.

Amongst the Lighthouse Tower, a Leadlight, 3 cottages, a Jetty and Railway apparatus, all of which are entered on Register of State Heritage Items, (Volume 3302 Folio 165, Sections 13, 61.), are other historical imprints, leaving an impression on how the pioneering Lightkeepers and families had lived. A stroll along 'main street' Althorpe Island would reveal sections where the old tramway once aided with the delivery of supplies to the 'rope locker', 'radio room', the 'workshop'.

Just behind the 'headkeepers quarters' ,(cottage #1), is the 17 m Light tower. This magnificent structure began warning mariners 120 years ago, when with the words "Lights on", the bright light beams indicated any dangers that lie in the treacherous waters and the beginning of Investigator Strait . Lightkeepers had maintained the limestone constructed tower and with the advent of technology, the dioptric lens that had the capability of 1,000,000 candle power sweeping it's warning signal for 28 NM, was replaced with a solar operated 12 volt 50 watt quartz halogen lamp that radiates for 16 NM.

On February 14, 1999, Althorpe Island Lighthouse Station celebrates 120 years of maritime operational service. Although automated in 1991, volunteers have maintained a presence on the island and by doing so, cultivating another chapter with its' new era of another "island lifestyle".

Members of the community have an opportunity to support the event with the donation of $10.00 for the Commemorative Medallion. Not only would the commemorative sailing event and through community support serve the purpose of recognition to the past 120 years as a Lightstation, but also boost the volunteer group's financial position.

A life size example of the 120 year Medallions that are for sale at $10 in order to raise money for the preservation of Althorpe Island 's Heritage.

Without exception, Althorpe Island Conservation Park has a unique coastal environment and provides any visitor with an example of 'days gone by'. The 2 billion year old granite formation and Althorpe Island's calcified sandstone cliffs, topped with a limestone layer are honey combed with caves. Fascinating discoveries are made in these mysterious caves, includingthe remains of an extinct kangaroo species,(Stennurine Kangaroo) or the obscure time capsules left by Lightkeepers.

With the sense of gratitude felt by those who visited or lived in any of the three 120 year old cottages, our cultural and heritage values are reminders that the sense of history is very apparent.

Althorpe Island lies at Latitude 35^0 22.2' South and 136^0 51.7' East. Charts BA 1762 AUST 345
BA List of Lights: K 2000.1

Althorpe Island - CP102

Low open shrubland
Calocephalus brownii

Low open shrubland
Atriplex paludosa

Low shrubland
Nitraria billardieri

Introduced grassland

Bare rock

Bare sand

Ocean

Scale 1:9000

0 .5km

Grid Interval 500m

ENVIRONMENTAL DATABASE OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Produced by: GAR Unit, Information and Data Analysis Branch
Department Of Housing And Urban Development
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Grid: Australian Map Grid, Zone 53
Data Analysis: ESRI Arc/Info Geographic Information System
Date: August 1995

3050m
1:10 000

28.10.76

SVY. 1998
010-128

DEPT. OF LANDS S.AUS.
YORKE PROTECTION AREA

Yorke Peninsula

Althorpe Island

As the sunrises at Marion bay on the southern tip of Yorke Peninsula we slowly make our way towards the Four Winds Charter Boat. Normally they take keen fishermen to the snapper grounds that abound in these waters. But today's charter represents a special pilgrimage for these two blokes...ex lighthouse keepers bound for Althorpe Island between Yorke Peninsula and Kangaroo Island. There are constant reminders of how dangerous these waters can be. The rudder post of the wreck the Willyama, can be seen as the rollers make their way passed Rhino Head and within minutes Haystack Island is in view. The reefs and islands have claimed many lives and as you approach the seal colony near Althorpe, you realise why. "There are two types of seals here, sea lions and New Zealand fur seals." Not far from here the vessel the Pareora went down, her captain and ten crew members lost in these treacherous waters. With the jetty in sight, reminders of that tragedy explain why lighthouse keepers like John Lawley were stationed here. "It's got a lot of nostalgia for me." John first came here as a nine year old when his dad was a lighthouse keeper. "It was a place of adventure really. I always remember that as a young child coming here, the adventure of coming to a place like this. I always get that same feeling coming back." It's a lifestyle which obviously runs in the bloke because John later returned as an adult, following in his father's footsteps as a lighthouse keeper.

And now with his mate Michael Lucieer a fellow keeper on Althorpe, the process of moving in emphasis the remoteness of this place. "We shift our supplies up to the top and that's ninety one metres high." That's the quick way but for John there's no escaping a climb which keepers have made ever since this lighthouse was built in 1879. Althorpe was first discovered by the French explorer Nicholas Baudin who named it Isles Vauban. Matthew Flinders also came across this amazing layer of limestone in 1802 and called it Omicron Island. But twelve years later it was renamed Althorpe after the Viscount of Althorpe in England, one of the Spencer family a distant ancestor of the late Princess Diana. Late last century fear of invasion by the Russians prompted the laying of a telegraph cable to Althorpe Island so those here could scan these waters and maintain contact with the mainland. "Coastguard Oyster Bay this is Althorpe Island we've been keeping a lookout for the yacht that hasn't radioed in, there's no sightings but we'll keep watch for that." Now the more likely invasion is by yachties sailing through way these waters. The lighthouse

is now fully automated. Michael was one of the last keepers to work here in 1991 and now he and John are members of the Friends of Althorpe Island Conservation Park. As part of the group they attend to maintenance jobs on this spectacular and lonely rock in Investigator Strait. "What sort of special attributes to people need to survive on a remote place like this?" "I think handling isolation and just enjoying your own company really. "There's always something to do, you're kept busy. For me it's just spending time with nature, being out in the environment like this which is so spectacular." Stories abound about the people who made this their home and those who built all this. "So they built the jetty and then they employed sixty men to hand on slings there and dug a big cutting, you can hardly see it there anymore. You can definitely see a marking there and during that time they had a dispute and industrial dispute. Some of them were accused of not pulling their weight and so on. But they had the working men sleeping on the he beach here and a rock happened on the foreman's tent and subsequently killed him." "was that an accident?" "Well who knows Ron. Who knows. Officially it was an accident." "But even here there's danger?" "Yes and we as a group are conscious of safety. When you come to this Island you've got to really adhere to the paths and be careful of how you walk and where you walk." In its heyday three keepers lived here with their families. And when you look down from he lighthouse keepers cottages to the beach below, you get a sense of what it must have felt like to them. "It's one thing to stay here for a few days on holiday and quite another to live and work here. It's hard to imagine a more isolated place and in the past should things go wrong this winch with its flying fox to the jetty below was effectively your only lifeline."

For John the isolation offers a chance to reflect on past adventures as a nine year old, like the day he stumbled across the entrance to a blowhole at the top of this ocean cave. He lowered himself by rope into the chamber below, fell into the swirling sea and ultimately swam among the seals to safety. It was probably the sort of adventure best kept from his mother but out here even the most adventurous kid could not avoid the inevitable. "Well you had schoolwork you can't get away from that. "So your mother taught you?" "Indeed yes we had correspondence school and we also had school of the air. We used to get a package that lasted a fortnight and we'd try and get through the package in four or five days and then we'd take time off to go fishing or wandering around the island or hobbies and things like that." And when wandering around here you can't help but be struck by the views. To the south the rugged cliffs on the north coast of Kangaroo Island further west a distant lighthouse at Cape Borda and further still magnificent Wedge Island. To the North Innes National Park from Westcape all the way to Cape Spencer and beyond. It was enough to make a nine year old feel pretty special and pretty small all at the same time. "So you do get that broader perspective of existence in a place like this." We left John to enjoy all this by himself and we returned to the boys from Four Winds Charter who'd had some luck in our absence catching a harlequin fish. "Very nice eating, one of the best eating fish in the sea." To stay on the island you need to join the Friends of Althorpe Island Conservation Park. Membership is ten dollars. The Friends will then arrange a

nominal fee for accommodation in one of the cottages and you'll need to bring your own linen and food. Four Winds Charter takes groups of eight to Althorpe Island at a total cost of $80 a head. They also have accommodation at Marion Bay on Yorke Peninsula for $90 a night for minimum of 6 people.

For more information you can email info@postcards.sa.com.au

BACK TO POSTCARDS

Althorpe Islands Conservation Park

Parcel Details

Map designed and created by
Reserve Planning using PAMS
Date: August 2005