

LIGHT HOUSES OF NEW ZEALAND

BARING HEAD K4004



Latitude: 41°25' South
Longitude: 174°52' East

The light was lit for the first time on 18 June 1935, and the last keeper withdrawn in 1989. The light shines from a 12 metre-high tower, and is 87 metres above sea level. It is an occulting white light flashing on for 9 seconds then off for 6 seconds, and can be seen for 10 nautical miles (18 kilometres).

Baring Head is the nearest light to Wellington, and was one of the last major lighthouse stations to be built in New Zealand. Until 1935, ships had been guided into Wellington Harbour by the light at Pencarrow Head, which was the first major lighthouse station to be built (in 1859).

In 1932 it was decided to build a new light station at Baring Head to serve both as an approach light to Wellington harbour, and as a coastal light for Cook Strait. It was built on land presented to the Government by a local farmer, Mr Eric Riddiford, and work commenced on the buildings, the lighthouse, and radio beacon towers in 1934.

The light at Pencarrow Head was extinguished in 1935 and the tower is now an officially

designated historic place, a popular landmark in the Wellington region.

The Baring Head light was first lit in June 1935 and was the first light in New Zealand to start operating immediately on electricity, powered by diesel generators. The light station was connected to mains electricity in 1950. However, possums caused frequent power failures as they climbed the poles and shorted the wires, so metal guards were fitted to all power poles in the area!

It was the first watched light to be built in New Zealand for 22 years (since the Castle Point Lighthouse was built in 1913) - all lights built in the intervening years were unwatched. After the Baring Head light was built, a programme of electrification of all lights around New Zealand began, and was completed by 1957.

The lighthouse at Baring Head was within comfortable reach of Wellington and Wainuiomata, making it easier for keepers and their families to stay in touch with the outside world, and for the children to attend school. The traffic wasn't always away from the light station, however. In 1984 the keeper estimated that as many as 1000 people visited the lighthouse each year.

Baring Head lighthouse was used as a signal station by the armed forces during the Second World War. While light keepers were exempt from conscription, they were issued with army jerseys because of the extreme weather conditions under which they worked, and because their work contributed to the war effort.

In 1989 the light was automated and the last keeper withdrawn. The light is now electronically monitored from Wellington.