

LIGHT HOUSES OF NEW ZEALAND

THE BROTHERS K4246



Latitude: 41° 06' South
Longitude: 174°26' East

The light was lit for the first time in September 1877, and the keepers were withdrawn in 1990. The light shines from a 12 metre-high white wooden tower, and is 79 metres above sea level. Its white light flashes once every 10 seconds, and can be seen for 19 nautical miles (35 kilometres).

The Brothers Islands are situated on the western side of Cook Strait. In 1877 the lighthouse was built on the largest of the two islands to replace the light on Mana Island, which sailors often confused with the light at Pencarrow Head.

The island is extremely isolated and desolate. There was not even enough soil for the workmen building the light to pitch their tents, forcing them to build huts for their accommodation. There was no

drinking water on the island and all water, food and supplies had to be shipped in. This proved a difficult task - it took 60 days to land the first shipment of building supplies because of gales and rough seas.

The island itself is a rock, and the tower was built on the highest tip to provide all round visibility of the light. The winds were so strong it was decided to strengthen the building by filling the space between the lining of the walls and the weatherboards with pieces of broken rock. The light began operation with oil illumination in September 1877 and was converted to electric power provided by diesel generators in 1954. Life on this station was nicely summed up by an early keeper, who wrote on the workshop wall: "If Providence brought me here, it must have been in anger".

The Brothers light station was deemed unsuitable for women and children because of the hazardous landing by crane and the confined living conditions. It was therefore watched by (preferably unmarried) keepers on a roster system.

The desolation of the island meant the keepers were completely dependent on the mainland for supplies. The letter books to the Marine Department are full of complaints about the poor quality of these supplies: "The last cask of salt meat that was sent here on November 25, 1881 is quite unfit for use as it is tainted and none of us is particularly fond of stinking meat... the meat was bad before it came here, the smell of it is

enough to drive a person from the table."

Often in one shipment the flour, potatoes, butter, oatmeal, and meat would arrive unfit for use. Keepers would have to survive on limited stores until the next shipment arrived. Even when the supplies arrived unsoiled, by the third month the meals had become very limited.

The isolation on this station was notorious for sending keepers 'rock happy', making it the least popular of all lighthouses in New Zealand. In 1973 the principal keeper wrote: "This is a place ruled by moods. I once had to lock a joker in his room for 24 hours because of the way he was acting, the isolation does it." However, some keepers enjoyed the peacefulness of the life at the Brothers, and for many it was a good training ground for a life in the lighthouse service. It was one of the last stations to be automated, in July 1990. The light is now monitored electronically from Wellington.