

LIGHT HOUSES OF NEW ZEALAND

EAST CAPE K3932



Latitude: 37°41' South
Longitude: 178°33' East

The light was lit for the first time on 9 August 1900 on East Island and again at East Cape in December 1922. The last keeper was withdrawn in 1985. The light shines from a 14 metre-high white cast iron tower, and is 154 metres above sea level. Its white light flashes once every 10 seconds, and can be seen for 19 nautical miles (35 kilometres).

East Cape Lighthouse stands on the most easterly point of the North Island of New Zealand. When it was first constructed it stood on East Island, just off the tip of East Cape.

Work began on building the light in 1898, but it was a difficult job as there were no suitable landing beaches. This meant tons of building material had to be transported from work boats up the steep slopes to the site of the light station. On one occasion four men were drowned when a boat from the Government steamer Hinemoa capsized in the

rough seas. These were the only recorded deaths relating to the construction of any lighthouse in New Zealand. Eventually, the light was first lit in August 1900.

The sea around the cape has taken the lives of many sailors. In 1906 the light keepers witnessed the wreck of the ketch Sir Henry, with the loss of all four men on board. The body of the captain was found and buried by the keepers and the grave can still be seen by passing ships.

East Island was an inhospitable home. The clay earth made it impossible to grow vegetables or keep livestock, so fresh meat and vegetables were rare foods. The island was subject to earthquakes, and the steep cliffs were continually slipping into the sea. By 1920 these slips were coming dangerously close to the lighthouse itself, and it was decided to move the light station to the mainland.

The light was temporarily extinguished in April 1922 and by December of that year, after the tower and houses had been moved to East Cape, the light resumed full operation.

Life at the new light station was much easier for keepers and their families, as it included new housing - with an inside bathroom - and plenty of fresh food. The light was converted to diesel-generated electricity in 1954 and in 1971 the lighthouse and station buildings were connected to mains electricity.

The last family left the station when the light was automated in 1985. It is now monitored electronically from Wellington.