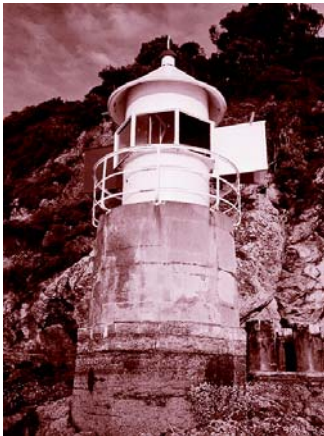


LIGHT HOUSES OF NEW ZEALAND

FRENCH PASS K4238



Latitude: 40°55' South
Longitude: 173°50' East

The light was lit for the first time on 1 October 1884, and the sole keeper withdrawn in 1967. It now has two red sectors and one white sector, which show a fixed light from a white house 3 metres above sea level. The white light can be seen for 10 nautical miles (18 kilometres) and the red light for 7 nautical miles (13 kilometres).

There are two lights marking the channel at French Pass at the top of the South Island, one on the mainland and the other a beacon in the middle of the channel.

Small boats had used the channel for years, but during the 1870s, with the growing settlements in Wellington and Nelson, passenger and mail steamers also began to use French Pass. It was a quicker and more comfortable trip - provided the ship could miss the reef between the mainland and D'Urville Island. During the 1860s a stone beacon had been placed on the outer edge of the reef, but

at night this was difficult to see. By 1880 the Wellington-Nelson mail steamer was using the pass regularly at night, to the horror of the Secretary of Marine who wrote:

"Some serious casualty will arise if a light is not put up." Despite this, it was two years before a light was fitted to the beacon. Then, as soon as it was finished the beacon was struck by a steamer, causing considerable damage to both the beacon and the boat.

In 1884 a tower was built on the mainland, facing out to the beacon, which was then repaired. The light was first lit on 1 October 1884. A single keeper was stationed to tend the lights with the help of a local family, who agreed to ferry the keeper out to the beacon whenever the light went out, which happened frequently.

The first few years of daily journal entries contain many reports of the light going out -several times the wind was so strong it could not be relit. At one stage, during bad weather, the keeper had to relight the beacon three times in one week. After seven years of this irritation the keeper plucked up the courage to complain to the Marine Department, stating that the small retainer he was being paid wasn't worth risking his life to go out to the beacon in gale force winds, and rough seas! By all accounts it worked - the following year he reported with great satisfaction: "The French Pass light has not blown out this year."

Because of its location in the middle of a busy shipping lane, French Pass lighthouse bore the brunt of many collisions. In one

incident a passing vessel that had grounded near the beacon used it as an anchor to haul herself off, causing considerable damage.

In 1961 the acetylene-powered lighthouse became one of the first to be automated, but a keeper remained in a caretaker capacity for another six years. In 1967 the light was replaced and the keeper left the station. The light was converted to mains electricity in 1971.