

LIGHT HOUSES OF NEW ZEALAND

KAHURANGI POINT K4506



Latitude: 40°47' South
Longitude: 172°13' East

The light was lit for the first time on 30 November 1903, and the last keeper withdrawn in 1960. The light shines from an 18-metre high white tower, and is 47 metres above sea level. The light that flashes twice every 15 seconds can be seen for 9 nautical miles (16 kilometres).

Kahurangi Point Lighthouse stands on the northern end of the Karamea Bight on the north-western tip of the South Island.

Construction of the lighthouse was difficult. Access to the site was limited and surrounding areas were practically unexplored, so no one knew quite what to expect.

The tower was made by Judd Engineering Works of Thames, and was shipped to the station in sections and landed at the mouth of the Big River. From there it was carted over 3 kilometres along the beach and then winched by tramway 50

metres up a cliff to the site. It was a difficult task – two small boats were damaged in the landing, and one worker broke his leg. The man had to be carried over 32 kilometres of rough country to Westhaven, and from there to Collingwood where a steamer took him to Nelson. All in all more than 145 kilometres were covered before he could be treated. The incandescent kerosene light was first exhibited in November 1903. Although access to the station was a problem, the keepers seemed to enjoy their time at this lighthouse. The area is very lush and green – growing vegetables and keeping livestock was no trouble, so their diet was varied.

The area also had good supplies of fish and seafood, wild berries and mushrooms. Getting other supplies to the station was not so easy. At first a contract was agreed with a steamer to land oil and stores at Big Bay every six months, but this proved too hazardous and it was decided it would be easier to supply the station by land. Each month one keeper would ride into Collingwood for supplies.

It came as no surprise when in 1925 the Marine Department decided to automate the light and withdraw the keepers, its reason being *“the light is extremely difficult to tender”*. In September 1926 the kerosene light was converted to an automatic acetylene gas light. However three years later the keepers were still working the station.

The keepers remained on the station until the Murchison earthquake in June 1929, which caused serious damage at the light station. The light was

shattered, but the tower remained standing – propped up by the landslide that had buried the bottom floor. One of the keepers home was completely covered by earth.

The lighthouse remained out of action for two months, until a temporary light could be set up. The tower was repaired and a new automatic light put into operation in March 1931. The keepers returned and the last one stayed until 1960.