

## LIGHT HOUSES OF NEW ZEALAND

# TIRITIRI MATANGI K3740



**Latitude: 36°36' South**  
**Longitude: 174°54' East**

The light was lit for the first time on 1 January 1865, and the keepers were withdrawn in 1984. The light shines from a 20 metre-high cast iron tower, and is 91metres above sea level. It flashes once every 15 seconds, and can be seen for 18 nautical miles (33 kilometres).

Tiritiri Matangi is the oldest lighthouse still in operation in New Zealand. Situated on Tiritiri Island in the Hauraki Gulf, it marks the approaches to Auckland Harbour some 28 kilometres to the south.

Construction of the lighthouse was very difficult. It took four months to dig down through 3 metres of thick, boggy, clay-like mud to reach ground which was hard enough to build on. Building materials for the lighthouse were then shipped to the island and carted in sledges by bullocks over the slippery banks to reach the construction site. Despite the hardships of construction, the original tower is still standing, but

the light itself has undergone many changes. When the fixed light was lit on the first day of 1865, it was fuelled by colza oil, but later it was modified to burn paraffin oil. In 1882 a red glass pane was fitted inside the lantern to throw a red light over Flat Rock near Kawau Island. This was removed in 1922 when an automatic light was installed on Flat Rock. In 1916 the light was again modified, this time to burn kerosene. It was replaced in 1925 with an automatic acetylene-burning revolving light, and the keepers were withdrawn.

During the 1930s the Tiritiri light was fitted with a radio beacon, and in 1947 the keepers returned to the station.

In 1955 the light was converted from oil to diesel-generated electricity. In 1956 the light was again replaced, this time with a new xenon light of 11 million candle power. With a visibility of 58 miles it was one of the most powerful lighthouses in the world at the time. The new light was a private donation from Auckland businessman and yachtsman, Sir Ernest Davis.

In 1966 the light was changed to mains electricity via a 5 kilometre underwater power cable. The present light is powered by solar panels, which charge the batteries that run the light at night.

During the 100 years that Tiritiri Matangi was a watched light, it was a particularly busy station, as one keeper wrote in the 1960s: "[At other lighthouses] Keepers tended to feel anonymous, whereas on Tiritiri we had a constant passing parade to prove our use." This parade was brought to an end in 1984 when the

keepers were withdrawn. The last keeper became the first conservation officer on the island and Tiritiri Matangi became an open wildlife sanctuary within the Hauraki Gulf Wildlife Park.