

*Montague Island  
Self-Guided Tour 1  
The Light Station*



*Explore the  
Light Station  
and its  
immediate precincts.*

*Use the map inside  
to navigate to  
feature points.*





# 1. HALLWAY

## 100 years ago

A great place to start - your accommodation.

This large 6-room house was provided for the headkeeper and family - three bedrooms, and originally one other bedroom reserved for the Visiting Inspecting Officer and other officials.

Houses and the tower were originally "connected" by a bell system, replaced by phones such as in the hallway here: one ring for far end house, two for middle house, three for this house, four for the shed, five for the lantern room in the tower. (Possibly from the 1940s onwards).

The first headkeeper was Captain John Burgess who, with his wife Isabella and children, stayed in this house for 17 years.

Keepers came and went with their own furniture until the 1960s. The Dept of Shipping & Transport then furnished the houses.

As with all the dwellings, this house is constructed of rendered brick, the walls being three and four bricks thick.

The flooring is slip-jointed ironbark and spotted gum timbers, (an example of slip jointing can be seen in the seat in the middle quarters courtyard).

The 11ft high ceilings are "Matchwood" boards.

All fittings are cedar.

No bathrooms originally. People would use a hip bath or a jug and basin.

## Since then

Changes in this and other buildings include:

- closing-in of verandahs,
- bathrooms being added,
- laundries fitted-out,
- heating systems changing,
- electrification,
- roofing materials changing.

The last official lighthouse keeper transferred to NPWS in 1987.

NPWS staff were then accommodated in these quarters until 2003, and are now housed in the northern cottage.

Recent renovations were completed in 2004 with the assistance of a National Heritage Trust grant and NPWS funding.

The Government Room is now room 4 and the Shed has become room 5.

Overnight stays have become possible with this improvement.

## Behind the scenes

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"Lofty" and "commodious" accommodation" - is how the quarters were described on completion.

During the 17 years of Captain Burgess, assistant keepers also stayed for long periods, suggesting that Capt. Burgess was a good headkeeper with whom to work.

One pair of keepers had a feud that lasted more than three months and they only spoke to each other over the phone system.

In the early 1970s, one family described how their children came to Montague expecting to live on an island "fringed with sand and covered in palm trees", but ended up loving the island.



## Imagine...

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You have been posted to Montague Island as headkeeper... what would you bring?

What would you think of this house for your family?

Imagine cleaning this house if you had a large family with you!

## 2. THE SITTING ROOM

### 100 years ago

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A large room with a magnificent outlook!

This would be the focal point for family meals and entertainment. The thick brick walls have superb insulating qualities for maintaining evenness of temperature.

Note the coal grates in the slate fireplaces.

### Since then

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The large window in this room dates back to only the 1970's. It replaced the original much smaller windows (as per bedrooms).

Over the years, physical changes to buildings occurred, some with permission, some without. Some keepers were reprimanded for inserting doorways or pulling out fittings.

Maintenance of these buildings is an ongoing process for NPWS staff, just as it always was for the keepers.

The recent upgrade is the result of a National Heritage Trust grant. Current furnishings have been chosen not to replicate but to give the impression of the period.

### Behind the scenes

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Mrs Isabella Burgess was famous for her baby grand piano (brought out by boat, lifted onto the horse-cart, brought to the house and installed in this sitting room). She would play it for the lighthouse staff and visitors. A story is told of a penguin walking through this sitting room and standing next to the surprised keeper sitting in his easy chair.

During the war there were fears that the Japanese would land here from submarines sheltering in one of the bays, so the keepers' wives kept bags packed ready to hide in a cave.

A story is told of one keeper's wife receiving a mail order of clothing from the steamer, and parading her new gear along the lawn in front of this room.

The Hampson family recall in the early 1970s having morning teas with the headkeeper in this room. Their father (an assistant keeper) and the headkeeper always wore uniform for these occasions.



## Imagine...

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What forms of family entertainment would there have been in the 1880's?

Imagine the storms rattling the windows and the roar of the sea and wind, although you may well experience this during your stay!

This would have served as the room for entertaining guests and visiting dignitaries by the Head Keeper.

### 3. *THE SOUTHERN VERANDAH*

#### 100 years ago

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This verandah was originally one of the open verandahs which spread around most of the building. Being on the south side it would have been exposed to the severe southerly weather systems.

#### Since then

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After enclosing the verandah, the end section was (and still is) used as a storage area.

The main room here was traditionally the "school room" from the 1960s or so.

The children would do their work on a long bench situated under the window.

Other uses for the enclosed verandah have included:

Store room.

First aid room, including the Royal Flying Doctor Service medical kit (now in the middle quarters "office")

Communications room, with UHF, VHF marine radios, phones, faxes and computers (now in the middle quarters "office")

Weather Room, with fully automatic weather station computer (now also in the middle quarters).

#### Behind the scenes

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The Hampson children remember struggling with attention spans doing their correspondence schooling here in the early 1970's.

One mother would supervise.

Occasionally there were visits from mainland-based tutors and teachers.

Some keepers chose to educate their children by boarding them on the mainland, especially during important years such as the Leaving Certificate. Occasionally arrangements would be made for children to remain at a previous school for continuity or to finish a senior year.

The last keeper's children on Montague were educated through School of the Air, communicating by radio with their Dubbo-based teachers.



## Imagine...

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Imagine the difficulties of balancing education with other activities on the Island (for both children and parents).

The distractions would be considerable, with no bells or normal school routines, and a whole island to explore just outside the window.....

There may well have been occasions where there was only one child living out here, and the opposite extreme could occur when there may have been 12 or even more school-age children (especially when there were 3 keepers and their families prior to 1969).

## 4. ROOM 4 - "THE GOVERNMENT ROOM"

### 100 years ago

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This room was known as the "Government Room" in the early days as it was used by the Inspector of Lights during his visits.

Inspections of lightstations were designed to keep everyone on their toes and everything "ship shape".

Inspections were held regularly and often with only short notice.

The visiting inspector was treated with a mixture of respect and perhaps in some cases fear. One keeper's words described the inspectors as being treated "like royalty".

This was the only room furnished by the government of the day. Keepers came and went with their own furniture until the 1960s when the Lighthouse Service furnished all the quarters.

### Since then

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The "government" furnishings have long gone and the room has assumed the role of a bedroom for visitors.

The room's outlook has changed significantly with the closing-in of the verandah.

### Behind the scenes

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Many Inspectors were fondly regarded and became welcome visitors. However, there were some notably fearsome Inspectors whose visits were dreaded.

One Inspector was renowned for coming at extremely short notice and causing a great to-do on the Island.

Workplace hierarchies then were much different to today. People in such senior positions were often feared as much as respected.

The head Keeper's wife was required to provide 3 meals, as well as morning and afternoon teas, for the Inspector during his visit.

A story is told of the Pilot Station on the mainland (above the entrance to Narooma) raising a special "secret" flag signal when the Inspector had arrived in town to warn the keepers to be prepared!



## Imagine...

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Having the Inspector visit would be much like having the *Governor General* in your home for a few days.

Would he eat with the family?

Would your children behave well?

## 5. *THE KITCHEN*

### 100 years ago

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With all its modern fittings, it is now difficult to imagine this kitchen in its original form.

The large hearth once housed a coal-fired stove which would probably have burned continuously.

Storage cupboards would most likely have come and gone with the Keepers. Shelves were shown in the plans to be built-in on either side of the chimney.

The dining room opposite the doorway was originally the internal store and possibly acted as a pantry.

Three months worth of supplies were to be kept at all times where possible due to the unreliability of sea transportation.

All the kitchens out here had windows to the courtyard for supervision of young children.

### Since then

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Significant changes occurred over time:

Electrification of the quarters by generator from late 1950

Pre-fabricated kitchens installed

Water supply augmentation

Stove changes ... electric then gas.

Refrigeration and deep-freezing.

### Behind the scenes

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Small boats from Narooma would bring out legs of lamb, swap for fish, and tell the children to "Rush this up to your mother for the oven".

The Island had a communal vegetable garden in the gully above the jetty, with an adjacent well that is still there.

Courtyards would have also held herb gardens and small vegetable plots at varying times.

Louise Hampson remembers receiving her home science lessons here in the early 1970s from Mrs McCabe, the headkeepers wife, as she was such a renowned cook.

Mice used to be a problem at times on the Island. Keeping your precious stores safe from them would have been a constant job.



## Imagine...

As a headkeeper's wife, you would spend a lot of your time in this room.

You would be responsible for cooking for visitors, and especially for the visiting inspector, as well as everyday meals for your family.

What type of meals would have been prepared for the keepers during their differing rosters - first shift till 10pm, second shift till 2am, third shift till dawn?

Imagine the impact of refrigeration and deep-freezing and how life must have become easier for the families out here.

## 6. *THE COURTYARD*

### 100 years ago

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This would be a family's "private" outside area.

This was the area for drying clothes and for your young children to play under your watchful eyes from the kitchen window.

The outside store (now the bathroom and laundry) would have housed the laundry, with a coal-fired copper for washing.

Some families probably had small vegetable and herb gardens out here, either in the ground or in tubs.

Each house still has a cistern (underground water tank) in its courtyard, originally with a form of hand pump over in one corner to draw water.

The roof drains to the cistern through the extensive gutter and drainpipe system. The original guttering was made of copper for corrosion resistance.

The cistern also has a "sump" for filtering out coarse materials.

Rubbish bins were probably stored here as well.

Household rubbish and nightsoil was all tipped into the sea on the eastern side via a flying-fox system of ropes and pulleys.

### Since then

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The weather and other circumstances have caused a variety of courtyard problems over the years.

The grass dies off in hot weather and the soil becomes dusty. The dust is whipped up by strong winds and blown into and onto the houses.

When the rains come it can then turn muddy.

Some courtyards (and the lawns surrounding the houses) were tarred unsuccessfully at one stage and this was later removed (probably too hot in summer).

At least one of courtyards was limed and then compacted, unsuccessfully.

Most are now cement in some form or another.

This courtyard is currently the only one with a lawn.

Flush toilets and automatic washing machines have greatly increased water-usage on Montague - each household had to manage their water efficiently.

For a time rubbish was tipped over the cliff to the west of the solar panels. NPWS removed most of it in the late 1980s.

## Behind the scenes

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Drying washing on Montague could have its difficulties:

In bird-nesting season the birds would mark the clothes with their excrement.

In a howling nor-east wind damp clothes became salty.

In extreme winds any washing left out would end up scattered over the island.



## Imagine...

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Would this be adequate private outdoor space for you and your family?

## 7. OUTSIDE THE OILSTORE

### 100 years ago

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The middle shed, made of rendered brick, is the only original outbuilding. It was used to store fuel for the lighthouse's oil-burning lamps. On its southern side, where the new toilets and shed now are, large bins were located for storage of coal and coke - the fuel for the stoves and fireplaces.

After the 1950s there were two large oil tanks holding fuel for the generators.

On the eastern side, visible on the walls of the houses, are the markings of the small trapdoors used for discreet access to the toilet pans (night soil as they were politely referred to), removal of which would have been the responsibility of one of the assistant keepers. The night soil was tipped into the ocean on the eastern side of the island.

It is interesting to note that the houses actually face east. Over time the back doors have evolved into the main entry points.

### Since then

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The area has seen significant changes including:

- Grassing of the lawns with kikuyu - sometime in the middle of last century.
- 1950s - building of the weatherboard shed to house the diesel motor to generate electricity for the houses and eventually for the light mechanism.
- 2002/3 - building of the new shed for housing the controls for the sewerage system and NPWS equipment, as well as new toilet facilities for tour groups.
- Cementing of driveways and paths.
- Between the houses, the communication tower is used by agencies such as Telstra, Eurobodalla Council and NPWS for communication systems.

Notice the "Tourism for Tomorrow" award next to the middle gateway. Montague Island Tours won this international award for sustainable eco-tourism excellence.

## Behind the scenes

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By the early 1900s, human and horse traffic had caused the grasses to disappear and the keepers experienced a constant problem with the sand being blown around and into the quarters. This became one of the reasons (the other may have been to provide food for grazing animals) for the introduction of kikuyu and buffalo grasses to the Island from about 1915. A fateful decision for the future of the Island!

More recently in 2002, similar conditions were experienced when the area was excavated for the new sewerage system. An unexpected nor-east gale of more than 40 knots blew the sand into the quarters and even up under the eaves.



## Imagine...

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With this being the main thoroughfare to the cottages, the area would have been a major interaction point for the three families.

Imagine this area during a gale from either the north or the south! (You may get to experience this first-hand during your stay!)

## 8. ASSISTANT KEEPER'S COURTYARD

### 100 years ago

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This cottage has four internal rooms, an external kitchen, store, laundry and toilet.

This particular cottage would house the First Assistant Keeper and his family.

As with all the houses, it is made of rendered bricks. The Moruya Examiner reported that in one 24-hour period, the construction company landed 64,000 bricks from the mainland - a remarkable achievement!

This courtyard has cement paving. At one stage it was made of rammed, limed, earth.

The relics in the corner were found around the island and relocated here for the public interest. The semi-circular steel plate is believed to have been part of the hand-operated crane on the wharf at the old landing site further south than the current wharf.

The seat near the relics has a "slip-jointed" top made of boards identical to the flooring inside the houses.

### Since then

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This house was used only as the relief quarters after the light was electrified in the 1960s - there being only two keepers and their families thereafter, with the Head Keeper in the large house and the Assistant in the northern quarters.

Little money was spent on maintenance and this, together with the lack of occupation resulted in problems such as rising damp and plaster falling off the walls.

NPWS began a restoration program, following the "Burra Charter" (guidelines for the care of important heritage places).

The inside of the main cottage has been restored to approximate 1890s condition.

This courtyard and the cottage are used by Montague Island Half-Day Tours for refreshments for tour groups to the island, as well as being a museum to assist with their interpretive experience.

Up to 7,000 visitors are catered for within this courtyard each year.

Recently (2004), the external storeroom was converted to re-house the NPWS office and the automatic weather station, both of which were previously housed in the southern verandah of the headkeeper's house.

## Behind the scenes

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Some assistant keepers and families stayed here for up to seven years. Some families didn't have children with them, while others had many children (the Townsend family had five in the early 1890s living in this house).



## Imagine...

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How many times would bricks have been handled in their journey from the kiln and into the walls of these houses?  
When the lightstation needed only two keepers, perhaps the decision to not use this house was made to provide some "space" between the headkeeper and the assistant keeper.

## 9. THE ISLAND IS PROTECTED

### 100 years ago

The trees in this area only date to the 1960s.

They are New Zealand Christmas bushes (Pohutakawa trees), planted by Miss Judith Cassell and the keepers in the early 1960s.

Miss Cassell is credited as being the motivating force behind the declaration of the Island as a Wildlife Sanctuary in 1953, and its being placed under the guardianship of the National Trust (NSW).

### Since then

Management of Montague Island has changed significantly over the years:

#### As a lightstation:

Marine Board of NSW (built the light and managed it from 1881-1899).

NSW Department of Navigation (1900-1915)

Commonwealth Lighthouse Service (1915-1951)

Commonwealth Department of Shipping and Transport (1951-1975)

Commonwealth Department of Transport and Communications (1975-1991)

Australian Maritime Safety Authority (1991 - present) manage only the tower and its associated power supply and solar panels.

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (28<sup>th</sup> December 1987 - present) now manage everything except the tower.

#### Conservation management as a protected area:

National Trust of NSW (March 4 1953 - 1987)

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (28<sup>th</sup> December 1987 - present)

#### Nature Reserve Status:

The Island was gazetted as a Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Wildlife Act on 17th January 1990, with the exception of the lighthouse tower and its solar panel.

## Behind the scenes

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Into her eighties and right up to her death in 1975, Judith Cassell would make an annual excursion to Montague to observe the wildlife, especially her favourites - the penguins.

Described as a "gentle sweet lady" by her colleagues, she could also "rough it with the best of them" in her fight to have the Island's wildlife protected.

Her visits were eagerly anticipated by the keepers and their families.



## Imagine...

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Judith Cassell's foresight marked the beginning of conservation efforts on Montague Island.

Many people consider the National Trust as being all about buildings, so it is worth noting that its first actual property was this Island, and it was due to the penguins and seals that it eventuated.

The National Trust still spells "Montague" with its original French spelling of "Montagu". Visit their website when you get a chance.

## 10. *INSIDE THE "MUSEUM"*

### 100 years ago

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This house has, in the main, been restored to 1890s condition. This is how an Assistant Keeper and family would have perhaps set it up during their time on the island.

NPWS intend that when completed this "House Museum" will allow visitors to experience a little of the lifestyle of the 1890s on Montague as though the assistant keeper and his family had just stepped out.

The project is ongoing, and each year new furniture and household items are added as funds and availability permit.

The furnishings and household items are, in the main, genuine antiques from the period. Please respect them.

Refer to the information panels in each room.

### Since then

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Extensive restoration work was needed to overcome the problems of age, the environment and neglect. The addition of a bathroom "wet area" on one of the verandahs caused significant damage from moisture.

The paint colours in three rooms and the hallway are a close match to that which was found underneath 26 layers of paint!

The timber floors have been restored, though the sitting room has the remains of the shellac coating which may have been the original floor finish. The boards are "slip jointed" - see the top of the bench outside in the courtyard for an example of this form of jointing.

The National Trust of NSW assists the museum process by sourcing all the furniture and artefacts from the period 1890-1892. This is part of an ongoing program.

Power and plumbing have been removed.

Curtains and floor coverings are obviously new, but made to closely match the period.

## Behind the scenes

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Although not as large as the headkeeper's house, this was still described when built as "lofty" and "commodious" accommodation.

The newspaper scrap on the floor under a plastic protector in the sitting room is from the 1940s and would most likely have been used as underlay for linoleum installed at that time.

The curious item on the dresser in the sitting room is a wool-winder.



## Imagine...

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Even these days many people half-jokingly speak of Montague's residents as sometimes becoming "rock happy" or suffering "islanditis" during their long stints out here.

The keeper's work continued every day, even weekends. Their only break would be for their annual leave.

What would conditions be like if you had a dislike of another resident?

## 11. THE NORTH-EAST CORNER

### 100 years ago

From this vantage point it is possible to appreciate the Victorian architectural skills of James Barnett, the Colonial Architect of the time.

He was responsible for the design of 15 lighthouses and their quarters and outbuildings during the 1800s.

The simple but elegant lines, the corner features, and the practical, privacy-creating courtyard walls are features of his work. He designed Greencape Light, the next station south of Montague, and is also famous for his design of the original GPO in Martin Place Sydney for which he took some of the island's granite to use as a feature.

The northern-most cottage would have been the second assistant keeper's accommodation.

After electrification of the light mechanism in the 1960s, this house and the large house were used for the staff, with the middle house used only for relief keepers.

It was originally a mirror image of its neighbouring house next door.

### Since then

The cottage has been modified over the years and can now accommodate up to a dozen or so people.

It currently houses NPWS staff working on Montague, usually out here for a one week period.

It has bunk accommodation for extra workers and/or research staff.

Its external store room off the courtyard contains a research facility for use of visiting university or CSIRO staff.

Currently, most visiting university students are linked to the Albury Campus of Charles Sturt University.

A part of one verandah has been converted into a bathroom with an inside flushing toilet. This work was done many years ago and would not be permissible under current heritage regulations.

As this house is effectively continuously in use we ask for your respect of the privacy needs of staff by not entering unless invited to do so.

## Behind the scenes

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This house is particularly exposed to the north-east winds that often strengthen considerably during the afternoons.

The verandah outside the eastern entrance and along the eastern verandah becomes a sheltering point for the young gulls and terns during the spring and early summer breeding season, and gets very noisy and covered with guano.



## Imagine...

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What would it have felt like to arrive with your family and try to integrate into the existing physical and social fabric of the community of keepers?

You would (temporarily, it is hoped) be the "outsiders".

## 12. SCIENTISTS COME AND GO

### 100 years ago

Montague has been a place for various research projects for more than 100 years.

The first recorded scientific research visit to the Island was by an amateur ornithologist, Mr Bassett Hull, in 1907. He was here in the spring for the silver gull nesting period.

Interestingly, Hull and his 12 year old son were thrown into the sea on their return journey when their boat capsized on the Narooma bar. They were saved by their good swimming skills and the Narooma Pilot boat. Sea bird, seals, whale and other research and monitoring has been occurring on and off ever since.

In earlier times, the research staff would either stay with the Keepers, as did Judith Cassell, or camp out in the field.

The old Navy Huts, built in the 1960s (now removed) to the north were also used as quarters by groups of researchers for their stays.

### Since then

Research has included work by the CSIROs Dr Norman Robinson from 1959 on the island's breeding Shearwater population - research which has been continued by volunteers annually ever since, making it one of the longest continuous studies in the world. An annual Shearwater census is held in March.

Gerard van Tets assisted Dr Robinson in 1964 and then annually until 1993 with a team which included Peter Fullagar and botanist Petrus Heyligers amongst others. A plaque in the courtyard, donated by the Tets family, commemorates this work.

The old storeroom has been converted into accommodation for researchers and other workers, while the house itself is used by NPWS staff during their one-week stints.

Other research has included work by the CSIRO. Most recent research has been largely conducted through Albury Campus, Charles Sturt University.

Much of current research is based around the Seabird Habitat Restoration Program (the Kikuyu project).

## Behind the scenes

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Many researchers, including Judith Cassell, formed an enduring attachment to Montague Island and its wildlife.

Keepers and their families would look forward to research visits for both the company they provided, news of the "mainland", and the interesting work they did.



## Imagine...

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Having a dedicated research facility in which to stay would be an improvement on having to stay with a Keeper and family, or on camping out, or staying in the unlined fibro, old Navy Huts to the north. Researchers these days still face some of the problems of their earlier colleagues... the weather and seas can extend a visit by many days past a planned return time!

## 13. THE LIGHTHOUSE STEPS

### 100 years ago

The Headkeeper usually had the first shift until 10pm. He would fill up a 5-gallon can with oil before heading up the stairs. In winter this could be early in the afternoon if it was a dark day, and in summer much later. He would then remove the curtains which protected the lens from the sun; fill up the oil-burning lamps; wind up the heavy weights (which slowly descended the centre of the tower to rotate the lens by clockwork gears); and the light would start to shine into the night for mariners. The lens emitted about 45,000 candlepower, (equivalent to approximately half of one car headlight).

At 10pm, the first assistant keeper would come up to the room and take over the watch.

At 2am, the 2nd assistant keeper would take the watch and stay until dawn.

The weights needed winding every 45 minutes and the oil lamps would need adjustment to keep them burning efficiently.

In the mornings, the keepers all worked on maintenance activities, which would include a lot of painting, especially of metal objects, to keep corrosion to a minimum.

This was a daily system - no days off for the Keepers, other than during annual leave.

### Since then

The northern shed was constructed in the late 1950s to house the diesel generator, and power was supplied to all the quarters.

Electrification of the light took some years of planning, and did not occur until the late 1960s.

The diesel generator would fire up and the light's electric bulb switched on, as well as the electric motor to rotate the lens.

This electric bulb emitted 1 million candlepower (equivalent to approximately 18 car headlights), and was the peak of the light's brightness during its lifetime.

At this stage the lightstation staff was reduced to just two keepers and their families.

In September 1986 solar technology came to the light. This first involved the delicate removal, piece-by-piece, of the cut glass Fresnel lens, which weighed eight tons. (It is now housed in the Lighthouse Museum, inside the Narooma Visitors Centre).

A solar-powered array of 75-watt, quartz-halogen lamps was installed on a new pedestal, and the 18 solar panels connected to their bank of 24 batteries.

In May 2006 the array was replaced by the current VEGA beacon. The light now operates at about 132,000 candlepower (equivalent to one and a half car headlights).

The eye baths are first aid equipment for battery acid accidents.

Other specialised equipment is to do with fuel and oil spills.

The current stair railing is a 2003 replacement for the original wrought iron railing that had all but corroded away.



## Behind the scenes

The electrification of the houses must have made a huge difference to the lives of the Keepers and their families, particularly in terms of food storage capacity.

The reduction in staff from three to two keepers would have altered the social fabric of Montague's keepers considerably.

## Imagine...

Imagine heading up into the lantern room, in all weathers, every single night, for perhaps three or four hours or more.

Which watch shift would have been the least popular?

## 14. THE TOWER

### 100 years ago

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The construction of the light during 1880 and 1881 was a labour-intensive project. The logistics of such an operation, even today, would have been considerable. See our Self-Guided Tour 2 for the details of its construction.

This light is one of 15 lighthouses in what was then the colony of New South Wales to be designed by the Colonial Architect James Barnet. Francis Hixson, the President of the NSW Marine Board, wanted the coast "illuminated like a street with lamps", with the decision to build a light on Montague first made in 1873, However the necessary monies were not set aside until 1877.

Globally, the 1800s saw the construction of many lighthouses as trade and colonisation increased the amount of shipping into and out of Europe.

The contractor W.H. Jennings coordinated a large team of tradesmen who finished the job in 14 months, 4 months ahead of schedule.

The tower stands, in the old scale, 39ft 9inches (approx 12 metres) from the rock to the balcony, and the lens was 251ft 9 inches (some 67 metres) above high water mark.

### Since then

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Following many changes of bureaucracy over the years, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) now manages and maintains the tower. Recent major works by AMSA's contractors have included the painting of the upper metal sections; re-sealing of the balcony jointing to keep rain out; removal of the many coats of paint from the internal stairs which had almost obliterated the tread patterns; removal, cleaning and re-sealing of all the windows in the lantern room; re-painting of the internal metal fittings; and removal and replacement of the "pointing" cement between the blocks.

The current beacon is a VEGA VRB-25, fully automatic lens rotating at 0.67 rpm, giving it a flash every 15 seconds from each of its six sides. The "parasitic" curtains (black metal plates) prevent any distortion of the beam by the oddly shaped windows.

## Behind the scenes

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Much of the design for lighthouses such as Montague was based on the lights of England and Scotland designed by the Stevenson family, who perfected the design, building and ongoing maintenance for such structures.

Their towers still stand today on some of the most remote and inhospitable reefs in the Atlantic.

Many of their towers incorporate the living quarters for the staff inside the tower itself, rather than in separate houses such as here on Montague.



## Imagine...

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Montague's keepers had the luxury of completing their shift and going home to their house and their family.

Can you imagine living inside the tower, with only another keeper for company, and only a small patch of rock outside the door in calm weather to escape to? This is how many of the north Atlantic lights were manned.

## 15. SUPPLY LINES

### 100 years ago

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In this vicinity would have been the terminating point of the main horse track from the jetty to the light station.

The horses were usually Clydesdales - quiet, reliable and strong.

From here, the track spiralled north around the quarry site, then along the eastern side and diagonally across to the old jetty site on the south-western corner of the Island.

The jetty had a small crane used for lowering a wooden 22ft row-boat into the water which would transfer goods from the larger steam boats. The crane also transferred the goods to the cart for the horse to transport up the track to the quarters.

The horse formed an important part of the supply line for the Island, the other parts being the row-boats and the regular supply vessels.

### Since then

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As with all the tracks around the Island, the horse track is still maintained for access purposes for humans.

These tracks are also used for access by Little Penguins and become "Penguin Highways" after dusk during the breeding season.

In the 1950s a small red three-wheeled tractor was shipped to the island to replace the horses.

For a few years, an amphibious vehicle (a LARC) would come with the Department of Transport's boat and efficiently transferred supplies such as fuel for the light, coal, heavy equipment and even furniture directly from the ship, up a ramp and straight to the light station precinct.

Helicopters have often been used since the 1960s for heavy work being more economical than ships.

The existing jetty came into being in 1958, although the bay had been used during construction of the light.

The old jetty has almost disappeared, with only a few old bolts to show where it once stood. You can retrace the horse track down to Old Jetty Bay.

Lumps of coal and coke on the tracks serve as reminders of this time.

## Behind the scenes

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The horses have become part of the legend of Montague. One particular horse is said to have received a beating from a keeper and swum across to the mainland. Legend says it did this several times before disappearing. Another horse was called "the beast" after its wicked temperament. Yet another horse apparently would hear the sound of the steamer's horn and disappear to avoid work.



## Imagine...

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Imagine the curious sight of a horse swimming towards the mainland!

The arrival of a supply ship would be cause for much anticipation of new things such as books, fresh food and news of the mainland. Perhaps some visitors or even a new keeper and their family would be aboard.

## 16. *THE LAWN LOOKING SOUTH*

### 100 years ago

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The water supply at a remote lightstation such as this was an extremely important consideration. On small Islands such as Montague, catchments are minimal and the Station would have to depend on the water it could collect and store from its roofs during rainfall. Some soaks exist around the Island, but they are unreliable. Each household would have to manage its own water supply stored in the cisterns under their courtyards.

Waste water was easily taken care of in those days - just tip it somewhere into the ocean or down the track somewhere!

### Since then

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Changes in water usage would have reflected the rapid changes in domestic technology over the years:

- Bathrooms and plumbing being installed in each house.
- Electric automatic washing machines.
- Flushing toilets.
- Pressurised plumbing systems

A septic system was installed in the 1970s to take care of waste water. The transpiration trenches were located directly north and south of the buildings.

After more than 30 years of use, this septic system failed and its absorption trenches no longer did their job.

In 2005 the current system was installed.

The tanks you see are a mix of the old and the new. The new sewerage system is designed to cope with a daily peak flow of 4750 litres (equivalent to 20 persons in overnight residence). It has four connected tanks fitted with aeration and transfer equipment. Water from the final stage tank is pumped out to underground irrigation pipes that drip feed the kikuyu lawn between the houses and the sheds.

This system was chosen as it delivers high quality treated water with low nutrient levels to the underground pipes and also has the smallest physical "footprint".

## Behind the scenes

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There is a report of the water tank filters becoming blocked with feathers during a particularly active seabird breeding season. Two recent droughts saw Montague's water storage fall to low levels, and in autumn 2003 it almost became necessary to bring water out from the mainland, but a fall of rain "saved the day". Increased capacity provided by the new tanks attached to the sheds has alleviated the problem somewhat.

Near the old vegetable garden is a small well that can re-fill overnight in good rainfall periods. It was never used as drinking water however as often penguins that had fallen-in but couldn't get out died in it. Another soak is towards the southern end, where a small dam was found. Both soaks dry out during periods of drought.



## Imagine...

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"Water, water everywhere and nor any drop to drink". This line from the Rime of the Ancient Mariner reflects the situation if water usage ever exceeds that collected and stored from rainfalls. On some lightstations the head keeper's wife would ration out the water to the assistants and their families during dry times.

## 17. *THE SIGNAL MAST*

### 100 years ago

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For many years the mast was the only communications method between Montague and the mainland and also with passing ships.

The signal flags or pennants were approximately 18 feet (6 metres) long and were housed in the small room attached to the headkeeper's quarters close by.

Signals were exchanged on an informal basis with the mainland until the Pilot Station was established on the hill at Narooma in the early 1900's. Heliographs and Aldis (Morse) lights were also used - both versions of a flashing light system - until the 1930s.

### Since then

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The mast has obviously been shortened to accommodate the anemometer (wind-speed measurer) for Montague's automatic weather station.

The Montague Island signal flags have long since disappeared, however the Lighthouse Museum in Narooma Visitors Centre has a similar, though smaller, signal flag set from the original Pilot Station on display.

Direct communication between the Island and other light stations became possible when pedal-powered radio receivers were installed in 1939.

The first radiophone was installed in 1960.

Nowadays even the internet has come to Montague!

Mobile phone reception is also very good.

### Behind the scenes

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The mast had to be painted regularly. It is obviously not an easy object to work on, nor are its wire stays. There is a story of one of the headkeepers bemoaning the low quality of some assistant keepers when he found that the wire stays had an unpainted stripe along their length from laying them on the ground to paint them and not rolling them over to complete it.

Signalling could often be a one-sided communication, as someone could see the signals but have no similar device with which to respond. Keepers and their families could only raise the signal and then hope.

There are stories of shopping lists being exchanged by signals, as well as newspaper headlines, including the declaration of World War I.



## Imagine...

From all accounts, life on Montague Island could be quite idyllic - until an emergency arose.

Suddenly you would realise that although just five nautical miles away, the mainland could be frustratingly and even tantalisingly out of reach due to weather and sea conditions.

Mrs Burgess, the headkeeper's wife and mother of the two young children buried in the Island's cemetery (visible to the south), summed up the isolation and communication difficulties with the following words in 1894, just after an assistant keeper's death and subsequent burial next to the children:

"We never could procure assistance [in medical emergencies] until too late"

# FEEDBACK

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We hope you've found your self-guided tour a rewarding experience.

Any feedback on this booklet is welcome, particularly constructive suggestions, corrections or ideas.

## Acknowledgements:

Written by Mark Westwood, NPWS Narooma November 2004  
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"The Lure of Montague", revised edition 2001, by Laurelle Pacey, has been cited extensively for this document. This book is available for purchase in the Narooma Visitors Centre.

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