



Chart of the north end of
KING ISLAND
BASS STRAIT, AUSTRALASIA
 (To accompany Report on Lighthouse)

Scale of Nautical Miles
 W. H. Ewing Colonial Engineers Department
 Sept 1855

Lithographed at the Surveyor General's Office Melbourne, October 1855
 by J. Jones

VICTORIA.

LIGHTHOUSE ON KING'S ISLAND.

*LAI*D upon THE COUNCIL TABLE by THE CHIEF SECRETARY, by command of HIS EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR, and ordered by THE COUNCIL to be printed, 28TH NOVEMBER, 1855.

REPORT

Of the Board appointed by His Excellency SIR CHARLES HOTHAM, K.C.B., Governor of Victoria, to examine and report as to the necessity of a Light-house being erected on King's Island, and the site best adapted for that purpose.

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD:

Commander Ross, R.N., Chairman.

James Rusden, Esq. R.N.

W. H. Burgoyne, Esq., Clerk of Works Colonial Engineer's Department.

I. AS TO THE NECESSITY OF A LIGHT-HOUSE BEING ERECTED ON KING'S ISLAND.

A cursory glance at its dangerous and rocky shores, with the position it occupies at the entrance of Bass's Straits, its proximity to the coast of Victoria, the strong current sweeping towards its shores under the influence of a westerly gale, (*found to be a prevailing wind*), and the disastrous shipwrecks that have occurred on its coast, but too strongly point to the vast boon the erection of a light-house would confer on the mercantile interests of Victoria and the neighbouring Colonies.

A beacon light on King's Island, if seen only at a moderate distance, would warn the mariner of his close proximity to a dangerous coast, where no harbor offers even a temporary shelter, and would avert a calamity which has too often occurred along the western shores of this Island by its timely warning.

II. THE BEST POSITION FOR THE PROPOSED LIGHT-HOUSE.

A careful examination of the northern portion of the Island and the adjoining New Year Islets has induced us to decide that the north end of King's Island is unquestionably the best site for a light-house, and a reference to the accompanying plan will give a weight to this decision, conveying as it does more tangibly the results of our observations, (the position is tinted yellow thereon,) and from the spot selected the sea horizon is visible around twenty-one points of the compass, even at an altitude of only six feet above the present surface of the ridge, consequently the light, when erected, will embrace within its circle a still greater range of the compass, while at the same time it will be distinctly seen over the New Year Islands, its usefulness will also be further extended by its proximity from the site selected to those dangerous shoals lying off the north end of the Island, the Navarine and the Harbingers.

III. AS TO THE HEIGHT OF THE LIGHT ABOVE THE SEA AND THE DISTANCE IT SHOULD BE SEEN.

The site selected for the proposed light-house has been found by observation to have an altitude of 171 feet above the sea level, and is on that part of the Mount Wickham Ridge, running down to the North Cape, which has been cleared of the dense scrub by some recent bush fire, and lies about a quarter of a mile from the beach.

Mount Wickham by these same observations has been found to be only 312 feet above the level of the sea instead of 595 feet as shewn on the chart, and by comparison is doubtless the highest point of the Island.

The lantern should be elevated at least 300 feet above high water mark, it should be a fixed light in contradistinction to that on Cape Otway, and of sufficient power to be seen on a clear night at least twenty-five miles.

Ships, therefore, sailing in either direction through the Straits, would have the advantage of its auxiliary aid in obscure or misty weather.

No objection can be urged to the elevated position we assign to the light, from the possibility of its being obscured temporarily by a land mist. During our survey this question was made one of special observation, with the wind scarce any two days from one quarter, yet the highest elevation was never once obscured by fogs.

A beacon of tar barrels was burnt on New Year's Island, distant seven miles in a direct line from the site of the proposed light-house, and was found of sufficient power to have been visible at a considerably greater distance, while at a lesser altitude than the site chosen for the light on King's Island.

IV. RESOURCES OF THE ISLAND, PARTICULARLY AS REGARDS BUILDING MATERIALS.

Abundance of good durable stone can be easily procured within a quarter of a mile of the proposed site of the light-house, either compact basalt or sandstone, while granite of superior quality abounds in large quantities on both of the New Year Islands, but no traces of limestone could be discovered, neither shells or coral in sufficient quantities along the shores of the Island as a substitute.

The indigenous timber is wholly useless for building purposes, being crooked and stunted in growth, and not any one specimen we examined exceeded six inches in diameter, it furnishes, however, a ready and abundant supply of firewood, and further, we are glad to report that good spring water is also abundant and near at hand; the positions of some of these streams are shewn on the plan.

In spite, however, of these drawbacks we are of opinion that a light-house could with ease and facility be erected of masonry, especially when stone of so durable a nature can be procured, and we are further led to this conclusion from the necessity of a durable structure occupying the exposed site selected for the light-house.

V. MANNER OF INTERCOURSE WITH THE ISLAND AND FACILITIES FOR LANDING STORES.

Ineffectual attempts were made by us to land on the north and north-east coasts, but were rendered abortive by the heavy surf constantly breaking on the shore even in the finest weather, and for this purpose the *Lælia* was anchored in Disappointment Bay, but afterwards permanently, during our stay, removed to Franklin Roads, found to be a tolerably safe anchorage for small vessels, and we have since practically ascertained that the only place where a landing can be effected is the small sandy beach close to the wreck of the *Whistler*, even here impossible with a strong north-westerly breeze.

This landing place is distant about twelve or fourteen miles from the site of the proposed light-house; the track we pursued to reach the spot is indicated by the red line on the plan; part of the road lay across a heavy sandy beach, impracticable for drays even without a load. This fact, in connection with the impossibility of effecting a landing on the north coast, induced us to ascertain the practicability of forming a road inland across the flats, and small ranges behind the sand hills, and we are satisfied that it would be a task of little difficulty, involving no great outlay, to open a good bush road sufficient for the purposes required in the conveyance of those heavy articles that would have to be landed and transported to the site of the light-house during the progress of the works.

VI. GENERAL REMARKS.

We deemed it our duty, before closing our survey, to ascertain the number, the nature and circumstances attending some of the most remarkable of those shipwrecks that have occurred along the western coast of King's Island during the past two years, which we have gleaned from parties resident on the Island, and sufferers from the earliest of these catastrophes.

Thus we have ascertained that within the past eighteen months the following vessels have been wrecked on the western shores of King's Island, viz. :—ship, *Brahmin*; schooner, *Waterwitch*; schooner, *Agnes*; ship, *Whistler*; brig, *Maypo*; schooner, *Elizabeth*;—and it is not merely a conjecture when we express our opinion that three of these calamities would, in all human probability, have been avoided had a light been erected prior to that period. These vessels, the *Brahmin*, *Maypo* and *Whistler*, were driven on shore at night by the force of strong north-westerly gales and a current which we have ascertained to be singularly influenced by these winds.

Their commanders were ignorant of their position; yet within the orbit of that beacon, even in misty weather had it been erected, they drifted on unsuspectingly, and in three instances adduced, not only were the vessels and cargoes lost, but they resulted also in a lamentable loss of human life.

Again we would, before closing our Report, urge the necessity of a light-house being erected on King's Island; fragments of wrecks cover its coast, doubtless the remains of vessels missing, whose fates have never been ascertained, and we are convinced it is a measure the importance of which can only be appreciated by actual examination of the localities, and the result of this examination has convinced us that within the compass of our duties lies an earnest recommendation to your Excellency that this great work be speedily accomplished.

M. G. H. W. ROSS, Com. R.N.,
Chairman.

JAMES RUSDEN.
WILLIAM H. BURGOYNE.

Melbourne, 15th September, 1855.