



Mizen Head Signal Station Visitor Centre

Mizen Tourism Co-operative Society Ltd.

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Regd.No.4724R



Mizen Head Visitor Centre at Ireland's Most Southwesterly Point!
An exciting experience for all the family in any weather

Mizen Head Signal Station

Ireland's Most Southwesterly Point

A great experience for all the family in any weather



Mizen Café • Gift Shop @ the Mizen
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Poster in Kerry Airport



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Mizen Head Signal Station Visitor Centre

The Irish Lights Mizen Head Fog Signal Station

Introduction and Background

Mizen Head, the most southwesterly point of Ireland, spelt danger to ships for centuries until the Irish Lights Signal Station was built there in 1908. In 1993 Mizen Tourism Co-operative Society Ltd. was established to seize the initiative to develop a unique attraction at the station as the last keepers left the Mizen Head Signal Station made redundant by automation. Together with the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse, the Signal Station has been involved with the advances in technology for safety at sea from the explosive fog signal through the first radio beacon in Ireland to the present day DGPS grid. The new visitor centre was called MIZEN VISION! The Irish Lights Signal Station Visitor Centre and it had in excess of 217,000 visitors in the first five years with 52,000 in 1998. In the years 1998 – July 2003 a further 205,000 visitors paid to go down to the Signal Station across the Bridge. In 2001 a new facilities and interpretive building was opened above near the car park.

The Mizen Head Visitor Centre site is in three locations. The Visitor Centre **Above** at the Car Park, the Path **On the Way** down to the Signal Station **Below**. There is a ten-minute walk between the buildings down a steep path and across the Bridge



Project Phase 1 (Completed)

In the first phase of MIZEN VISION! the Signal Station was opened to the public for the first time in June 1994 with displays and exhibits in the former Keepers' quarters about the lives of the Keepers, Mizen wildlife, wrecks and the story of the Fastnet Lighthouse. In 1996 MIZEN VISION! won a Ford Ireland Environmental Award; it was short listed twice for a AIB Better Ireland Award winning the National Prize for Small Rural Business in 1999. It was awarded Fuchsia Brand status by West Cork Leader Co-operative in 1998. This development created an integrated all weather authentic visitor experience. It has added significantly to the experience of a visit to the Visitor Centre. Mizen Café and Shop@ the Mizen, Toilets, Navigational Aids Simulator, Automatic Weather Station, Displays and Interpretation have given comfort and interest to the visitor. The concept of the displays in the new building is to explain the use of modern technology in safety at sea. The modern way of collecting weather data unlike the manual methods used by the Lightkeepers is with a computerised Automatic Weather Station (AWS). Mizen Tourism purchased a system from Mason Technology.

There is much more to Mizen Head Visitor Centre. The location at Ireland's most southwesterly point is dramatic with the 99 Steps and a spectacular Arched Bridge. In the former Keepers' quarters there are displays about the life of the Keepers and the environment of the Mizen. The new building has artwork by Jules Thomas who has created a stunning mural showing the Mizen landscape looking back from the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse. The 1/10th model of the Lighthouse has been made by Geoff McCarthy and Dave Otway. In the entrance Sheena Wood and Kurt Lyndorff



of the Ewe Art Centre, Glengarriff (formerly of Goleen) created three sculptures, Water on Rock, a water feature, Sky to Seabed, a tile mural and Lighthouse Crafts, five pairs of hands showing lighthouse keepers' crafts. In Mizen Cafe John Eagle's photographs of the lighthouses from Old Head of Kinsale to Cromwell Point, Valentia dominate the wall alongside Richard Mills' exquisite photos of local wildlife, flowers and ancient monuments. On the gable is a mural by Russell Barrett of the Bridge and the Signal Station across the other side. There are a café, shop and toilets to give comfort to the visitor. The development has given an experience to people who for various reasons do not walk down to the Signal Station. Mizen Vision! was renamed Mizen Head Signal Station Visitor Centre on the opening of the new building in 2001. In 2003 Mizen Head Signal Station was included in the Reader's Digest/Sunday Times 100 Most Amazing Places in Britain and Ireland



Project Phase 2: This phase of the project develops the 'learn to' aspects of the project in five interrelated themes, Safety at Sea, Communications, Weather, Tides and Currents and Geology, These themes are integrated throughout the Visitor Centre site as they follow from the Visitor Centre **Above, Along the Way** to the Keepers' Quarters **Below**. Another three rooms have been constructed with more interpretation at the Visitor Centre; Below at the Signal Station, the displays have been revamped and renewed.

First Room

- A Tide Clock with a Rescue at Sea enacted every 15 minutes - a Yacht sailing past the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse gets into difficulties, the Baltimore Lifeboat comes out to give assistance, the Coastguard Helicopter flies in and winches a man down to the deck of the Yacht.
- The Sea Life on the seashore through all the stages of the tide shown on a detailed mural.
- The Geology of the Mizen area in five dioramas and geological descriptions which have been devised with input from Dr. Ivor MacCarthy, Geology Dept., UCC.
- A 10' x 8' satellite photograph of the Mizen.
- A Historical Tour of the Mizen based on the OS Discovery Series Map 88
- Window panels to explain and locate the SS Irada Prop, the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse, Ships that pass the Mizen and Mizen Head Signal Station.

Second Room

The Ship's Bridge Navigational Simulator has been moved to room of its own. The software has been upgraded; the CGI of the Mizen Area has been added to the journeys; the Bridge has been rebuilt and new computers and screens installed.



The CIL Photographic Exhibition of the building of the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse and the original photos and plans of the building of the Mizen Bridge are displayed in this area too.

This room is scheduled to be kitted out as a seminar/class room.

Third Room

This is a room above the Bridge/Simulator Room which is used as a store presently, but in the future it is intended to rent it out to a university/college for use as a sea watch facility.

Donation of Memorabilia

Commissioners of Irish Lights, Eamonn Doyle, Claire Barrett, Rtd. Gda. Michael O'Reilly, Arthur O'Sullivan, the late Ken Austin, the family of the late Tom Barry, Charles J. Haughey, Goleen ICA, Birds Ireland, Birdwatch Ireland, Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, Donal O'Sullivan, Rosemary O'Driscoll, Mrs. H. Glanville, the late Mrs. R. Craig-White, the late Frank Ryan, Peter Duggan

Architects: Daly, Barry & Associates.

Quantity Surveyor: Jim Scannell & Associates.

Engineers: Diarmuid McCarthy & Associates

Main Contractor: CHOM Ltd.

Bank: AIB, Schull and Skibbereen.

Solicitors: Babington, Clarke & Mooney

Accountants: PriceWaterhouseCoopers and Gordon Lane & Co.



Development, Project Management, Research, Fundraising: Sue Hill and Stephen O'Sullivan

Design Advisor, Artist, Sculptor, Model maker : Jules Thomas.

Multimedia: Tony Perrott and Uwe Schiller, UCC. Pat Leonard, Thornhill Bros.

Filming: Ted Dolan and Tish Barry.

Navigational Aids Simulator Co-ordination: Cormac Gebruers, Transas Ltd.,

Eamonn Doyle, Charternav GPS Ltd.

Automatic Weather Station: Mason Technology.

Mizen Tide Clock: Stokes Clocks, Cork.

Geology Advisor: Dr. Ivor MacCarthy, U.C.C.

Signs and Panels: Bob Clarke, Sign Studios, Matt Mills, Axis Digital Media.

The Committee of Management 1993

Dr. Brian O'Connell (Chair), William Buckley, Diarmuid Kenneally, Kathleen Downey, Sue Hill, Michael McCarthy, Maureen Newman, Dermot Sheehan, Terry Tuite

The Committee of Management 2000

Dr. Brian O'Connell (Chair), William Buckley, Kathleen Downey, Sue Hill, Michael McCarthy, Maureen Newman, Stephen O'Sullivan, Dermot Sheehan, John Stuart.

The Committee of Management 2008

Dr. Brian O'Connell (Chair), Stephen O'Sullivan, Sue Hill, Maureen Newman, Dermot Sheehan, William Buckley, Michael McCarthy, Michael Barnett, Brian Murphy, Reps. Cork County Council.



History of Project

March – December 1992

- Lease sought from Commissioners of Irish Lights for Mizen Head Signal Station.
- Application to West Cork LEADER for funding

December 1992

On receipt of Draft Lease from CIL and 50% matching funding from LEADER a Public Meeting agreed to register a co-operative with the Registry of Friendly Societies

April 1993

Took over Mizen Head Signal Station and started installing safety fencing.

October 1993

Opened to the public as Mizen Vision! The Irish Lights Signal Station Visitor Centre for the Bank Holiday Weekend to show everyone what was in the Keepers' Quarters before it was changed. 1000 people came through the gates in two days from as far away as Waterford and Limerick.

October 1993 - May 1994

Project Phase 1 Building and interpretation completed. Matching funds raised by selling shares and sponsorship by Murphy's Brewery and their agent, West Cork Bottling. Car park made by County Council.

Funding



Mizen Tourism Co-operative Society Ltd.

- LEADER grant £30,000
- Matching Funding from Shares (at £25 each) £20,000
- Murphy's Brewery and WCB £19,000
- Own funds from Income £20,000
- Total investment £89,000

June 1994

- Opened the Signal Station to the public. A small portacabin was installed as ticket office, shop and refreshments. There were 32,000 visitors in the first year. As the most southwesterly point of Ireland, the light keepers before automation said there were hundreds of people on the cliffs outside the Bridge every summer.
- Mizen Tourism Co-operative allowed those visitors across the Bridge thereby making business and employment for the area by adding value to an already popular location.

1995

Allied Irish Banks' premises in Goleen were rented by Mizen Tourism Co-operative Society Ltd. and opened as an Information Point/Telecottage/Business Centre. Full office services, visitor information, accommodation reservations, a serviced office for professionals were provided for locals and visitors.

1997

Mizen Tourism bought the building from AIB and continued to provide services until July 2003 when the Telecottage was closed. Since it was opened in 1995 circumstances have changed and most people have computers at home. Mizen Tourism subsidised the tourism information including bureau de change and



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reservation service, but the Telecottage was not cost effective. It is collateral for the Society for funding and loans. It is not possible to open it for public use as it is not accessible.

1996 – 2001

Project Phase 2, Part 1.

The plans were drawn for next phase; funding and planning permission applications were completed. Planning permission was given and funding was in place from:

- West Cork LEADER for construction,
- Bord Fáilte/ERDF for interpretation,
- Cork County Council and National Millennium Funding for matching funds.

Funding

Bord Fáilte/ERDF	£225,575
West Cork LEADER	£200,000
Cork County Council	£ 75,000
National Millennium Funding	£ 70,000
Own Funds – AIB Term Loan	<u>£167,000</u>

Total £737,575

Work started and finished over a period of 2 years.

March 2001



New Building opened (by telephone) by Noel Davern T.D., Minister for Food at the beginning of the Foot and Mouth Emergency when 'Mizen Vision!' renamed 'Mizen Head Signal Station' was closed for 6 weeks. Final payments from Bord Fáilte/ERDF, West Cork Leader, Cork County Council and National Millennium Funding.

February 2002

Initial application for funding from Bord Fáilte /ERDF in competition for Phase 2 Part 2.

May 2003

Granted permission by Fáilte Ireland to apply for funding

May 2004

Granted funding by Fáilte Ireland /ERDF 36%

(Only 2 drawdowns allowed at that stage, which affected construction and interpretive timetable)

€211,428

June 2004

Granted matching funding by Cork County Council

€200,000

December 2005

Granted AIB Term Loan

€150,000

April 2005

Mizen Head Signal Station Bridge closed by Commissioners of Irish Lights.

June 2005

Temporary Scaffolding Solution for the Bridge

Constructed and Bridge reopened June 25th

€ 60,000



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Funding	Commissioners of Irish Lights	€30,000
	Cork County Council	€30,000
	Inspection fee (Mizen Tourism)	€400 per month

May 2006

Donation from local well wisher	€ 50,000
Mizen Tourism Funding (matching)	€ 38,000

January 2006

First Drawdown Fáilte Ireland/ERDF

January 2007

Second Drawdown Fáilte Ireland/ERDF

May 2008

Completion of Project and Final Drawdown

Total Investment to date: €1,698,967 +€60,000 (Bridge)

This sum does not include monies invested by Mizen Tourism over the years from income.

Mizen Head Signal Station Visitor Centre has had steady growth in numbers of visitors and income since its beginning 15 years ago. In 2008 there are 749 shareholders.



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