

ABOUT US

Mizen Head

Ireland's most Southwesterly Point

History

In 1847 when a 1034 tons American liner, SS Stephen Whitney, sank off Crookhaven with a loss of 92 lives, the Irish Lights Board decided to build a lighthouse on the Fastnet or Fastness Rock as the existing Cape Clear Island Lighthouse, the marker for the Cape and Fastnet Rock, was too far inland. The original Fastnet Lighthouse was used from 1854 to 1891, but the tower was not sturdy enough to withstand the power of the sea. A new tower was built between 1899-1903 at a cost of 84,000 pounds. This is a magnificent engineering feat topped by a powerful bifocal oil light with Fresnel lenses which can be seen for 19 miles. It is in the unique position of being the first landfall after America.

In 1906 the Board of Trade together with the Irish Lights Board decided to build a Fog Signal Station on Cloghane Island, Mizen Head. In 1909 the fog signal was established and in bad visual conditions the Keepers manually set off a charge of explosive at three minute intervals.

The Arched Bridge was built between 1908-1910 to connect the island to the mainland. The design was chosen from many that were entered in a competition. It is 172' across and 150' above sea level. An early example of reinforced concrete, it is made from the local hard stone. Even the aggregate used was crushed on site from the same rock.

In 1931 a wireless beacon was installed at Mizen and in 1959 a light was placed on the rocks at the end of the head at a height of 180' with a range of 13 miles in clear weather. The fog signal was discontinued in the 1970s when sonar and satellite navigation (GPS) took over. Mizen head Signal Station has participated in the whole history of radio communications up to the DGPS mast on the site today.

In 1993 Mizen Head Fog Signal Station was automated and demanded by the Commissioners of Irish Lights. The automation coincided with the first LEADER programme of EU funding for rural development. In 1993, with a lease from the Irish Lights and funding from Leader, the local community in Goleen Parish registered a co-operative to develop a visitor attraction at Ireland's most south westerly point. Murphy's Irish Stout, West Cork Bottling, Cork County Council, Ford (Ireland) Ltd. all contributed to the matching funding. The core of the funding came from the shareholders in the co-operative society. Shares are sold at 35 euro and at present there are over 600 shareholders, local and international. In April 1993 the



last Light keepers left the Mizen and the facility was opened to the public in June 1994.

In 2001 Phase 2 of the project was completed with the opening of a new visitor facility near the car park to replace a portacabin! Now gales, rain and fog cannot close the centre with exhibits, a cafe and shop undercover for our visitors in all weather. Presently nearly 50,000 visitors a year make their way to Mizen Head Visitor Centre

In 2002 the Committee of Management has applied for funding for Phase 3 which will include an observation tower, research area, seminar/classroom, environmental gallery, displays in the Transmission Hut, revamp of the existing displays in the Signal Station. Work will start in 2005 for completion in 2006 when Mizen Head Visitor Centre should be ready to accept 100,000 visitors a year.