

Barra Head Lighthouse

Light Established

1833

Engineer

Robert Stevenson

Position

Latitude 56° 47.1'N

Longitude 07° 39.2'W

Character

Flashing White every 15 Secs

Elevation

208 metres

Nominal Range

18 miles

Structure

White stone tower 18 metres high

History

After the 1829 Inspection Voyage to the West Coast, the Engineer, Robert Stevenson, recommended to the Board that a Lighthouse be erected on Barra Head. The Commissioners approved the recommendation and preliminary reports were prepared early in 1830. The site was chosen for several reasons; because Barra Head is roughly half-way between Eilean Glas and Rinns of Islay Lighthouse and it stands at the Southern entrance to the Minch. It would also be of great assistance to the coastal shipping off Argyll and to foreign-going vessels approaching the West Coast of Scotland.

The Lighthouse was built by Robert Stevenson and was completed in 1833. The oil burning light was first exhibited on the night of 15 October 1833. The light was converted to incandescent in 1906. A Wireless Beacon was established there in 1936.

The actual Lighthouse itself is situated on the West Side of the island of Berneray at the top edge of a very steep cliff. The tower built of stone is only 58 feet high, but the light is 693 feet above sea level and has range of 18 miles. The landing is approximately 1¼ miles from the Station and latterly the Lightkeepers were the only inhabitants of the Island.

After the last war, the remains of a Blenheim bomber were found on the cliff face. The parts found enabled the Blenheim and crew to be identified. Apparently, it had crashed in a storm and no-one had heard it.

Barra Head Lighthouse was converted to automatic operation, and the last of the lightkeepers were withdrawn on 23 October 1980.

The main optic is now an acetylene operated Dalen revolving pedestal, manufactured by AGA. The rotating fresnel lens equipment rotates at 1 revolution every 30 secs. It has a mantle exchanger (gas) and it incorporates duplicate gas pressure operated devices. The equipment is automatically started and shut down by a sunvalve.

During daylight hours the system is designed to drive the fresnel lens round at a very slow speed to prevent the mantles from deteriorating in strong sunlight conditions. There are 4 mantles in the exchanger systems and together with many parameters of the equipment are monitored by Hyskier Lighthouse.

With the exception of the main optic, all the equipment is electrically powered by batteries which are automatically recharged by a diesel alternator twice a week. (The diesel alternator is automatically controlled by a quartz clock system).