



'Decision Light'

Summer 2009 Edition, Volume 20

Newsletter of the Cape Decision Lighthouse Society

'Dedicated to the Preservation of the Cape Decision Lighthouse and Surrounding Wilderness Areas for Public Recreation'

The Lighthouse at Cape Decision

I flew from Seattle for two hours and arrived in a small town called Sitka. I knew I was going to the wilderness especially since on that plane ride I saw virtually no houses or any sign of human life. After that I went on a float plane ride for another forty-five minutes. This was the first two days of my Alaskan adventure to Cape Decision Lighthouse.

When I finally got to Cape Decision Lighthouse I was thinking to myself that the job we were about to do (fixing up the lighthouse) was going to be impossible. Some of the windows were cracked, the whole pier was about to fall down from the aftermath of being burned, the doors were missing, the chimney was cracking, and everything that wasn't copper, stainless steel, aluminum, or brass was rusting. It seemed like a lot of work, but even though it was a little trashed it was one of the best experiences of my life.

Why would it be one of the best experiences of my life? It was because I could just get away from everything. There was no cell phone reception, no one to give you a bad time, and you could do virtually anything you wanted to. Even though I was cut off from everything I didn't feel lost or homesick. Probably because in those few days I got

a taste of what life should feel like. Everyone at Cape Decision was like a family. We sat down at every meal together, we didn't argue, we all got along perfectly. Shouldn't this be the way families should get along?

It was also a great experience because of being in the middle of nowhere. Chris Brooks and me went fishing right outside of the lighthouse and so far I love Alaska fishing. Within about ten seconds of having our lines in the water we both had a big black bass on. We decided to throw one back and keep the other. Then we fished for another five minutes and we caught another black bass. We decided to keep this one and go back in to go cook up some mean fish taco's. The scenery was also amazing. I could watch the waves crash into the rocks for hours.

Another thing that caught my attention was the wildlife. The whole crew working on the lighthouse went on a one and a half mile hike on the historic light keepers trail. We saw a deer, elk, eagles, and a ton of other plants and animals. On the way back to the lighthouse from the hike we ended up trying to find the elk's bedding spot, but got moderately lost and ended up pushing our way through bushes trying to find the lighthouse. Another nature experience was all of the whales that we saw. I saw whales

WORDS OF WIT AND WISDOM

'You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.' Mark Twain

"Impossible is just a big word thrown around by small men who find it easier to live in the world they've been given than to explore the power they have to change it. Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is nothing." -Adidas

'It is impossible to enjoy idling unless there is plenty of work to do.'

Jerome K. Jerome

everyday I was in Alaska. I even saw them on the plane rides to and from the lighthouse. One day I even saw some jumping out of the water. The last major animal experience was having a little baby deer that we called Bambi chase us around on the beach. The deer was about two feet tall and it looked like a dog running around on the beach. We think that the deer was taking shelter behind us or he thought that we was his mother.

Another good experience was the work at Cape Decision. The work was good because it was very laid back, never rushed, and we never hurt ourselves to get done. When working we were always taking breaks and taking our time. Everyone also worked really good together. We would help each other until we were done. Even when everything went wrong, we still was just laughed about it. For example, when we epoxied the floor on one batch of the sealer we forgot to put in the bonding agent and we had to destroy socks and jeans to try to correct our mistake.

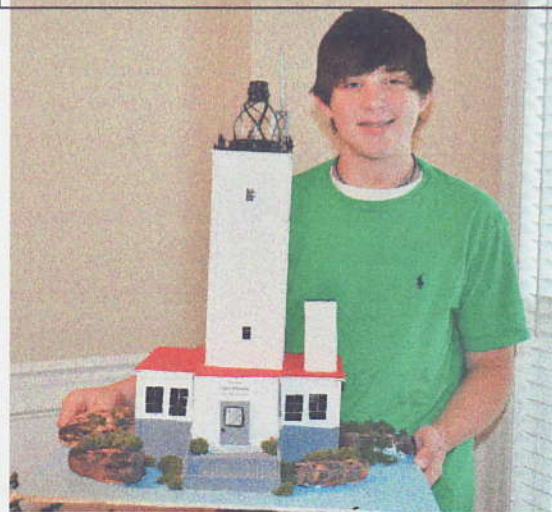
If you are wondering if I would recommend coming to Cape Decision Lighthouse, I would say definitely. There was great wildlife, work ethic, and many nice people. There might be a lot of work to do at the lighthouse but eventually, when the restoration work is complete, it will be a great destination to see and you too could be a part of it.

Christopher Harrison, age 12
Salmon Beach, Washington



CDLS was fortunate to have Christopher and his father Ralph Harrison, the son of a mason and a Science teacher in Tacoma, who both helped enormously with the seeming 'impossibility' of the tasks at hand. We extend a special thank you to Chris for lending a helping hand with the epoxy, installation of the basement doors, and cheerful presence, and to Ralph for accompanying such a fine young man! Ralph was keen on documenting the flora and fauna of southern Kuiu in a field notebook, and interested in bringing his students to the lighthouse. He looked over our chimney problem taking measurements for custom flashing, mixing epoxy, putting in the basement doors with our vp Chris Brooks, and generally being a great addition to the work party. We have quite a few new members from Salmon Beach which, historically, is connected with Cape Decision, for the shanty town sprang up along the banks of Puget Sound in Tacoma in the 1920's (where most of the fishing boats going to Alaska were built), and the fishermen shoved off from these same shores in search of the salmon, herring, halibut and whaling riches they hoped to find voyaging to SE Alaska, prompting the construction of Cape Decision lighthouse completed by the US Lighthouse Bureau in 1932.

CDLS corresponded with Brody (below) while he was building his model of our lighthouse, and we commend and applaud him for his excellent work. You deserve an A+! An incredible likeness!



'I had a great time building a model of Cape Decision and researching the history of this beautiful and unique lighthouse. Not to mentioned...I received an A+!'

Brody Binder, a 7th grade project in Ooltewah, TN

Know yer Board

Karen Lucas, pres.
Chris Brooks, v.p.
Sheila Finkenbinder, sec.
Brandon Marx Esq., treas.

Representatives: Sean Cavlan, Joel Hanson, Steve Lanwermyer, Bryan Cornelius

Advisory: Phyliss Mulligan, Terry Poelstra, Jim Davis



As with most projects, one needs to prioritize the variety of tasks involved, that combined, bring about the desired end. We are ever in a state of assessment, determining the next most important step for the preservation and maintenance of the lighthouse, and the preparation of the lighthouse living quarters for accommodating visitors. After completing the core of the Strategic Plan last winter, and from the observations made at last summer's work party, the board decided on: the chimney rehabilitation, to stop the leaks, and protect the brick mortar, combined with the installation of the Canon wood stove and pipe insert to heat the lighthouse; and removal of the industrial floor tiles (some with trace asbestos) and laying of a poured epoxy flooring for safety and sanitation purposes. CDLS was awarded a \$14,855 Tier 1 Rasmuson Foundation grant to make this happen. The funds are to be spent on materials and labor to complete the floor renovation and chimney masonry work. Many thanks to the Rasmuson Foundation for the continued support, encouragement to complete a Strategic Plan, and their patience with our long-term goals.

Freight Runs to the Lighthouse from Seattle & Port Alexander

.Comes a note in the dead of winter from Capt. Jack Knutsen of the f/v Cape Decision saying, 'I will be leaving for Alaska around the end of May. Let me know if you need anything brought up from Seattle...' Jack began his fishing career in Alaska when he was 14, fishing with his father onboard the f/v Grant, a halibut schooner his grandfather had fished in Alaskan waters since 1915, and took over as Captain of the vessel when his father retired. Jack knows the Inside Passage like the back of his hand, even in a pea soup fog with 0 visibility. He can read the bottom. Most of all, his generous, Alaskan hospitality, helping a lighthouse 'in distress' and understanding the 'law of the land' where people share food, helping hands, fuel or any other necessity in the bush to keep life moving along. About this same time, Chris Brooks and Scott were sandblasting and nickling the early 1900's US Army Canon potbellied wood and coal burning stove that had been donated by the Tompter's of Salmon Beach. Anyway, needless to say, we did have freight, and to get it hauled from Seattle straight to Cape Decision made the logistics so much simpler and kept down the freight, and as it turned out, the transportation expenses, as Chris, Scott and Rhonda were able to catch a ride with Jack to the lighthouse. Between Scott Higgins and I, we proceeded with the purchasing, delivery and stowing of the masonry supplies, basement doors, wood stove, building materials, food and miscellany to Jack's boat in Fisherman's Terminal. As the f/v Cape Decision was making her way North, in Sitka, the m/v Eyak was being loaded with '57' 40lb buckets of epoxy flooring, boxes, scaffold material, etc. and heading South to Port Alexander (PA). Once in PA, Capt. Steve Little, after seeing the load on the front float, offered to haul it to the lighthouse on the f/v Log Dog. His running partner Capt. Kim Kendall of the f/v Karen Sue, assisted, helping out, prospect for fish, and planned to get the lines wet on the way back to PA. The phone rang in PA, and Jack was in Ketchikan, ahead of schedule (due to navigating favorable tides and optimizing on weather conditions), so we scrambled to load the f/v Log Dog and get underway to Cape Decision, 25 miles across Chatham Strait. We hailed



Captains and crew rendezvous in the galley for King salmon dinner after unloading freight.



Jack's King, our dinner, being hoisted with a load of cargo

Jack, Chris, Scott and Rhonda in Sumner Strait who were headed to the back of Port McArthur, while we steamed on to Cape Pole to drop the hook, and pay tribute to our mutual friend Greg Clark, and friend of the lighthouse, lost at sea in 2002. At 5am, we get a radio call from the f/v Cape Decision. It is Jack asking what our ETA will be. We had left at 4am, and were one hour from the back of McArthur. At this time of the year in SE Alaska, there are about only two hours of darkness, with a long and lingering twilight and sunrise on either side of it. The earth, sea and sky are a riot of new growth, leaping whales, baby eagles, the air full of songbirds, shade, dappled light, and a shimmering, sparkling sea. God's country, abundant life, full to overflowing, and it energizes, and makes one not want to sleep so as not to miss out on the action! Greetings and introductions, and in the early morning, we

get right to work unloading the freight off Jack's boat onto the the f/v Log Dog. There happened to be a beached humpback whale carcass on the beach which we had to investigate before the trip to the lighthouse to mount the hoist and begin the unloading. Jack happened by on his way to Coronation Island, shouted he was off to catch a King Salmon, Chris and I in the the CDLS skiff 'Helga' waved him on wishing him luck, and proceeded with the multiple trips from the f/v Log Dog, anchored in the lee, to the gut, with Scott and his wife Rhonda on the hoist, and dealing with freight on the pier. About a half hour later, Jack comes out of the fog, to ask if we'd like a King, which of course we could not decline. He had caught four nice ones. By 3pm, we had most of the freight stowed in the lighthouse, and were to have the freight runners for a King Salmon dinner. Time to shift gears. The dinner was grand by any standard. We bid farewell to our Captains, with hugs and thanks, and with plans to meet later in the summer, and then hit the bunk. We spent the next five days chipping tiles, laying some of the epoxy flooring (which took longer to dry without heat than we'd anticipated), and Scott and Rhonda finished up the outhouse, truly a work of art! It becomes more apparent each year that this work we have undertaken is not necessarily 'impossible', instead, viewing the workload realistically, we should not be discouraged, but realize we are continuing to make progress, and remember to balance the work fun with fun. More on the floor and chimney work in the fall.KL



The old 'new' galley stove donated by the Tompters of Salmon Beach, WA.

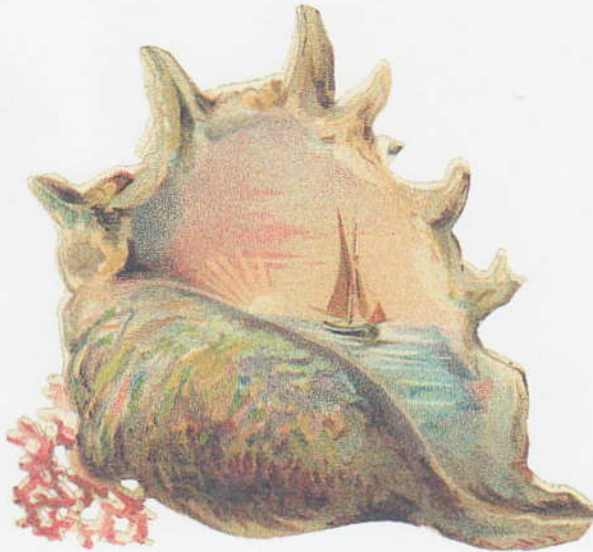
To read about the trip up the Inside Passage, and to learn more about the community of Salmon Beach, google 'Salmon Beach Rowboat Project' and Higgins blog spot.

The full page 'big picture' Site Plan by architect W. Caramella to be featured in the fall newsletter!



In the back of Port McArthur, the freight runners meet and 'parley.' From left: Capt. Jack Knutsen, Rhonda and Scott Higgins, Chris Brooks, vp., Capt. Kim Kendall, Karen Lucas, pres., & Capt. Steve Little

LITERARY CORNER



Stanzas for Music

Lord Byron

There be none of Beauty's daughters
 With a magic like thee;
 And like music on the waters
 Is thy sweet voice to me;
 When, as if its sound were causing
 The charmèd ocean's pausing,
 The waves lie still and gleaming,
 And the lulled winds seem dreaming.

And the midnight moon is weaving
 Her bright chain o'er the deep;
 Whose breast is gently heaving,
 As an infant's asleep;
 So the spirit bows before thee,
 To listen and adore thee;
 With a full but soft emotion,
 Like the swell of Summer's ocean.

Our sincere appreciation to...

- >Peter and Roxanne Tompter of Salmon Beach for the donation of our new Canon potbelly wood & coal burning stove (shown below!)
- >Jack Knutsen of the f/v Cape Decision for hauling our freight and three volunteers from Seattle straight to the lighthouse!
- >Whalefest volunteers: Mike Mayo, Brandon Marx & son Dylan, Sheila Finkenbinder, Cindy Plaza, Sean Cavlan and Joel and Alice Hanson
- >Dick Dapevich for the timely 2008 taxes filed for us inkind
- >The McIntosh Foundation for the continued generous general support grant that has been the backbone of our organization
- >Steve Little of the f/v Log Dog and Kim Kendall of the f/v Karen Sue for hauling all the flooring, fuel, propane and other heavy freight for this summer's projects
- >Roger Hâmes of SeaMart Quality Foods for the \$250 food donation for our volunteers
- >Coast Guard Spouses and Wives Association for the \$100 donation
- >Jim Boyce for assisting with transportation back to Port Alexander from the lighthouse
- >Volunteer workers Scott & Rhonda Higgins, and Ralph and Chris Harrison
- >Scott Harris & Lyndene Downey of Harris Air for the donation of transportation and excess baggage!
- >Anissa Berry-Frick for serving as Port Alexander representative & to Phyliss Mulligan stepping in to take her place
- >Ed Johnson, of the f/v Republic for the donation of the Absolyte dry cell batteries (a \$6000 value) for our inverter system, and the USCG Aids to Navigation Team for hauling them (2400lbs) with the helicopter
- >Ron Konklin for writing his story for the archives
- >all of our members continued support and to those who attended the Sitka membership appreciation potluck in January. Thanks!



From the Archives: The Burning of the Boathouse & Pier

October 29, 1989

Myself, Petty Officer in Charge (POIC) Ron Konklin, and three other USCG personnel were deployed to Cape Decision on October 29th, 1989 to do a manual maintenance trip which included changing the oil in the generators, cleaning up lighthouse, checking the batteries, solar array, fueling, water levels, change light bulbs, and check the foghorns. Basically, we were to make sure all systems were up and running. One routine maintenance job was to dispose of waste oil and trash. Many people know that in a remote location there is not a lot of viable land to safely dispose of waste oil and trash, so the safest, most effective way to dispose of it was to burn it in a barrel, as was US Coast Guard procedure at all the lighthouses. There was a 8x12 concrete pad on the pier in between the



boathouse and tram house that had a 55 gal drum that we used to burn waste oil and refuse in, which we usually burned in small batches, five gallons at a time. That trip, one of the main generators was down which required everyone to be inside to move the generator. As POIC, being paid the highest rate, I brought everyone inside to move the generator. However, I wasn't aware that the trash detail man had left his position and had come inside to help with the generator, too. Normally, with a steel drum, we didn't have to worry about the fire, and we hadn't overfilled the drum.

The trash detail coastguardman was delayed inside while we moved the generator. First, we smelled smoke, and then, we noticed the barrel had spilt and that fire had spread to an area of the wooden pier structure. Being out there with no real fire-fighting equipment, we were in dire straits. We rigged a bucket brigade, and used all extinguishers, but the pier being so rotten and dry, it just became more and more out of control. We couldn't maintain or control it, so, we called the Air Station on the VHF to report the fire out of control, and the Rescue Coordination Center (RCC) in Juneau dispatched a helicopter from Air Station Sitka. They brought pumps, fire extinguishers and personnel to help fight the fire, but by the time they got there, the whole boathouse was on fire which had large stores oxyacetylene, petroleum products, propane, oil, wood, grease, and materials for repair projects. When the helicopter arrived, they tried several times to lower equipment, but the propane tanks and other explosives started to go off like rockets. The helicopter had to dodge the explosions while dropping off the equipment. During this time, we maintained the bucket brigade trying to keep it under control, until we exhausted all free water in both cisterns, a total of 10,000 gallons. We kept the water buckets running back and forth, a bucket at a time until the cisterns were dry. We severed the fuel lines to the lighthouse to prevent it from becoming a total loss. A small boat from the Cutter Woodrush, which was in the area, had steamed over with a fire fighting party with pumps, and the guys from the base Woodrush knocked it down, and the helicopter was finally able to drop off the equipment and personnel. The difficulty fighting the fire was due to the oil that had dripped and ran down the beams and uprights underneath the decking. We were trying to fight the fire from the top, when it below. Fire extinguishers don't work for open spaces, and dry chemical doesn't spread out enough to cover and smother. Everyone responded above and beyond the call of duty, everyone did what they possible could have done with the limited resources. As I was the POIC, I took the brunt of the disciplinary action, by pulling the refuse fire watch off duty.

I fell 50 ft to the rocks below and broke my back, but I didn't know I had broken my back. I was having trouble walking, and I couldn't feel my legs. I was taken to the hospital, where sixteen hours later, I learned I had broken my lower spine. I was the last one to leave.

To maintain safety, the Lighthouse Society needs to get a water pump and enough fire hose to reach the lowest tide line because of the isolation, and the time it would take for firemen to get there, and a boat to get off the island should a fire burn out of control.

Ron Konklin, April 30, 2009

Hello All Members of CDLS and fellow supporters of Cape Decision, Our single, most important project at this juncture is to focus on the repair the burn site. After moving our freight across one section this summer, it is apparent that it has become less structurally sound, is an extreme safety hazard, and needs to be remedied before we can invite the public to visit the lighthouse. We featured the burning of the boathouse and pier in the Summer 2006 newsletter gleaned information from and article in 'Alaska Bear' Sept-Dec. issue, 1989. We want to give a hearty thank you to Ron Konklin for enriching our archives with his first hand knowledge of that fateful day. The USCG has stockpiled timbers there for the repair, structural engineers have looked at it from every angle, and with our own staff's construction abilities, ingenuity and enthusiasm, we believe it can be done. Yes, it seemed overwhelming this summer with a 'skeleton crew', as we are in the process of laying new flooring, so the living quarters are torn apart making 'eating & sleeping' problematic for a large work party. Notwithstanding, we are seeking larger funding, and will organize a few work parties, back to back, for summer of 2010. Many hands make light work. We thank you for your membership renewal and continued support. Every contribution is applied toward our on-going historic preservation effort. Let's stay the course, for the children. KL

Cape Decision Lighthouse Society

Membership Application—Please renew or join for 2009-2010 today!

Name: _____ Vessel: _____

Address: _____ City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____ Tel.: _____

Yes, I would like to renew my 2009 membership with the annual \$25 dues

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Cape Decision Lighthouse Society, a 501 (c)3

Alaskan nonprofit corporation, at the tax deductible contribution level indicated below:

Donation: **Receives these gifts:**

Lightkeeper \$10,000 or above All premiums & your name on a brass plaque at lighthouse

Life Line \$5,000 or above Cape Decision chart artwork, woodblock, mug & decal

Life Saving Station \$1,000 & decal Cape Decision chart artwork

Friend of the Light \$500 Cape Decision lithograph or woodblock print & decal

Business \$100 Lithograph print or Cape Decision mug & decal

Family \$50 Lithograph print & decal

Individual \$35 Lithograph print & decal

Student or Senior Citizen \$20 Lithograph print & decal

☀ Premiums can be viewed at www.capedecisionlight.org

☀ Please add \$4 shipping for orders over \$1

Make checks or money order payable to:

Cape Decision Lighthouse Society

224 Katlian

Sitka, Alaska 99835

Email: capedecisionlighthouse@yahoo.com

Other Gift Ideas: Cape Decision *postcard* \$1

Membership *decal* \$1



One of our first tasks is to hoist the flag in honor of our veterans and men and women in the armed services, and to let the shipping traffic, tugs and barges, cruise ships, fishing and pleasure boats know we are there as a lifesaving station!

Please note our new website is www.capedecisionlight.org