



# South Channel Fort

## Victoria's only artificial island

South Channel Fort is a small artificial island of about 0.7 hectares built during the 1880's to serve as part of a strategic defence facility for Melbourne and Geelong. The Fort contains antiquated gun emplacements, a labyrinth of underground passages and magnificent panoramic views over southern Port Phillip Bay. Since 1995, South Channel Fort has been managed as part of the Mornington Peninsula National Park.

The Fort will be managed as a low key visitor destination, which aims to protect the site's environmental and heritage values. The Fort provides visitors with a unique heritage and conservation experience on Port Phillip Bay. The site is listed on the Register of the National Estate in recognition of the role the island plays as a breeding site for the White-faced Storm-Petrel and its military and historical significance.



**Parks Victoria Ranger**

*"Victoria has all the outdoors you could wish for – mountains, forests, beaches and bushland, all preserved in our parks. Our natural landscapes have been here longer than anyone knows, and together we can make sure they're here forever."*

**For more information call the Parks Victoria Information Centre on 13 1963 or visit our website at [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)**

### Location and Physical Description

South Channel Fort is an historic landmark situated in the southern part of Port Phillip Bay, 5.95km north-east of Sorrento. It is a small artificial island built up on 14,000 tonnes of bluestone boulders and concrete with sand overburden. The Fort is 121.9 metres long, 76.2 metres wide and 6.4 metres high above sea level.

### Background

The Fort was built as part of a complex military and naval strategy, which included Point Nepean and Queenscliff in a triangle of defence. Its main purpose was to illuminate the channel at night and to electronically explode the mines under attacking ships should they breach the heavily fortified Port Phillip Heads.

A similar island was proposed but only partially completed off the coast of Queenscliff. Now known as the Annulus Fisheries Reserve (Pope's Eye), this latter structure is also an important wildlife refuge, and its sheltered waters provide a popular destination for people learning to dive.

The Fort has had a long history of management since its completion in 1888, including the Ports & Harbour/ Public Works Department during the 1950's-1980's for

the storage of explosives for blasting rocks in The Rip.

### Access to the Fort

Access to the Fort is by way of jetty, located on the western side of the site. The jetty was closed in 1997 as severe structural deterioration rendered it unsafe for visitors. During April-October 2000 Parks Victoria undertook jetty reconstruction and associated rockwork repairs, to enable safe public access to the Fort once again.

Visitors are permitted only during daylight hours and as the island is an important bird habitat, visitors are asked not to feed the seagulls.

### Environmental Values

The island is one of only three breeding sites in Victoria, and the second largest of the three known colonies, for the vulnerable White-faced Storm-Petrel and as a result plays a critical role in the protection of this species.

The site contains a diverse range of marine habitats around the Fort, with particularly healthy intact seagrass communities in Torpedo Bay area.

The Fort is used by a number of other species for breeding, offshore feeding and roosting, including the Little Penguin, Black-

faced Cormorant and the Australian Fur Seal. Five species that visit the Fort are listed under international migratory bird agreements.

## Heritage Values

The Fort is of national and state significance for its historical and heritage values. The site is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register, and as such is protected under the *Heritage Act 1995*, and is classified by the National Trust.

The Fort was built between 1879 and 1888 as part of a complex military and naval defence strategy, which included Point Nepean and Queenscliff in a triangle of defence. In the Fort's heyday, 100 officers lived and worked on the island.

The remains of the disappearing or hydro-pneumatic guns are of particular interest for their early date and for the rarity of the 8-inch guns.

The Notes for Guides prepared by Kitson (1988), *Port Phillip Defences: South Channel Fort* provides detailed descriptions of the various components of the Fort and the site history.

## Recreational Values

South Channel Fort provides good opportunities for tourism, both as a destination in its own right and as a component of a southern bay tour, including South Channel Pile Light, Pope's Eye, Fort Queenscliff and Point Nepean.

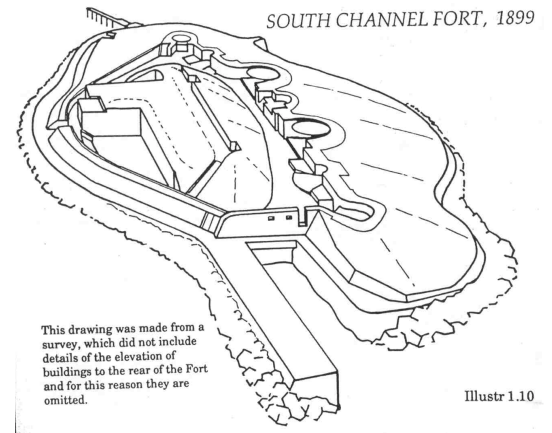
## Underground Tunnels

The Fort was carefully designed to ensure the safe and efficient handling of ammunition and gunpowder underground. The layout of the underground Fort is an interesting labyrinth of passages, small lobbies and magazines.

Public access to the underground tunnels is restricted until structures are adequately stabilised to enable safe and appropriate visitor access.

## Visitor Amenities and Facilities

Visitor facilities, such as toilets, seating, shelter and picnic facilities, are not provided on the island due to its high environmental and heritage values.



## Caring for the environment

Help us to look after the Fort by remembering the following guidelines:

- Keep to the defined tracks and within areas open to the public. Do not enter conservation areas.
- Comply with park regulations.
- Take care when swimming in the vicinity of the Fort due to strong currents, undertows and deep water.
- All buildings, artefacts, relics, native plants and birds are protected by legislation.
- Dogs, cats and other pets are not permitted.
- Firearms are prohibited.
- Please take your litter away with you.
- Do not light fires.
- No camping is allowed onsite.
- No disturbance to wildlife, including the removal of eggs.

## For more information

For further information contact the Parks Victoria Information Centre on 13 1963.

November 2000