



Summer Newsletter 2008/09

LIGHTSTATION guide Pat Howell was inside the top of the tower talking to a couple from New Zealand when a swallow flew in and landed on his head.

The winged interloper was so light Pat didn't feel it land or take flight minutes later.

"It was quite funny because the woman was pointing and looking dumbfounded - I had no idea it had landed on my hat," he said.

Pat who spent 10 years as a lightkeeper working at Gabo Island, Wilsons Promontory, Point Hicks, Deal Island, Green Cape and Cape Otway, has had his share of interesting experiences in lighthouses but has never been used as a perch before.

Originally Pat became a lightkeeper to avoid people, crowds and the "hustle and bustle of cities".

Having grown up on a Flinders Island farm he was well-equipped to deal with isolation and rugged weather conditions.

"In 1990 when de-manning of lighthouses became as sure as death and taxes I knew if I wanted to stay in lighthouses I'd have to start working with tourists," Pat said.

Cape Otway Lightstation visitors find Pat at the top of the 1884 lighthouse and enjoy hearing about his life as a lightkeeper.

Pat Howell and his feathered friend



A hard act to swallow

Family honours son who vanished

MORE than a dozen members of Frederick Valentich's family travelled to the Lightstation in October to remember their son, brother and uncle on the 30th anniversary of his curious disappearance over Bass Strait.

The last place Mr Valentich was seen was at Cape Otway as he flew over on his way to King Island in what is considered by many to be Australia's greatest UFO mystery.

It was 7:06pm on Saturday, October 21, 1978 when pilot Frederick Valentich was flying from Moorabbin Airport to King Island when he encountered an unidentified aircraft which he reported was "playing a game with him".

He told air traffic controllers the mystery craft had buzzed him at high speed and had four bright lights.

Then when it suddenly reappeared above him Mr Valentich told air control staff: "That strange aircraft is hovering on top of me again....it is hovering and it's not an aircraft."



An unidentified metallic noise was broadcast for 17 seconds, the transmission ended suddenly, and Mr Valentich and his single engine Cessna disappeared.

Following a seven day land and sea search an investigation found his disappearance could not be explained.

On the night Mr Valentich vanished there were hundreds of UFO sightings along Victoria's coast.

Guido Valentich, Frederick's father, (who has since died) joined the Victorian UFO Research Centre in the desperate hope of finding out what happened to his son. He believed Frederick had been abducted by aliens. The Valentich family erected a

memorial plaque in Frederick's honour in the Lightstation grounds. Until his death Guido maintained an annual vigil on the anniversary of his son's disappearance, a tradition which is still maintained by Frederick's mum Alberta.

Beat boredom with a free activity pack

TAKE the challenge out of keeping kids entertained over the summer holidays with a visit to the Lightstation.

Children get a thrill out of reaching the top of the light tower with a chance to meet a real lightkeeper, take in the stunning views of the Southern Ocean, and keeping a look-out for seals and dolphins.

They can also explore the historic Telegraph Station, World War Two Radar Bunker, and enjoy exhibits on how tough conditions were for the first lighthouse keepers.

Every child receives a free activity pack, and kids should keep watch for the Lightstation mascot Willy the Whale.

You can also download the activity pack from www.lightstation.com.

Families are welcome to bring their own lunch and make the most of new picnic tables throughout the heritage precinct.

Snacks and lunches are available from the Lightstation café.

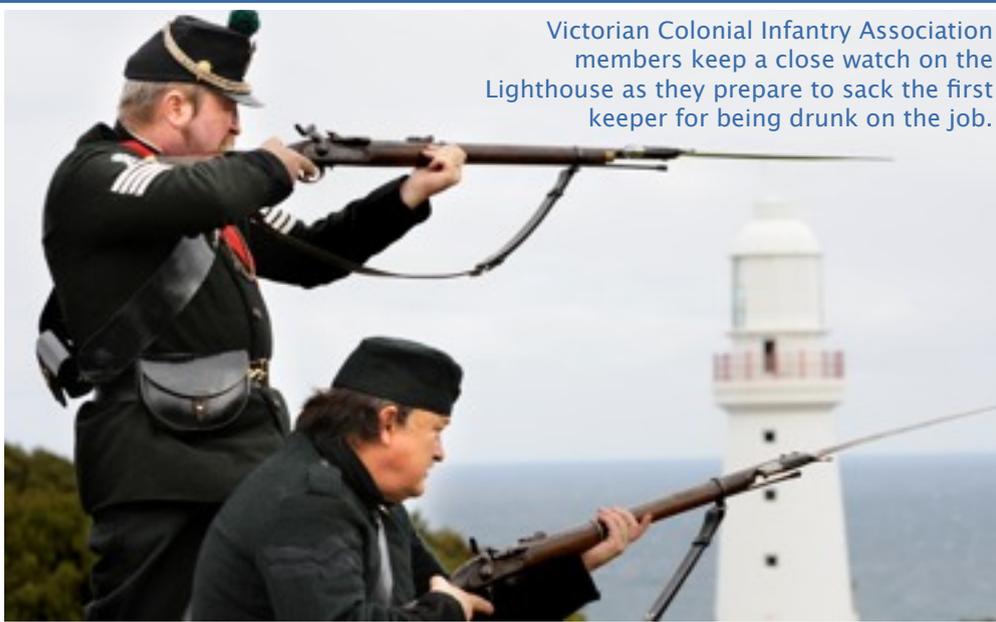
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Victorian Colonial Infantry Association members keep a close watch on the Lighthouse as they prepare to sack the first keeper for being drunk on the job.



Shipwrecks, survivors & the great outdoors

FROM early 2009 the Lightstation will be offering Lightkeeper's Shipwreck Discovery Tours.

Tourists will be taken off the beaten track, and immersed in the fascinating natural and manmade history of Cape Otway - home to mainland Australia's most significant lighthouse.

This off-road adventure into the Great Otway national park will allow visitors to walk in the footsteps of our first lightkeeper in 1848.

Guides will share amazing stories of shipwrecks, survivors, daring pioneers, and rugged conditions.

The tour includes a visit to the lighthouse and the top of the tower, Parker River Inlet the difficult landing spot for Keepers' supplies, the shipwreck Eric the Red, the 1850s Telegraph Station and the World War Two Radar Bunker.

Set your sights on a top weekend

WORK has already begun on an exciting program of live music, theatre and historical re-enactments for International Lighthouse Weekend in August 2009 which will coincide with the 150th anniversary of the Cape Otway Telegraph Station.

Hundreds of people braved blustery conditions for a taste of the traditional lightkeeper's life in mid August.

There was standing room only in a marquee which became a theatre as Canberra actress Chrissie Shaw performed *The Keeper*, a piece of object theatre about the brave, lonely, dedicated and versatile women who supported their lightkeeper husbands and families in the 1900s.

Guided by the full moon more than 50 people heard the stories of the Cape's ghosts from a team of paranormal investigators.

Lightstation manager Paul Thompson said the two-day festival was a success with people travelling from as far as Melbourne to

enjoy heritage police re-enactments, to listen in on radio conversations with lightkeepers around the globe, and to soak up the history of the 1848 lighthouse.

"People are starting to look out for the event now and we're aiming for it to become a highlight of the region's winter calendar of events," Mr Thompson said.

"The weekend's activities were a real winner with grown-ups, and children enjoyed craft activities, live music, pony rides, visiting the top of the Lighthouse and the thrill of the ghost tour.

"Teenagers really enjoyed the Telstra Countrywide texting competition where they tested their skills against the speed and accuracy of the Morse Codian Fraternity."

For details on the 2009 International Lighthouse Weekend and accommodation packages, see regular updates at www.lightstation.com. Mark August 15 & 16 in your calendar now.



Graham Nathan (centre) with his wife Olive's ashes and his cousins Don (right) and Bob Pringle.

Lightkeeper's daughter returned to birthplace

MELBOURNE man Graham Nathan recently brought his wife's ashes to her birthplace - Cape Otway Lightstation.

Although Olive Nathan, nee Nicholls, died more than 30 years ago, Graham said he now felt much happier that her final resting place was a beautiful spot where she came into the world.

Olive was the youngest of four children, and was born at the Lightstation in 1919. Her father Harry Nicholls was an assistant lightkeeper.

"Olive's maiden aunt was to come and help with the birth, but she never arrived, the weather might have been too rough for her to land," Graham said.

"The family found life hard here in the sense that the stores and everything came in by boat - there was no road or track."

Content with Olive's final resting place, Graham said: "I got the funny feeling in the middle of last year that I'd like to do this, so I'm here today with my cousins."

A PRIZE purse of \$1,000 is being offered by Cape Otway Lightstation for the best photographs taken at the heritage precinct. Details of the competition would be announced on the Lightstation's website in the New Year, said manager Paul Thompson

"We aim to make it an annual photo competition to inspire amateur and professional photographers to be snap-happy when they visit us," Mr Thompson said.

"Happily we have quite a few visitors from around the world who email us their favourite shots of the lighthouse or encounters they have with wildlife while they're here.

"We wanted to reward people with a cash prize and show off these pictures in an annual exhibition."

Details of the photography competition will be posted at www.lightstation.com in late January.

Picture this for \$1,000