

South Channel Fort



Visitor Guide

South Channel Fort is a unique and highly significant 19th Century artificial island. Built during the 1880s, it is part of the strategic defence network of Port Phillip. The island contains gun emplacements, a labyrinth of underground passages and magnificent panoramic views over Port Phillip. It is also a breeding site for the White-faced Storm-Petrel and other important birdlife.

History

Why an artificial island?

It was built as part of the Colony of Victoria's military and naval strategy in the late 1800s. The triangle of defence included Fort Nepean and Fort Queenscliff. South Channel Fort was constructed to illuminate the South Channel at night and electronically explode mines under attacking ships. As well as gun emplacements, the island also contains an underground keep and the footprint of a now demolished barracks.

How it was built

The fort was built within a protecting ring of bluestone rocks which were laid as a foundation. Concrete cylinders were then sunk through to the sandstone base rock below. Resting on these is a thick table of concrete and brick and then on this, the concrete structure of the fort. Sand was then placed on top of the gun emplacements, its purpose was to absorb impact from any projectiles.

Who lived on the island

In its heyday, from the 1890s to 1916, around 100 officers lived and worked on the island. They included artillery men and engineers who manned the fort. Gradually the increased range, rapidity of fire and efficiency of coastal defence guns allowed the entrance to Port Phillip to be protected by gunfire from Fort Nepean and Queenscliff. This resulted with South Channel Fort becoming redundant and deserted by the military.

Exploring the island

Gun emplacements

There are a number of gun emplacements whose function was for artillery defence of the shipping channel, artillery protection and defence against landings.

Underground in the 'Keep'

The layout of the underground keep is a labyrinth of passages, small lobbies, magazines and a kitchen, carefully designed to ensure the safe and efficient handling of ammunition and gunpowder underground. It was constructed with red-gum timber and mass concrete. Beneath the keep is the test room from which the minefield in the South Channel was controlled and tested. The mines were placed so that they would explode below attacking ships.

Battery Observation Post

The post was built to protect the Fort Commander from gunfire. Constructed in 1905 it contains a plinth for a range finder and fire control positions. It also has the best views of the island and Port Phillip.

South Channel Fort

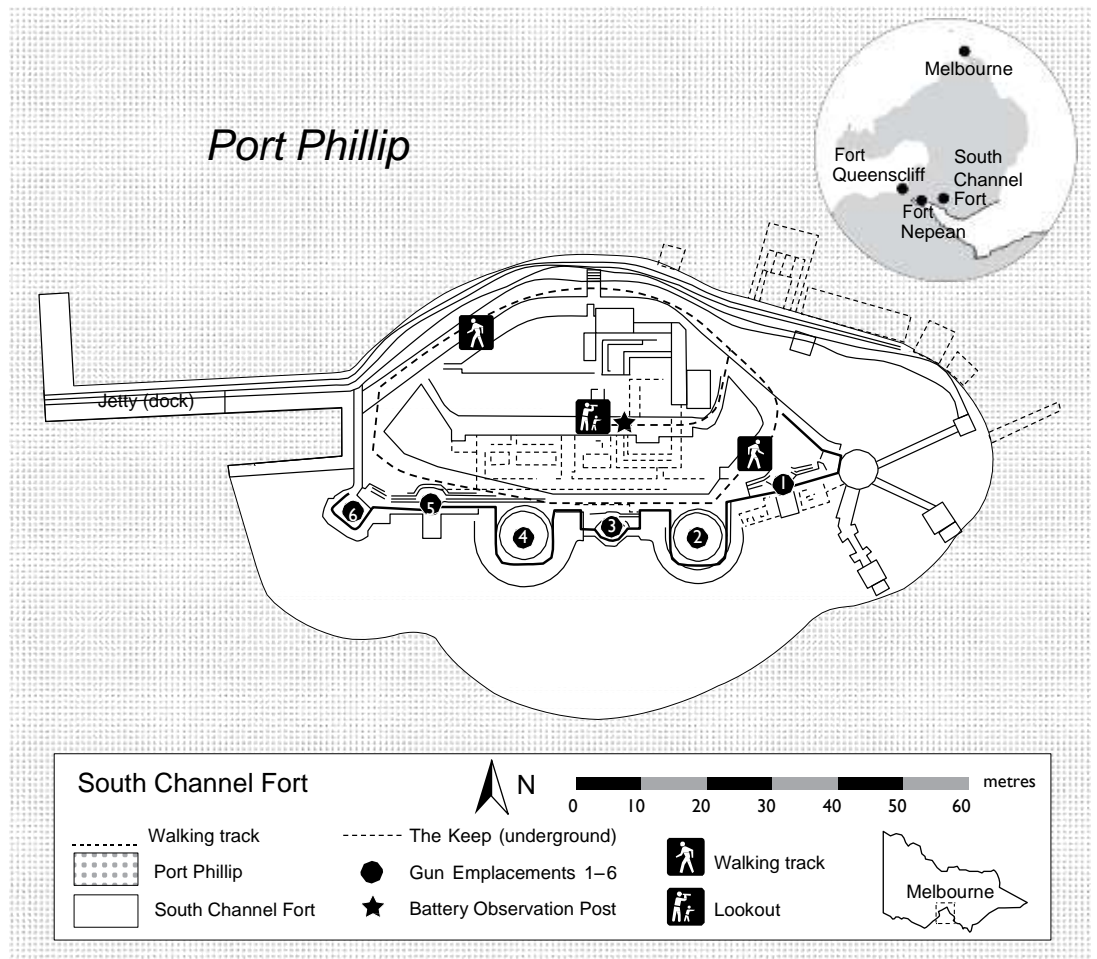
Located adjacent to the South Channel in Port Phillip, 6km north-east of Sorrento and 13km north-west of Queenscliff. General public can access by boat or Licenced Tour Operator, call 13 1963.

To find out more about the spectacular South Channel Forts and around the Bay telephone 13 1963 or visit

Healthy Parks
Healthy People www.parks.vic.gov.au

For further information

Parks Victoria
Information Centre
Call 13 1963 or visit the
Parks Victoria website
www.parks.vic.gov.au



Caring for the environment

Help us look after this park by remembering these guidelines:

- Please take all rubbish home with you
- Fires and camping are not permitted
- Keep to walking tracks
- Please take care when swimming due currents and undertows
- Dogs, cats and other domestic pets are not allowed
- All native plants and wildlife are protected
- Please don't throw this park note away. Keep it, recycle it or return it for others to use

Be FireReady and stay safe

Many parks and forests are located in high fire risk areas.

On days of forecast Code Red Fire Danger this park will be closed for public safety.

You may not receive a personal warning that the park is closed so check the latest conditions by calling 13 1963 or visit www.parks.vic.gov.au

Printed on Australian made
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September 2011

Important refuge

The island plays a critical role in the protection of the White-faced Storm-Petrel. It is one of only three breeding sites in Victoria and the second largest of the three known colonies.

The island is used by a number of other species for breeding, offshore feeding and roosting. Species include the Little Penguin, Black-faced Cormorant and the Australian Fur Seal. Five species of bird that visit the island are under international migratory bird agreements.

Marine life

Surrounding the island are the waters of Port Phillip. The rocks that make up the fort provide a suitable habitat for a range of marine organisms including kelp forests and many invertebrates that attach to the rocks. Colourful sponges and soft corals grow amongst the rocks and jetty structures. The small torpedo bay supports areas of seagrass and many fish can be seen here as well as under the pier.

Management

South Channel Fort has both high environmental and heritage values that need to be protected. Recent works have been undertaken to clean up the fort and make it accessible to visitors once again. Works have included removing pest plants, revegetation with native species, fuel reduction burning and track maintenance.

Want to volunteer?

If you are interested in lending a hand at South Channel Fort there are opportunities available. Works include maintaining the vegetation and general site maintenance. For further information please call 13 1963.

Booking a tour

Visitors can access the underground keep of South Channel Fort through a Licenced Tour Operator only. To find out more please call 13 1963.