

HILTON HEAD REAR RANGE LIGHTHOUSE AT PALMETTO DUNES

Recently restored Hilton Head Rear Range Lighthouse at Palmetto Dunes Oceanfront Resort Serves as Historic Landmark

HILTON HEAD ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA — The Hilton Head Rear Range Lighthouse underwent a significant renovation in 2019. The distinctive structure, located in the Leamington neighborhood of Palmetto Dunes Oceanfront Resort overlooking the resort’s award-winning Arthur Hills Golf Course, was built between 1879 and 1880 as part of a larger system of navigation lights guiding ships into Port Royal Sound. Congress authorized \$40,000 for the construction of the complex.

A cast-iron skeleton tower built about a mile inland on six concrete piers, the lighthouse stands 94 feet tall and was activated on August 1, 1881. Light from the structure was visible from 15 miles away.

Featured on the National Register of Historic Places and part of the Inventory of Historic Light Stations, the lighthouse occupies a unique place in Hilton Head Island history. One of only a handful of surviving lighthouses in South Carolina, the Hilton Head Rear Range Lighthouse is the only once-functioning historic lighthouse on Hilton Head Island.

Greenwood Communities and Resorts, the parent company of Palmetto Dunes, restored the structure in 1985 and opened the lighthouse grounds to the public. The Hilton Head Rear Range Lighthouse has served as a popular landmark and visitor destination at Palmetto Dunes.

Now, the Hilton Head Rear Range Lighthouse has been renovated again, including the addition of a new cedar shingle roof, which was stained, replacement of 360-degree observation deck boards and structural wood areas, cleaning and treating of interior, cleaning of exterior, and the structure was painted with an oil-based, marine-grade paint. In addition, the windows and doors were replaced and painted in a “Charleston Green,” while overgrown foliage around the lighthouse was removed, and more.

“We are pleased with the recent renovation and improvements to this historic Hilton Head Rear Range lighthouse and excited to welcome visitors to see the completed project,” said Palmetto Dunes Chief Operating Officer Brad Marra. “We’re also excited to share the recent tree survey information on one of the oldest oak trees on Hilton Head Island that is adjacent to the lighthouse.”

The Leamington Lighthouse Live Oak (*Quercus virginiana*) stands close to the Hilton Head Rear Range Lighthouse and provides a magnificent backdrop for the 15th green of the Arthur Hills Golf Course. The tree stands approximately 70 feet tall and has a canopy that spreads across 150 feet. With a diameter of about 9 feet, calculations estimate the age of the tree to be between 435 to 450 years old from a survey report in 2019, recognizing it as one of the oldest living trees of its kind on Hilton Head Island.

Guests who wish to visit the lighthouse should enter Palmetto Dunes and proceed to the resort’s South Gate, where they can request a guest pass. Then, proceed to the Leamington Gate and turn left onto Leamington Lane to the lighthouse. Please park along the roadside. The restroom facilities have also been recently renovated.

The original lighthouse complex included a keeper’s house and a shorter forward beacon that was mounted on a second keeper’s house near the beach. By positioning their ships so that the two beacons were vertically aligned, sailors entering Port Royal Sound would know that their vessels were in the proper channel.

Today, only the rear lighthouse survives, along with a vintage brick oil house and a water cistern located on site alongside the oldest living oak tree on Hilton Head Island. Sheltered by towering pine trees, the main lighthouse structure, which is now inactive, includes a central cylindrical stair tower, a wooden watch room and a cypress lantern room. Lighthouse Keepers would climb 112 steps to reach the hexagonal watch room.

A number of interesting ghost stories and legends surround this historic lighthouse. In 1898, a major hurricane lashed the South Carolina coast. Determined to keep the light burning, lighthouse keeper Adam Fripp died of a heart attack during the storm. At Fripp's urging, his 21-year-old daughter, Caroline, kept the navigational light burning. But she passed away just three weeks later from exhaustion and the loss of her father, inspiring haunted sightings of a female ghost in a long blue dress on dark, rainy nights.

The lighthouse, which originally included a wooden exterior, was deactivated in 1932. During World War II, however, the structure served as an important lookout tower for enemy ships and anchored Camp McDougal, a network of U.S. Marine temporary barracks and ammunition sheds. Gun emplacements and searchlights were established on the nearby beach. Marines were taught to use naval guns, called "Big Betsy," as well as .30 and .50 caliber machine guns, and practiced firing these weapons into the Atlantic.

In 1985, Greenwood refurbished the lighthouse, cistern and oil house — installing a decorative sodium vapor optic — and the Hilton Head Rear Range Lighthouse was added to the National Register of Historic Places on December 12, 1985.

For historical photos and documents, an extensive history and information on visiting the Hilton Head's Rear Range Lighthouse in Palmetto Dunes, visit <https://www.hiltonheadlighthouse.com>. And join us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/thehiltonheadlighthouse>.

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About Palmetto Dunes Oceanfront Resort

Palmetto Dunes Oceanfront Resort is a 2,000-acre resort destination located in the middle of Hilton Head Island, S.C., bounded by 3 miles of Atlantic Ocean beach on one side and a sheltered Intracoastal Waterway marina on the other. Named No. 3 "Best Resort in the South" in Condé Nast Traveler's Readers' Choice Awards and to the top 25 World's Best Family Getaways by Travel + Leisure, the resort features vacation home and villa rentals, three world-class golf courses, an award-winning tennis and pickleball center, an 11-mile inland salt-water lagoon system for kayaking and fishing, and Hilton Head Outfitters for bike rentals, canoes, kayaks, fishing, beach rentals and retail shopping. The Mediterranean-style Shelter Cove Harbour & Marina, Hilton Head Island's largest deep-water marina, located right across from Palmetto Dunes, features waterfront shopping and dining and a wide variety of charters, including nature cruises, dolphin tours, fireworks tours and fishing. For information about activities or reservations, please call 877-567-6513 or visit www.palmettodunes.com.

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