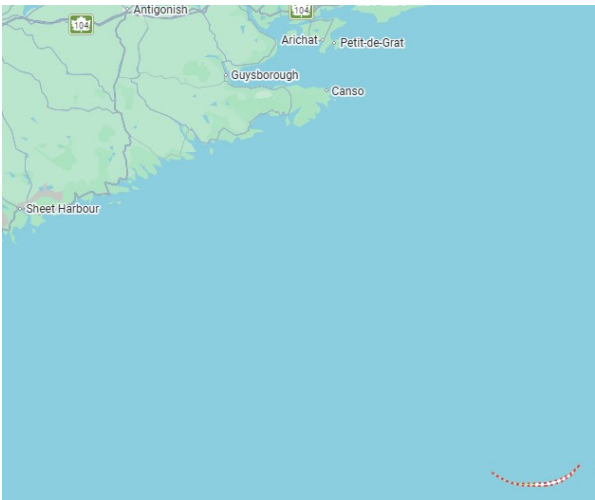




1st Sable Island East End Lighthouse
Credit: Nova Scotia Archives



Location of Sable Island (red crescent)
Credit: Google Maps

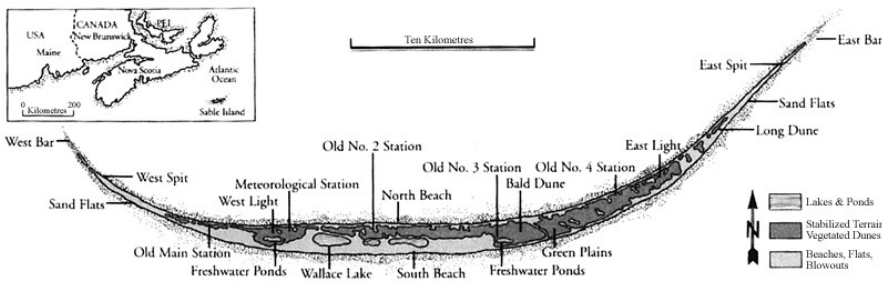
Sable Island is a low-lying sand bar about 40 km (25 mi) in length and 2.4 km (1.5 mi) wide lying 156 km (97 mi) off Canso and has been the site of about 350 shipwrecks. While a lifesaving station was established there in 1801, it wasn’t until 1873 that two identical tall octagonal wooden towers along with a powerful steam whistle was built on the west and east ends of the Island to warn mariners about the nearby dangers of Sable Island.

You could tell the two lighthouses apart as the East End lighthouse had a fixed light while the West End lighthouse had a revolving light. Also the East End lighthouse had one brown stripe painted down the middle of each of its white sides while the West End lighthouse was all white.

Each lighthouse had a 2nd order Fresnel lens whose light could shine out 29 km (18 mi) on a clear night and was tended by a lightkeeper and two assistants. All were provided with comfortable houses and shared two barns each sheltering two cows and a horse, unusual perks at that time.

There are stories of shipwrecked sailors dragging themselves to the lighthouses to seek help for their mates who could not manage the near-impossible swim to safety. In one case, the sailor said “seven” indicating the number of people on the ship while another held up four fingers, repeating the name “Himmy” that turned out to be the ship’s dog. Faced with such situations, lightkeepers had to ride to the Main Lifesaving Station immediately for assistance and as was noted in one report, one lightkeeper did so “at the risk of his own life” by going out into a roaring nor’easter. What great relief it was for horse and rider when five phones were installed on Sable Island to enable fast communication from one end of the island to the other in 1885.

The story of Sable Island lighthouses continues in our September 15 post.



Sable Island Map
Credit: Friends of Sable Island



On patrol for shipwrecks
Credit: Dr JB Gilpin