# Lake Sunapee's Herrick Cove Lighthouse Airlifted for Repairs

***By Jeremy D'Entremont***

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*A Sikorsky S-58 helicopter piloted by Charlie ...*
Photo by: Bob LaPree

On October 1, 2003 the drone of a Sikorsky S-58 helicopter broke the quiet along the shores of Lake Sunapee in New Hampshire. The mission of pilot Charlie Priestly of Hummingbird Helicopter Service of Wallingford, Connecticut, was to lift the Herrick Cove Lighthouse, one of the lake's three wooden lighthouses, off its base and to transport it to a nearby yard for repairs.



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*The helicopter initially had trouble lifting the ...*
Photo by: Bob LaPree

The lighthouse's wooden, stone-filled crib base will also be overhauled. "It was clear that the crib had deteriorated to the point that another winter could have endangered the lighthouse," says Walt Goddard, president of the Lake Sunapee Protective Association (LSPA), the organization that cares for the lake's three lighthouses. The organization weighed the idea of dismantling the lighthouse to move it to shore, but decided on the more innovative approach of transporting it via helicopter. Local resident Norm Gavin, a major contributor to the project according to Goddard, donated the use of the helicopter.



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*Court Cross watches as the Herrick Cove ...*
Photo by: Bob LaPree

The 27-foot lighthouse was lifted from its crib smoothly enough, but then there was trouble. It turned out that the 4,300-pound tower weighed about 1,000 pounds more than what had been estimated, and the lighthouse was briefly immersed in the lake. "A lot of hearts stopped there for a while," says Walt Goddard. But the helicopter's 5,000-pound lifting capacity prevailed and soon the lighthouse was again airborne and on its way to the yard of Court Cross of New London. Cross is a former president of the LSPA and is now the chair of the organization's lighthouse committee.



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*An early 1900s postcard of steamships on Lake ...*

For well over a hundred years beautiful ten-mile long, three-mile wide Lake Sunapee has drawn crowds each summer. Vacationers in the late 19th century arrived at the lake by train, and then boarded steamships to get to their destinations around the lake. A number of large resort hotels and private estates lined the lake's shores.



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*Herrick Cove Lighthouse in the late 1990s.*
Photo by: Jeremy D'Entremont

In 1891 the steamer Edmond Burke struck an underwater ledge. This led to the construction of a lighthouse on Loon Island in 1893. The builders were the Woodsum Brothers, owners of the steamships that serviced the lake. They also built two other lighthouses on the lake at about the same time, Herrick Cove and Burkehaven.



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*Loon Island Lighthouse is another lighthouse ...*
Photo by: Jeremy D'Entremont

Herrick Cove Lighthouse was refurbished in 1965 and more repairs were done in 1983 after some ice damage, but it remains the only one of the three original lighthouses on the lake. Loon Island Lighthouse was rebuilt after being destroyed by lightning in 1960, and Burkehaven Lighthouse was destroyed by ice in 1935 and was rebuilt by the Lake Sunapee Protective Association in 1983.

Today the three still-active solar-powered lighthouses are owned by the State of New Hampshire, but the towers have been cared for by the LSPA since the early 1980s. The primary mission of the nonprofit LSPA, founded in 1898, is to maintain the water quality of Lake Sunapee and the environmental quality of the Lake Sunapee watershed. But they have a strong awareness of the importance of the lighthouses. "They're one of the special attributes of Lake Sunapee," explains Walt Goddard. "Our goal is to keep them in their original condition."

A local painter, Paul Johnson, has for several years donated the repainting of one of the three lighthouses each year. Funds for other lighthouse maintenance come from public donations. "The interest people have in supporting the lighthouses here is unbelievable," says Ron Wyman of the LSPA's lighthouse committee.

When Ginger Cross Shaw, daughter of Court Cross of the LSPA, died in an avalanche while skiing in Wyoming in 1996, many donations were made to the organization in her memory. When it became obvious that immediate repairs were needed to Herrick Cove Lighthouse and its crib, the Cross family was approached with the idea of using those funds for the repairs. They agreed that it would be an excellent way to honor Ginger's memory. In fact, when the lighthouse is put back in place, Walt Goddard says there will most likely be a memorial plaque for Ginger Cross Shaw added to the tower.

The overhaul of the Herrick Cove Lighthouse's crib will be completed by local contractor Rick Green. Onshore, carpenter George Neuwart will perform the necessary work on the lighthouse. The rotted wooden components of the lighthouse framework will be replaced, and the outer wooden panels will be replaced by new maintenance-free panels. The appearance of the lighthouse will remain exactly the same.

It's hoped that the lighthouse will be back in its home on the lake before the year is over, or by next spring at the latest. According to Ron Wyman, of the three towers only the Burkehaven Lighthouse has any real importance to navigation on the lake. But all three have "lots of sentimental value," says Wyman, to lakeside residents and visitors. And thanks to the LSPA they'll be standing tall for generations to come.