

## The Montauk Point Lighthouse

by Patrick Havlik

Being one of the most historic landmarks on Long Island, the Montauk Point Lighthouse is most definitely in danger. I grew up in the town of Montauk, and personally the lighthouse means a lot to me, for a few different reasons. From an early age, I would surf under and around the massive structure, which seemed to be always looking out for us. The lighthouse also reminds me of my home town, therefore I am proud of the structure. When President Washington commissioned the lighthouse to be built in 1792, the structure was erected about 300 feet from the ocean, anticipating the inevitable erosion. Today the lighthouse stands a meager 75 feet from the water. With the lighthouse getting closer and closer to the Atlantic Ocean every year, there has been efforts to re-enforce the huge boulders that surround the tip of Montauk Point, none of which have actually protruded into the surrounding ocean. It is obvious that if the lighthouse is left unprotected, it could fall into the ocean in the matter of a few years.

A bill is currently being passed to allow the Army Corps of Engineers to undergo a 14 million dollar project, which would include building an 840 feet long, 40 feet thick wall known as a revetment, sticking out just south of the lighthouse to potentially save the building from the ever raging ocean. Myself, as well as many other surfers and environmentalists, are strongly fighting this proposal. Not only will the revetment stick out into and ruin one of Long Islands best left-hand surf breaks, known as Alamo, it will cause further erosion and sand blockage to surf spots west of Alamo, known as Kiddie Pools, and Turtle Cove. So what is the best possible solution to this mess? Just move the lighthouse, dude.

In a telephone interview with Tom Naro, the Chairman of the Eastern chapter of Long Island's Surfrider Foundation, Naro stated that since 1946, there have been more than five walls, or rock structures put together to try and stop the erosion. His point was that if we keep putting money into stopping erosion, eventually we'll just go bankrupt on the issue and the lighthouse could be lost. There really is no logical sense in trying to beat natural erosion; the ocean is an extremely powerful force which never stops moving. Naro also points out that indeed this revetment would hold off the erosion of the point for some time, but if the lighthouse were to be moved back, it could stand for hundreds of

years to come. This procedure of moving lighthouses has been done on Block Island, as well as in Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. The Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, which happens to be the nation's tallest, was moved inland 1,500 feet in 1999. Of course moving the lighthouse would cost almost twice as much, 13 million dollars more to be exact, but in the long run would definitely pay off. The argument many surfers have is that the rock wall that is planned to be built would stop the westerly sand flow to Kiddie Pools and Turtle Cove, not to mention completely interfere with the spot known as Alamo, but would change the other two world-class surf breaks for the worse. These surf breaks mean an incredible amount to me; it's where I first fell in love with surfing bigger waves. To me, it seems completely understandable why the lighthouse should be moved instead of trying to stop Mother Nature with man made structures.

In an article from Senator Charles Schumer's website in June of this year, he states how excited he is about the bill being passed. "This is great news for the Montauk Lighthouse. I'm thrilled to know that the Army Corps of Engineers will have funding to keep up maintenance on this Long Island landmark." This statement alone reflects how much our own senator really knows about actually keeping the landmark well maintained. In the same article, our other senator, Hillary Clinton, said basically the same thing in different words. If they really did care about the history and well being of the lighthouse, they would look beyond the apparent solution and consider a more permanent resolution, which is to move the lighthouse, the more logical idea proposed by the Surfrider Foundation.

Apart from what you may be thinking, the Surfrider Foundation is much more than a bunch of tanned, long haired surfers hoping to keep a few surf spots around. The foundation is a non-profit, world wide organization of surfers and environmentalists who devote their free time and energy to protecting shorelines and natural surf breaks from being taken over by corporation, or simply being ruined. The Surfrider Foundation also includes members like Eddie Vedder of Pearl Jam, and Kirk Hammett of Metallica. More importantly, mostly every surfer that is involved with the organization is more concerned with their environment and keeping it as pristine as possible. Also, we would love to see the Montauk Lighthouse stand tall for the rest of our lives, and for our kids to be able to enjoy it as well.

As Tom Naro pointed out to me, the cost benefit analysis of spending the 13 million dollars more would "save the Lighthouse for hundreds of years, instead of just

until the turn of the century” (Naro, 2006 phone interview). In a different e-mail interview with long time fellow surfer and father figure, Jay Fruin of the Surfrider Foundation, explained to me how back in the 1970’s, the Army Corps of Engineers lengthened the Montauk Inlet jetties, and since then both Soundview Beach and Culloden Point’s beaches have completely disappeared. “There used to be 100-200 feet of sand on both beaches” (Fruin, 2006 e-mail interview). He also pointed out a particularly interesting fact to me. He told me that the Army Corps of Engineers doesn’t even accept global warming in their projections. This fact really upset me, and got me thinking more about what is really going on here. In the first place, to think that global warming isn’t really taking place is ridiculous. The facts are all around us, including hard evidence from science labs all over the world. Not to knock the Army Corps of Engineers or anything, but I really think they are over looking the future just to make a quick dollar. In actuality, the funding for projects like these come from our tax money, and to know that particular projects like these will never be fully completed is mind boggling, which evidently brings me back to the proposal of actually moving the lighthouse back, instead of trying to battle Mother Nature.

I have had plans to get the Montauk Lighthouse tattooed on the left side of my body, on my rib cage, for some time now; and this whole situation just makes me want to go through with it even more. That is how much this structure, landmark, means to me. But part of the reason it means this much to me is because it is my favorite place to surf in Montauk, my home town. Not to mention, Montauk Point is known to hold some of the most prestigious waves on all of the East Coast. In the end, all arrows inevitably point towards the one solution; moving the lighthouse inland. Yes, it will cost New York tax payers twice as much to do than the other proposed solution, but the fact is the other proposal isn’t even a solution at all. I feel that if everyone that is involved and that is affected could understand all of the aspects and positive outcomes regarding the actual movement of the Montauk Lighthouse, there could be a weight lifted off everyone’s shoulders soon enough and the lighthouse can stand for us and our families to enjoy for generations to come.