

## *Burnt Island Living Lighthouse*

The Maine Department of Marine Resources (DMR) acquired the Burnt Island Light Station in 1998 as part of the *Maine Lights Program*. Education Director Elaine Jones, her assistant Jean McKay,



local contractors, and hundreds of volunteers transformed it into an educational and recreational facility for the people of Maine and the nation. The buildings have been restored and redecorated to 1950, while nature trails established along the rocky shore appeal to the outdoor enthusiast.

An educational curriculum focuses on topics relating to Maine's maritime heritage, coastal environment, marine fisheries, and conservation. During the spring and fall, the five-acre island serves as an exceptional outdoor school for students and teachers from around the state. School children discover the varied life found in and around the rocky shore, sand beach, meadow,

and maritime forest as they explore the island and participate in experiential learning activities. Local elementary schools participate in day trips to the island, while children from the middle school level spend up to three days and two nights tenting out. The building of an Education Center is on the horizon, a facility that will provide adequate accommodations and classroom space for school groups.

On June 30, 2003, a new educational program called the *Burnt Island Living Lighthouse* opened to the public. The light station's beautifully restored buildings serve as a "living" history museum where interpreters in period clothing portray a lighthouse family who once called Burnt Island home. A natural history walk around the perimeter trail follows the "living" history component, where interpreters point out the flora and fauna indigenous to Maine's coast, as well as the geological features of this picturesque island. Visitors also learn about Maine's marine resources, the methods used to harvest them, and the measures used to conserve them. During the final segment of the three-hour tour, visitors climb the winding stairs into the lantern-room; view the historic photographs and documents in the covered walkway museum; sport fish off the rocks; or picnic by the waterfront. This interpretive tour helps to preserve and promote Maine's cultural heritage, while providing enrichment and opportunity for its participants.



There are very few, if any, lighthouses in the nation that offer living and natural history interpretation to the extent of the Burnt Island program. Summer visitors rave about the fabulous experience, calling it a "National Treasure" rich in detail on human, historical, and environmental levels. Many participants compare the program favorably to other national historic programs, with some remarking that it is better than Colonial Williamsburg.

# “A National Treasure”

## Extraordinary Effort

The *Burnt Island Living Lighthouse* is an exemplary model of the sustainable use and preservation of Maine's cultural and natural heritage assets. The restoration effort has promoted intergovernmental cooperation, formed partnerships with the private sector, preserved a deteriorating historic site, created an outstanding educational and recreational facility for the public, and contributed to our state and local economies.

The Burnt Island project is a prime example of an endeavor that used innovative and creative approaches to accomplish its mission. In order to fund the project, grants were received from federal, state, and local organizations, as well as private donations from individuals and local businesses. A cost-effective approach was to utilize the volunteer labor of AmeriCorps, Maine Conservation Corps, Boy Scouts, Landmark Volunteers, Master Gardeners, former lighthouse keepers, teachers, students, and citizens from within and outside the community. Today, these supporters are all proud of having been part of a cooperative effort that has transformed an abandoned site into a facility that showcases our region's historic and natural resources.



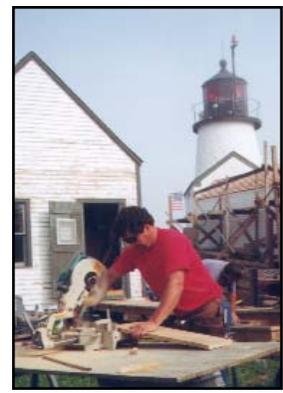
Keeper Elaine Jones painting the lighthouse.



AmeriCorps volunteer removing ceiling tiles.



Master Gardeners creating raised flower beds.



Former keeper's son repairing his old home.

## Outstanding Opportunities

School children, Maine residents, artists, and cultural tourists are now drawn to the Boothbay region for an unparalleled experience that has been rated by some visitors as the "best in the nation." The living history component entertains the public as it teaches about the life and times of the station, while the natural history segment creates awareness of our fisheries, and the need to protect our environment and its resources. An added bonus is the boat ride aboard the *Novelty*, which provides participants with a spectacular view of one of Maine's most beautiful harbors.

Recreational boaters and kayakers enjoy important public access to one more unique piece of Maine's coastline as a result of a new docking system and moorings. Docents serving as park rangers remind visitors that they, along with the DMR, must be responsible stewards of the island and its buildings. This approach helps to protect Burnt Island's cultural and natural assets for future generations.



The Novelty docks at Burnt Island.



Artist at work



Exploring the tide pools

## Incredible Interpreters

A trip to Burnt Island is like a step back in time, with a highly competent staff portraying Keeper Joseph Muise and his family. Dressed in period clothing, they make guests believe that it is 1950 while sharing their life experiences at the Burnt Island Light Station. James Buotte, the gentleman in uniform, “wows” the crowd not only by his stately appearance, but also by his knowledge. As a true former keeper of the Burnt Island Light (1955-58), there isn’t a question that he can’t answer.



James Buotte portrays Keeper Joseph Muise.



The family relaxes on the porch of the restored keeper's dwelling.



Jean McKay portrays Annie Muise, the keeper's wife.

The keeper's children all become naturalists after the living history component. As interpreters, they lead small groups around the perimeter trail, pointing out the flora and fauna indigenous to the island. They also identify nearby landmarks, share local lore, and explain about Maine's coastal fisheries.



Bailey Irving explains about Maine's fisheries.



Michael Wood leads a naturalist hike.



Katie Brydon teaches about intertidal life

## And Family Fun

Burnt Island offers numerous recreational opportunities for families; from exploring the nooks and crannies of the five-acre island to catching a striped bass. Recreational boaters stop by for a break or enjoy a picnic lunch near the scenic shoreline. Artists capture the beauty of the lighthouse on canvas, while the young and the young at heart enjoy the tire swing.

