

## The History of NCI Worms Head



In March 2005 the National Coastwatch Institution was made aware of the possibility that the abandoned coastguard station at Worms Head might become available to lease as a watch station.

Initial research revealed that the station was set in a beautiful location on the very dangerous coastline of the Gower peninsular. Between April 2005 and February 2006, the NCI Trustees held discussions with the National Trust to establish their view on the future use of the building and the National Trust made it clear that they would be happy to see the NCI use the building in its original role as a watch station.

During the same period NCI were holding discussions with some local groups and local residents to try to get determine the need for them to operate in the area and,

more importantly, the level of local support they could expect. Both the NCI and the National Trust were convinced of the need for NCI at Worm's Head. Gower attracts a large number of visitors with more than 300,000 people visiting the Worm's Head area annually. The dangers of the area are very real and there had been a number of fatalities in the area in recent times together with a larger number of less serious incidents.

A 15-year lease on the building was finally signed in May 2006. In June 2006 representatives of the NCI visited Swansea and started a publicity campaign with a public meeting held in Middleton Village Hall at the beginning of August, where some twenty people attended. A second meeting took place in early September and, as a result of these two public meetings, 19 volunteers joined NCI Worm's Head.

A first meeting of these volunteers took place on 9<sup>th</sup> September and by 14<sup>th</sup> November a training programme had been devised and was underway with the Worms Head volunteers having set themselves the target of opening as an operational station in time for the 2007 Easter Weekend. That meant that they had just thirty weeks to get everything up and running from scratch, but a large number of those weeks were over the winter period!

The training of volunteers was easy as the equipment and materials needed were readily available and a quite remarkable gentleman from the team that operates the Loughor Inshore Lifeboat gave his time freely each week to take groups of volunteers through the training syllabus. But, in other respects, there were some problems at Worms Head.

There was a 'lookout' which showed all the signs of having been unoccupied for some considerable time. It had no running water, no electricity, no telephone, no heating and as if all that was not enough - no toilet! And, of course, it was a one mile walk from the Rhosilli car park. However, the saving grace is that the views are fantastic!

What was needed was a weatherproof lookout equipped with optical equipment, compasses, marine VHF Radio, short-range Walkie Talkie Sets, charts and a chart table, maps of the local area, a power supply for the radios, an accurate clock, a weather station, loud hailing equipment, smoke canisters and high-visibility jackets, along with some sort of domestic arrangements to allow watchkeepers to make a hot drink and to wash up afterwards. Naturally furniture, secure storage facilities for the equipment, some form of heating and, of course, a toilet were also a necessity! The one slight snag in all of this was that NCI Worms Head had no money!

The NCI Trustees helped with an interest free start up loan. The volunteers themselves set to work raising money through collecting boxes in local shops and organising events such as coffee mornings, bridge meetings and, as the weather improved, garden parties. They also contacted local businesses, clubs and organisations to let them know what they were aiming to do and why, and all of these organisations helped out with generous donations. The cost of materials for the refurbishment and enough equipment to operate satisfactorily was relatively modest. However, this totally ignores the other materials and equipment which somehow or other found their way into the lookout totally free of charge.

It took more than 1,000 hours of the volunteer's time to refurbish and secure the building. They installed a bank of batteries and the wiring to feed the equipment along with the means to collect and recycle water from the roof. Volunteers also spent hours at boat jumble sales and in chandlers not only trying to get the best possible deals on the equipment which was needed, without falling into the trap which defines a bargain as 'Something which you don't really need, at a price you can't resist'!

As a result, one week before Easter 2007 NCI Worm's Head lookout opened as an operational station, one week ahead of target.

A spokesman for NCI Worms Head said “I hasten to add that we are absolutely certain that none of the paint, or other materials 'fell off the back of a lorry'! However, if ever there was proof needed that the innate generosity of people who recognise a worthwhile cause is very much alive and in evidence, this was it. We owe a large debt of gratitude to a multitude of local people.”



NCI Worms Head on St Davids Day