

Danger Point

Few other coasts in South Africa have the dubious reputation for being the final resting place of many ships. The area between Danger Point and Cape Infanta holds about 140 wrecks. Yet only a few are remembered today, as their tragic tales serve as a reminder to the incredible dangers associated with seafaring in those days.

"Women and children first!"

In 25 February 1852 the HMS Birkenhead was en route from Simons Bay near Cape Town towards Algoa Bay carrying about 634 men, woman and children. Under the command of Capt Robert Salmond, the Birkenhead was carrying troops and some of the officer's families to the Cape Frontier War.

Early the following morning she struck an uncharted rock near Danger Point. All the women and children were placed on lifeboats and rowed away to safety. As the ship sank around them, the soldiers waited on deck. Only some managed to reach the shore, while many soldiers drowned or were taken by sharks. Although 634 passengers were on board, only about 193 were saved.

The heroic actions of the soldiers became known as the "Birkenhead Drill" and this tragic event was also the origin for the term "women and children first". The largest collection of Birkenhead relics is housed in the privately funded Strandveld Museum in nearby Franskraal. Legend holds that the Birkenhead carried almost three tons in gold coins which had been secretly stored in the powder-room before the final voyage

In 1895 the Danger Point Lighthouse was erected to warn passing ships of the dangers lurking near the coasts. The lighthouse is about 18,3 m tall and its light can be seen for apporximately 25 sea miles. At the base of the lighthouse is a remembrance plate for the Birkenhead and it points to where the ship met its doom.