

The lighthouse at Gatteville

Accueil : <http://www.decouvrir-montfarville.fr>



3km north from Barfleur stands the great lighthouse, erect, high and lofty, that burns on the tidal strand like an easter candle. It stands on very dangerous rocks and reefs linked to the land by a 130 meter long jetty.

As it is 75 meter high, it's been compared to a giant, head in the clouds, feet set in the rock, who for ever keeps a still silent watch. It actually keeps watch on the wide moving burial ground where thousands of sailors have sunk nearby. It looks like a fine huge memorial. The graceful proportions are a delight to the eyes whether admired closely for details, or seen from a far distance for its shape silhouetted against the sky and sea of blue.

One hundred years ago, between 1829 and 1834, a talented engineer, built this nonesuch granite column: it seems to be one solid piece whereas it is made of 11000 blocks for a total weight of 7400000kg, it is 9meter wide down at the basis and 6 meter wide at the top, it is crowned with a corbel protruding for 80 cm.

A 367 step staircase leads to the lantern. It was lit for the first time on 1st january 1835. Since 1892, it has been working electrically. The Barfeur Gatteville light consists in a set of two white flashes every 10 seconds which means that all through the night, 6 times a minute, a long double ray of white light, rotating from left to right suddenly tears the night, sweeps round the horizon, illuminates the sea and the sleeping country side. " there are glimmering waves, whitening shores, meadows and clumps of trees that stand out in the night. Right up to the heights of La Pernelle, Quettehou and Morsalines , steeples roofs gleam fugaciously."

The light house at Gatteville bears as far as 22 nautical miles: its fire can be seen for more than 40km afar. Its ray crosses that from La Hève eastward and the one from the isle of Wight northward.

In foggy weather, the column is no longer silent, the granite giant comes to life. A deep and gloomy booming sound can be heard from its throat once every minute. The siren warns off the ships at sea through the noisy swell to avoid a certain death.

The small light house which is today used as a semaphore is 27 meter high and dates from 1774. The elegant building, Jacques Maurice's achievement is well worth the sight.