

Launch of the Cape Canaveral Lighthouse

We Have Liftoff!

Beware Of Old Fooler

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CAPE KENNEDY — It happens everytime they launch a rocket, and Sunday's launch of Apollo 14 will likely be no exception.

Some beachside bird watchers will train their binoculars on the century old Cape Canaveral Lighthouse, standing tall beyond the missiles and gantries, and patiently wait for it to soar skyward.

OF COURSE, it never does and the red-faced rocket watchers are usually a little embarrassed and irritated.

But the lighthouse does have a function in rocket launches beyond misleading spectators.

The historic structure played an important part in providing information on the position of Apollo 13 until it reached an altitude of 50,000 feet. Keeping track of the rocket involved exact sightings of several fixed targets, including the lighthouse.

"GUIDING AND tracking systems for missiles require exact geographic positions, line of known direction, elevations and gravity measurements," said Gerald J. Tremblay, member of the 1st Geodetic Survey Squadron Detachment 4 of the U. S. Air Force.

"To these ends, precision surveys are conducted by Detachment 4," Tremblay said.

"The lighthouse is frequently used as an initial line of known direction when occupying various instrumentation sites."

Tracking ships also use the lighthouse in adjustments of "on board instrumentation," which demands precise, instantaneous azimuths. This is accomplished by simultaneously observing from aboard ship and atop the lighthouse.

Being a sentimental crew, they like to think the 450,000 candle power beam of the Cape Canaveral Lighthouse guides America's astronauts safely back home.

While the Lighthouse never actually launches, many an unsuspecting tourist has trained their eyes on our beacon, thinking it was the next rocket to space. While its origins are not exactly known, a 4-minute video spoof was created around 1960, possibly by employees of Pan American World Airways working at the Cape.

