

The Search for *Stefano*



Illustration from *The Wreck of the Stephano*, by Rathe

Austro-Hungarian barque wrecked off Point Cloates, 27 October 1875

Funded by Dr Monte Sala

Report- Department of Maritime Archaeology
Western Australian Maritime Museum, No. 79

Introduction – Ian Warne

The search for wreckage of the *Stefano* began with my interest in the Ningaloo area. I had been returning to the area frequently since my first visit in 1987 with a WA Museum expedition on the American trader *Rapid*, sunk at Point Cloates 1811.

I had been researching all shipwrecks in the area of Point Cloates and was most interested in the 'wrecks on the beach', as reported by Capt Walcott on his voyage to the area in search for any further survivors of the *Stefano*. This chart was first brought to my notice by Peter and Jill Worsley who wrote to the British Admiralty and received this Walcott Chart along with others.

The *Stefano* kept cropping up at an important part of the early history of this area and I was continually on the lookout for further information. A chance meeting in my local printer, I met Carlo Stransky, who was writing an opera based on the story of the *Stefano* survivors. He suggested I contact Monte Sala, whom he knew was interested in the history.

On contacting Monte, he was enthusiastic about my interest and suggested lunch, at which he told me of all his research and the literal translation from the Italian manuscript of the survivors' account.

Monte mentioned that he was most interested in following in the footsteps of the survivors, and finding any evidence of the wreck.

At a second lunch with Mike McCarthy and Monte Sala, he generously offered to sponsor an expedition to first: search for any wreckage in the water, and later to embark on a re enactment of the survivors' trek.

The proposal was for a group from MAAWA to undertake a two-week expedition supported with a boat and technician from the Museum.

The primary aim would be to search around Black Rock where the ship is believed to have wrecked, and the beach area where the survivors and wreckage came ashore.

Monte Sala would fund a grant of \$2000 prior and \$500 on completion of the report for this initial survey. A further \$2500 would be available for subsequent land based 'Survivors' Trek' expeditions.

At a lunch in Fremantle (again generously hosted by Monte Sala), the day of my departure for Pt Cloates, Monte, Mike and self were joined by Pat Baker, the Museum person assigned to accompany us. Decisions were made on dates and rendezvous to launch boat at Coral Bay and drive truck to campsite and crew for boat.

Later, Colin Powell of the WA Museum, agreed to come up to assist in the boat launching and truck driving.

Report of the MAAWA-WA Museum to Point Cloates, Easter 1993

Patron: Monte Sala

Members of the party:

Peter and Jill Worsley	Geraldton
Brunhilde Prince	City Beach
Sharmini Chelva	Geraldton
Nola and Terry Farrell	Leeming
Neville and Jeannette Passmore	Shenton Park
Ian Warne, Rhonda Edwards	Nedlands
Ross McGuffie	Fremantle
Ross Easton	Bunbury
Geoff Glazier	Hilton
Patrick and Matthew Baker	Fremantle
Peter and Pamela	Perth

Objectives

- (i) To search for wreckage of the barque *Stefano*, sank near Point Cloates 1875.
- (ii) To search for wrecks on the beach as mentioned by Capt Walcott during his search for survivors of the *Stefano*
- (iii) To follow the trek of the crew of the shipwreck as detailed in their account by Scuria/Sala
- (iv) To search in water along reef nearby for other shipwrecks reported in vicinity of Point Cloates.



Figure 1 - In the sand dunes looking NW to Point Cloates .

Field Daybook

Report – Day 1; Friday, 9 April 1993

Arrival day, set up tents and campsite

Search priorities

To search around Black Rock for signs of wreckage, i.e. anchors and chain, deck winches, rudder fittings etc. and any large iron objects.

In survivors' accounts: Ship steering nor-nor-west - winds from south, struck black rock ...spun right around and laid on her right side...

Note: some dispute over course or perhaps a strong current could have pushed them closer to shore than they believed.



Figure 2 - Black Rock in good weather

Report - Day 2; Saturday, 10 April Weather warm and sunny

Day spent settling in and research notes being discussed of Captain Walcott 'Wrecks on the Beach'.

Also from Sala - Scuria notes of where survivors first made camp. The following points highlighted:

28 October - Scuria pp.14/15

Shipwreck materials found, masts, oars, ladders, cases of wine, food, barrel of water, 2 yards of cotton material, 2 planes, sails etc. and an old column from previous wreck.

Hut erected on sandy stretch covered by layer of seaweed overgrown with small plants. Site located behind dune providing cover from prevailing winds, eastward view dominated by extensive plains covered by low vegetation spreading all the way to an horizon towered over by very high hills, black with dense eucalypt.

Hut/Tent description: mast used as 4 corner posts 5 m x 2 m. They then tied 2 yards along and 2 smaller poles across the tips of the corner posts and impaled planks firmly in the sand as walls and covered the lot with canvass. *Stefano's* state-room door (*left with *Stefano* and survivors' names carved in) faced eastward. Bedding was dry grass with flowers filled with cotton like material. Provisions, except for H₂O were brought to the tent. Barrel of water was left 2 miles away.



Figure 3 - Studying notes in fisherman's hut

Report - Day 3; Sunday, 11 April

Pat and museum party arrived with *Seaspray*. Spent time unloading gear from the truck, setting up camp and preparing equipment. Pat reported Black Rock heavy in swell and would probably require couple of days before any thought of diving.

Land party set out to check 4WD tracks as marked on modern map and to try and locate possible sites of Walcott ships and survivors' camp. All tracks exist as marked on Chart 1652-4. Camps on the beach and in the dunes confirm that good sites exist for future land-based expeditions.



Figure 4 - *Sea Spray* anchored off beach

Report - Day 4; Monday, 12 April

Weather, rain all day. 'Just one more sandhill..' said Geoff in his pursuit of the highest hill. Some signs of mutiny from some of the crew. Jill was particularly interested in blow-outs in the sandhills close to the beach. Many hearths were found, baler shell fragments and a midden of fine needle shells.

Fishing trip to the inner edge of the reef in Geoff's boat. Good selection of reef fish mainly caught by Nola. Neville captured a painted cray. Fishes cooked in a Thai style broth. Cray barbequed then dunked in same broth.

All gathered at the main campsite to enjoy the camp-fire courtesy of Colin and protection from rain.



Figure 5 - One more sand hill to climb

Figure 6 - Baler shell fragment in dune blow-out



Report - Day 5; Tuesday, 13 April

Weather, cloud clearing. Light winds easterly

Party left in *Seaspray* to compare bearings from the sea of the various charts. From the entrance one hill stood out as being entrance hill as this is behind first line of dunes. Can only be seen 3 miles out. the other being Apex Hill is more evident closer in and possibly the point on Walcott Chart. Coming in on a bearing of 56° we meet the land party on the beach about two miles further south than we were looking previous day. Strong shore breaks and murky conditions made any sea searching pointless.

Pat checked photo transits on *Rapid* site. Conditions OK on this site. Also checked visual photo transits on inside (*Benan*) site waves breaking over site. Land party agreed this new site south most likely of Walcott Chart. Geoff noticed items in water and weed worthy of swim search, also a good prospect for survivors' campsite.

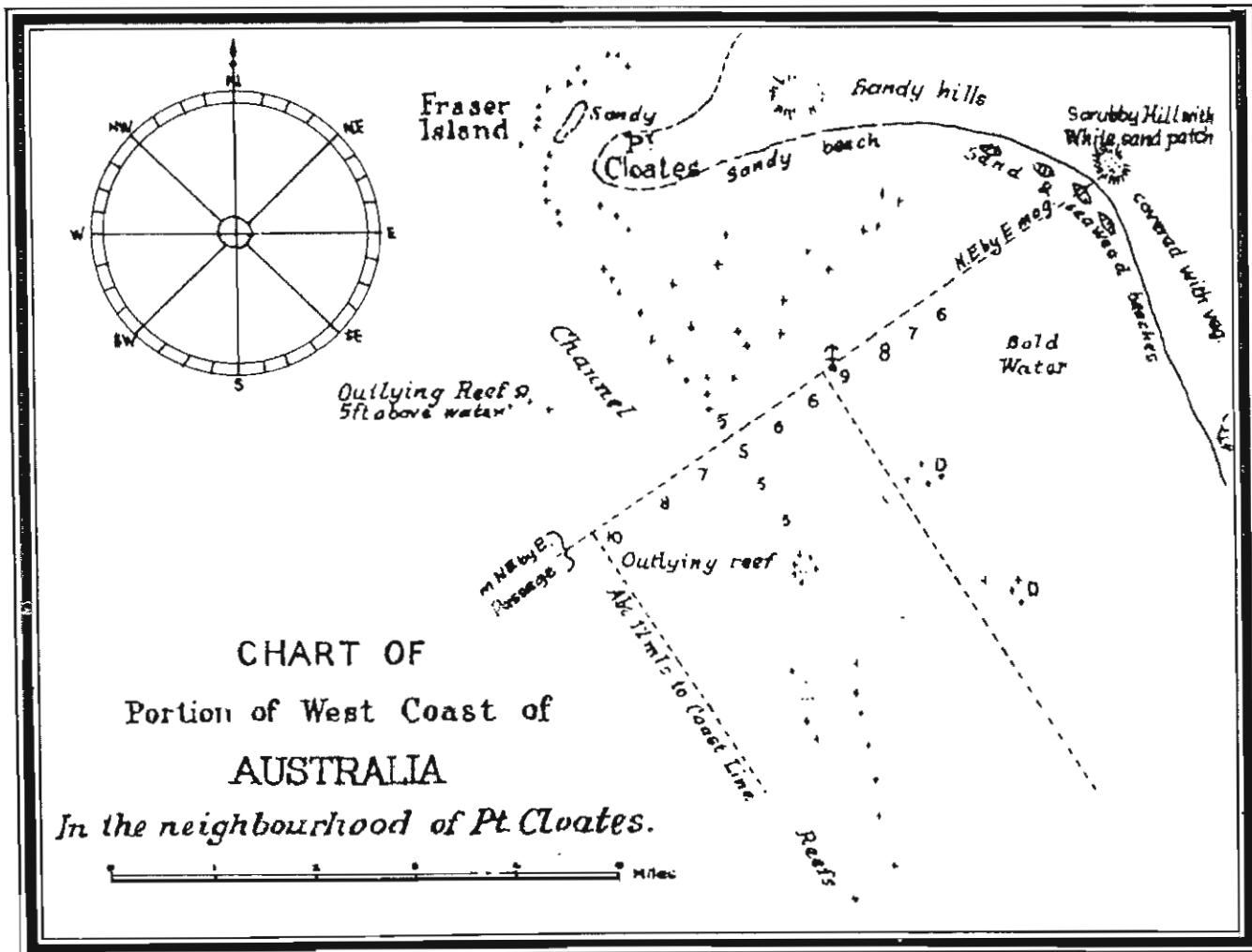


Figure 7 - Chart by Capt. P. Walcott, 1877

Report - Day 5 ; Tuesday, 13 April

Weather cloud clearing. Light winds easterly.

On *Sea Spray* visited Fraser Island - now a shallow sandy area inside main reef. Wreck of the *Finn* with boiler and motor above the water-line. Corals had begun to cover the underwater parts of the wreck. Also, we looked over the ruins of the lighthouse now tipped over and lying half submerged. Lots of fish life attracted by wreckage. We saw sandy coloured wobbigong, blue spotted stingray and large NW snapper on site.

Also visited abandoned whaling station at Norwegian Bay. CALM have now placed signs re site warning of asbestos fibres on site. Looked over whole processing area. There is now a track leading to main track - we presume.

- A. Party left in *Seaspray* to search area 400 yards offshore from position seen by Geoff Glazier. Water still very murky, visibility 1-2 m. Area covered approximately 200 m along sand-bank. Divers Jill and Peter Worsley, Jeanette and Neville Passmore.
- B. Party canvassed the secondary dunes 6K from Ningaloo Homestead up the Ningaloo-Coral Bay track. The dunes were accessed from the track leading to 'The Well' in the west-end of the paddock. We searched for the Entrance Hill peak and established it to be possibly the northern most mound behind the blow-out. It lies in a straight line to Black Rock, unfortunately we didn't carry any nav. gear to verify hearings - Geoff, Sharmaine, Nola, Terry and Brunhilde.



Figure 8 - Looking NW to Point Cloates

Report - Day 6; Wednesday, 14 April

Meeting at 0900. Much discussion re Walcott wreck sites and location of survivors' camp.

Geoff's 4WD party went along station tracks through gateway near old shearing shed site(?) and along landward side of dunes, then cut across country to back of tallest dune in coastal strip - probably Apex Hill GPS reading SATELLITE NOS :

11 28 01 15

Time 4 hrs 31 mins, 48 seconds UTC

Position: S 22°43,25.3 E 113° 43,26.1

Old lighthouse tower bearing 300°.

Took bearing of highest hill visible inland 082°. This confirms Apex Hill and Entrance Hill as this bearing agrees with the charts.

Examined blow-outs north along beach from Apex Hill. Almost all have evidence of some human activity, e.g. evidence of fire blackened pebbles, animal bones (some probably natural death, others food scraps), shells, large broken boilers etc. We were looking particularly for a site that fits the description given in Rathe's book and Salla's translation but while a 'probability' was concluded, this is not definite.

The party then moved down to the beach and started to walk south. Joined boat party where Terry had found an iron object in the sea. Bearing 204° from a position on the beach of SATELLITE NOS.

11 15 29 25.

Time 6 hrs 17 mins, 46 seconds UTC.

S 22° 42,37.7, E 113° 42,30.1

Bearings Apex Hill 12.20 p.m. 4.3148 UTC (GMT)

S. 22° 43, 25.3

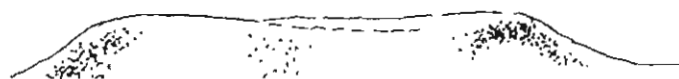
E 113° 43, 26.1

Lighthouse	300°	Black Rock	244°
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Reef southern edge	237°	Reef northern edge	200°
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Pt Cloates	270 (due west)		
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Checked Entrance Hill to be 82° from Apex Hill.



APEX HILL FROM SEA.

Figure 9 - Apex hill from sea

Report - Day 7; Thursday, 15 April

Pat's group of 6 in the *Seaspray* and Ross and Terry in the rubber duck succeeded in locating the *Rapid* wreck today. Photographic transits taken by Pat more than 10 yrs ago needed updating in line with change of dune cover and structure around the lighthouse. The row of star pickets were noted initially by Nola on board and we snorkelled to examine the 2 anchors and pile of ballast. Some timber appears to be exposed.

At Black Rock, Pete and Ross were unable to locate any sign of *Stefano* wreckage, swells were quite large so Pat stood well off until signalled by the boys that 2 sharks were hanging around.

Using photographic transits for *Benan*, wreck material was located on the southern arm of the reef in two locations. The swell here, again made it difficult for the *Seaspray* to work in close enough to the reef and diving was postponed.

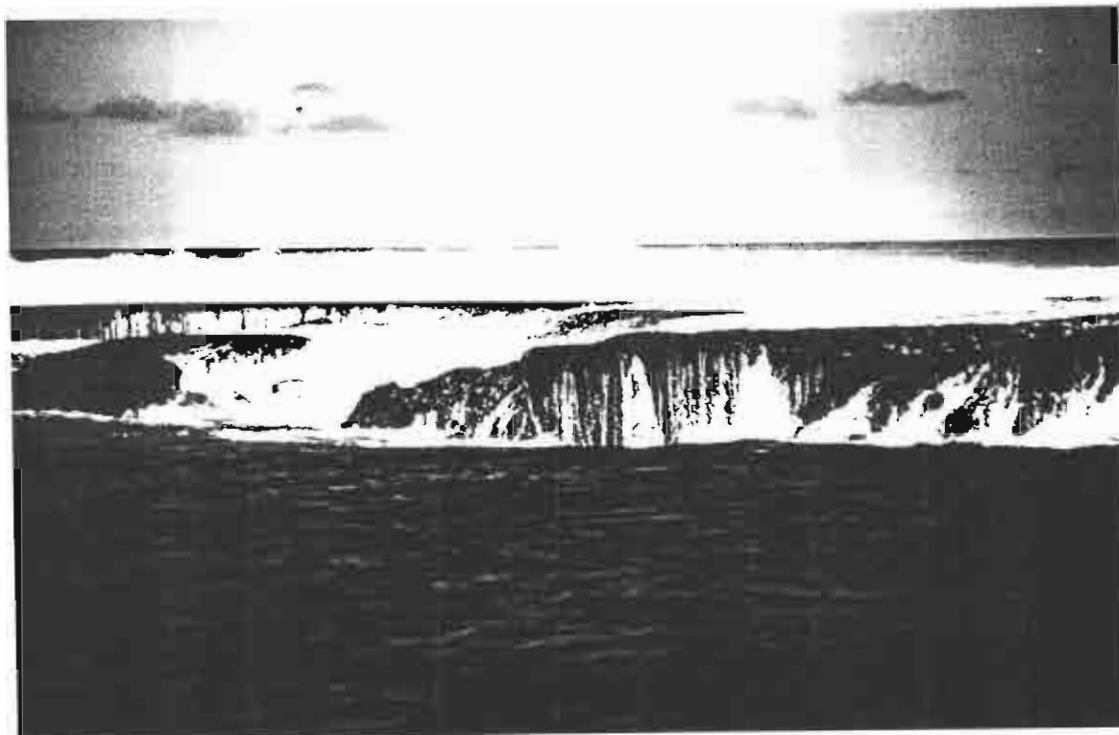
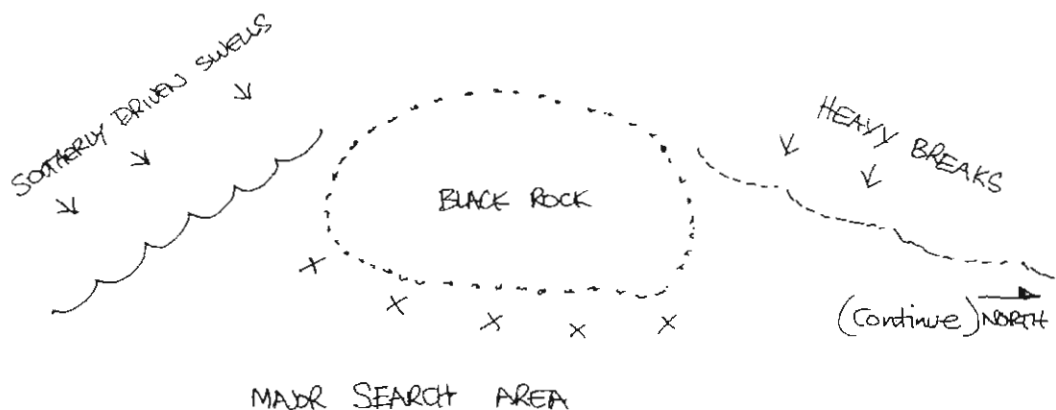


Figure 10 - Looking due west, Black Rock

Figure 11 - Major search area



Report - Day 8; Friday, 16 April

Party aboard *Seaspray* departed 0900 taking Ross with metal detector to join party coming by 4WD to swim beach. Strong southerly winds in bay made too rough for boat. Dropped Ross off in north part of beach to walk around then went out to *Benan* inside reef site. Ross McGuffie joined in rubber ducky.

Located site with photographic transits site over shallow reef in pool between shallow reef and outside reef. Strong current coming over. Ian and Brunhilde joined Ross. Small piece of wreckage 10' located with two bollards about 5 ft, (piece of hull). No other pieces seen in this bay. Ross recovered brass porthole nearby.

Shore party continued metal detecting in sand dunes where survivors' camp thought to be. Erected transits on beach to guide future sea party to search close inshore where piece of iron spotted.



Figure 12 - Rubber-Duck inside reef lagoon at low tide

Report - Day 9; Saturday, 17 April

Southerly winds again today. *Seaspray* departed 9.00 am with six divers. Too rough to go to Black Rock so we went on the outside of the reef to find the wreck of the *Benan*? Ian and Alby snorkelled but could not find wreck. Proceeded to Norwegian Bay to find wreck of *Zuir*. This also proved elusive so we came back to Fraser Island before heading home to camp. Really strong winds by this time, 12.30 p.m.

Report - Day 10; Sunday, 18 April

Left base 9.30 a.m. - southerly breezes. Six divers and Ross with metal detector. Tim Shallcross from Bullara Homestead came with us. Dropped Ross off at Whaling Station then proceeded to wreck of *Zuir*. Found it without any trouble. Ross, Tim, Nola and Terry had a dive. The wreck was huge and you could distinguish everything. No weeds growing on it. Patrick and Matthew went in after we came back on board. Patrick took heaps of photos, there was an enormous variety of fish life on the wreck. Picked Ross up at Whaling Station then came home 2.00 p.m.

Report - Day 11; Monday, 19 April

Left camp at 0900 to dive on *Rapid*. All the remaining crew went plus Doug Myers from CALM at Exmouth. Light easterly - good conditions. Failed to find wreck after a fair bit of searching so proceeded to camp-site of survivors. Anchored first off shore. Ross showed Pat the area covered with metal detector to date - photos taken. Pat and Ross proceeded to highest point where Pat took panoramic views of area. Rest of crew looked after boat and patrolled beach. Headed back to camp and arrived approximately 1430.

Usual campfire - Peter and Pamela arrived 8.00 p.m.



Figure 13 - 4 Mile south looking north

Report - Day 12; Tuesday, 20 April

Peter, Pamela, Terry, Ross, Pat and Matthew set out on *Seaspray* at 8.00 am for Black Rock. Slight southerly blowing in the bay. On reaching the passage to Black Rock seas were too heavy so once again tried to find the *Rapid*. Ross went metal detecting at the site of the Old Homestead and found a metal 12 gauge cartridge and a 303 cartridge and a nail.

Ross and Ross went to the Shearing Shed in 'Rick O'Shea' and met a fellow called Duke Wellington. Duke is a retired professional fisherman from this area and has knowledge of the campsite for the survivors of either the *Rapid* or *Stefano*. He is coming to our camp-site tonight to tell a few stories. Took Matthew to meet the bus at 1.30 p.m. and then started to pack up. We leave tomorrow at 9.00 or 10.00 am.

Pat Baker has long talk to Duke Wellington, drawing map to show inlet and cave north of Cape Farquar. He thinks survivors' camp is a little further south, at 6 Mile, where most wreckage ends up, there are more open views, beyond the first dune there too! (He gave Pat carved stick.)

Report - Day 13; Wednesday, 21 April

Last morning. Pack up time.

We were a bit worried about getting the cars through the bog. Left Ningaloo about 9.30. Pat and Ross in the boat. Terry drove the truck to Coral Bay. We all met up in Coral Bay and had to wait for the tide to come in to get the boat on the trailer. Left Coral Bay about 2.30 p.m. for the trip home.

Post Report from Peter Worsley

He noticed on leaving, that the gate posts at 'Rope Gate' to Ningaloo Station were Oregon with square boat nails and two other posts were square finished mahogany type wood, also with square boat nails.

Photos and wood samples given to Museum for analysis. It is believed the original Ningaloo Homestead was built in this area and many ships' timbers would have been used in construction of sheds and buildings - the gate is perhaps all that is now left.



For the Future

- Search of Black Rock when museum boat in the area with white water diver Geoff Kimpton
- Further research of pioneers' journals, pastoralists, fishermen etc. to ascertain knowledge of any construction of buildings from ships' timbers (as first Ningaloo Homestead) and any finding of relics from survivors.
- Commence to track survivors' journey to establish landmarks as given in survivors' accounts.
- Further shallow water searching when weather permits along shoreline where wreckage reported by Capt Walcott
- Follow up where *Stefano*'s state room door with survivors' names ended up.

Bibliography

- Henderson, Graeme and Henderson, Kandy-Jane, (1988)
Unfinished Voyages: Western Australian Shipwrecks 1851-1880.
University of Western Australian Press, pp.308.
- Sala, M. and Scuria, S.,
Translation from original manuscript of survivors' accounts
- Rathe, Gustave, 1990. *The wreck of the barque Stefano off the North West Cape of Australia in 1875.* Hesperian Press, Carlisle, WA.

Charts

- 1886 Admiralty Chart No. B1096
1877 Chart from Report by Capt P. Walcott
1897 Survey by Comm. Dawson 'Anchorages on the NW Coast of Australia'.
1991 Survey Map 1652.4
1956 Hydrographic Chart No.72.

Note of Interest

Australian Pilot Volume V - Sixth Edition, 1972

Black Rock lies 2½ miles SW of Point Cloates and the sea always breaks on it; there is a pinnacle rock in the centre 2½ m (8 ft) high. There is foul ground for some distance around this rock, and it is probably a detached portion of the barrier reef.

There is now no noticeable pinnacle on Black Rock.