

Norwegian Bay Whaling Station

Maritime Heritage Inspection Report

Compiled by Dena Garratt, August 1994
from a report by Myra Stanbury

Report - Department of Maritime Archaeology
WA Maritime Museum, No. 88.

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administered by the Australian Heritage Commission and the Heritage Council of
Western Australia.

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The information for this report is derived from a site inspection undertaken by Myra Stanbury in 1982 and is compiled from excerpts of an archaeological report by Myra Stanbury, published in 1985 by the Western Australian Museum.

Introduction

In January 1982, during the final season of excavation of the *Rapid*, a team of archaeologists, students and volunteers, carried out a field survey of the Norwegian Bay Whaling Station. The main aims of the project were firstly, to map the site; and, secondly, to identify and record the various physical components of industrial activity and their relation to one another. When weather conditions permitted, a preliminary search of the sea bed in the vicinity of the main jetty was made.

Background

Compiled from excerpts of the publication by Myra Stanbury, 1985, *Norwegian Bay Whaling Station: An archaeological report*. Western Australian Museum

Site Name(s): Norwegian Bay Whaling Station
Point Cloates Whaling Station

File Name: Jetties and Port Related Structures

File No: MA 2.93

File Name: Heritage Council of WA.

File No: MA 13.93

File Name: Whaling

File No: MA 58.88

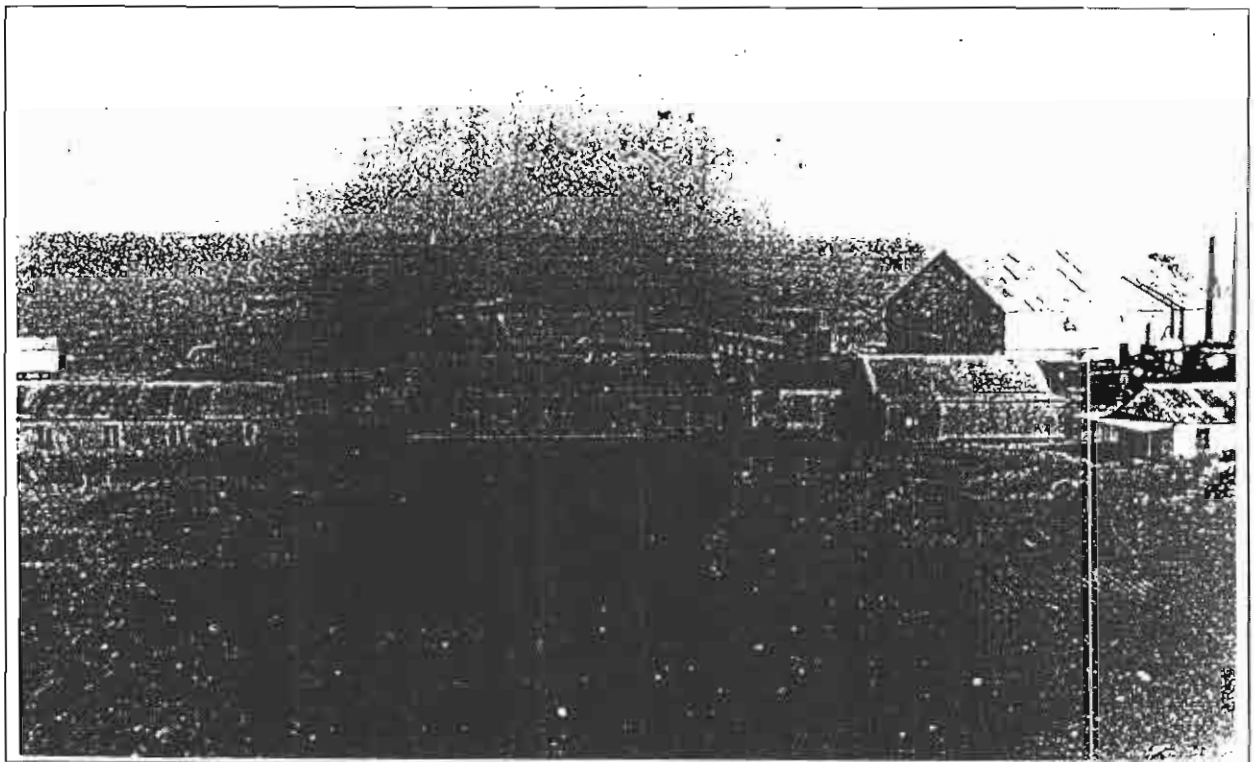


Figure 1. Norwegian Bay Whaling Station in 1924, showing the position of the main jetty. (J. Morrissy)

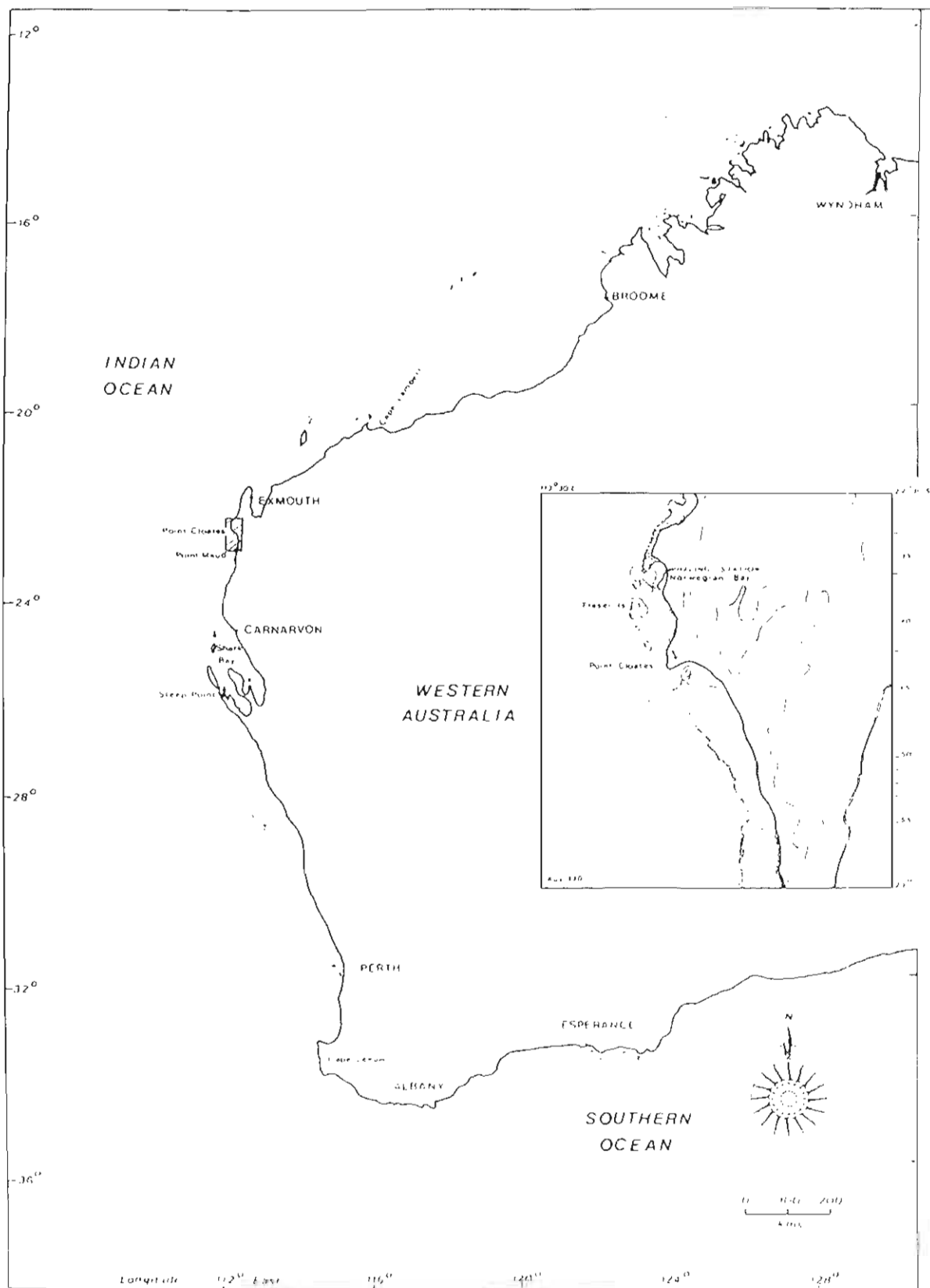


Figure 2. Locality Map: Norwegian Bay. (M. Stanbury, p. 10)

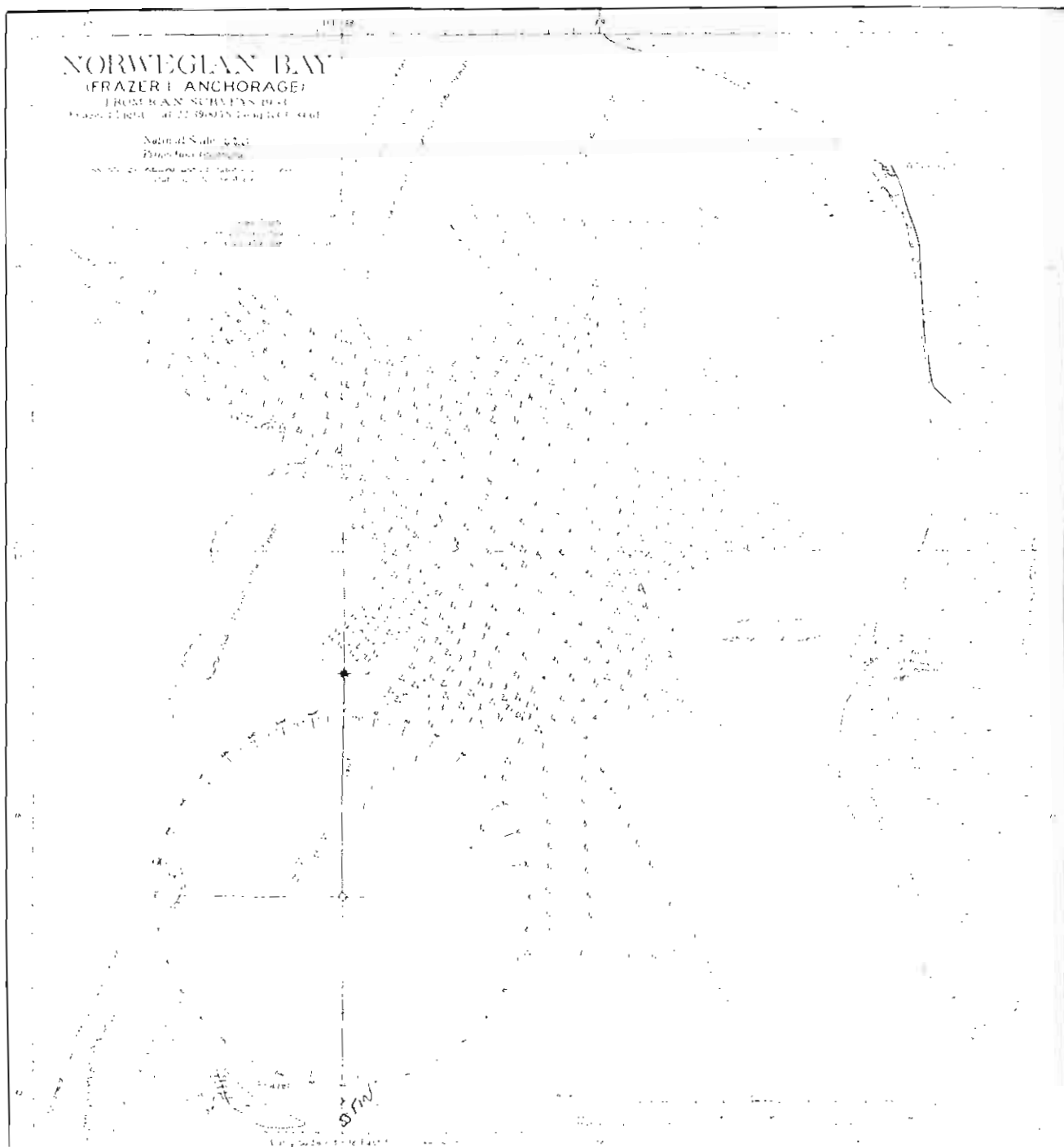


Figure 4. Map: AUS 72, 1953, 1: 75 000 (x 0.7), showing the site of the Norwegian Bay Whaling Station.

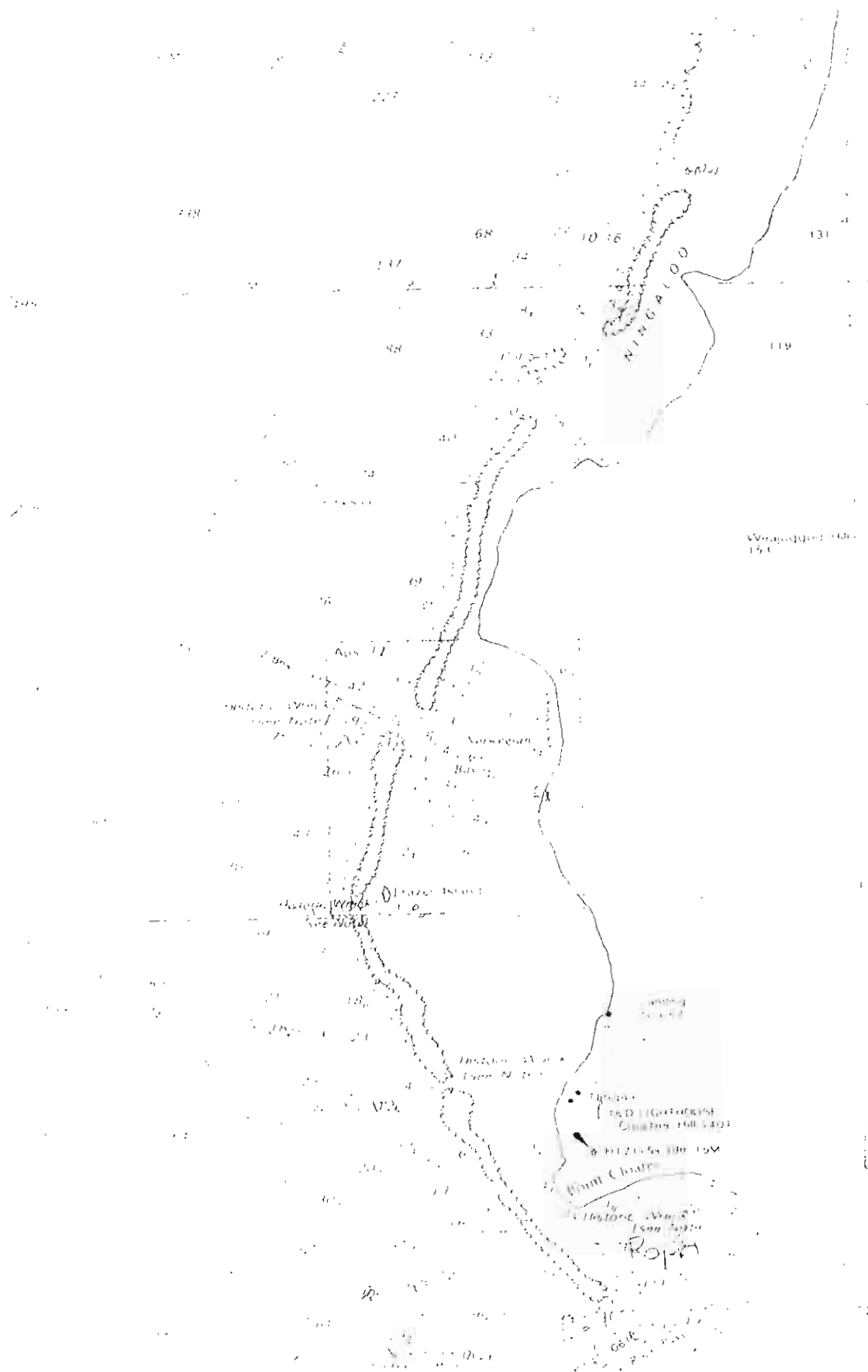


Figure 5. Map: AUS 745, 1985 1:150 000, showing the site of the Norwegian Bay Whaling Station.

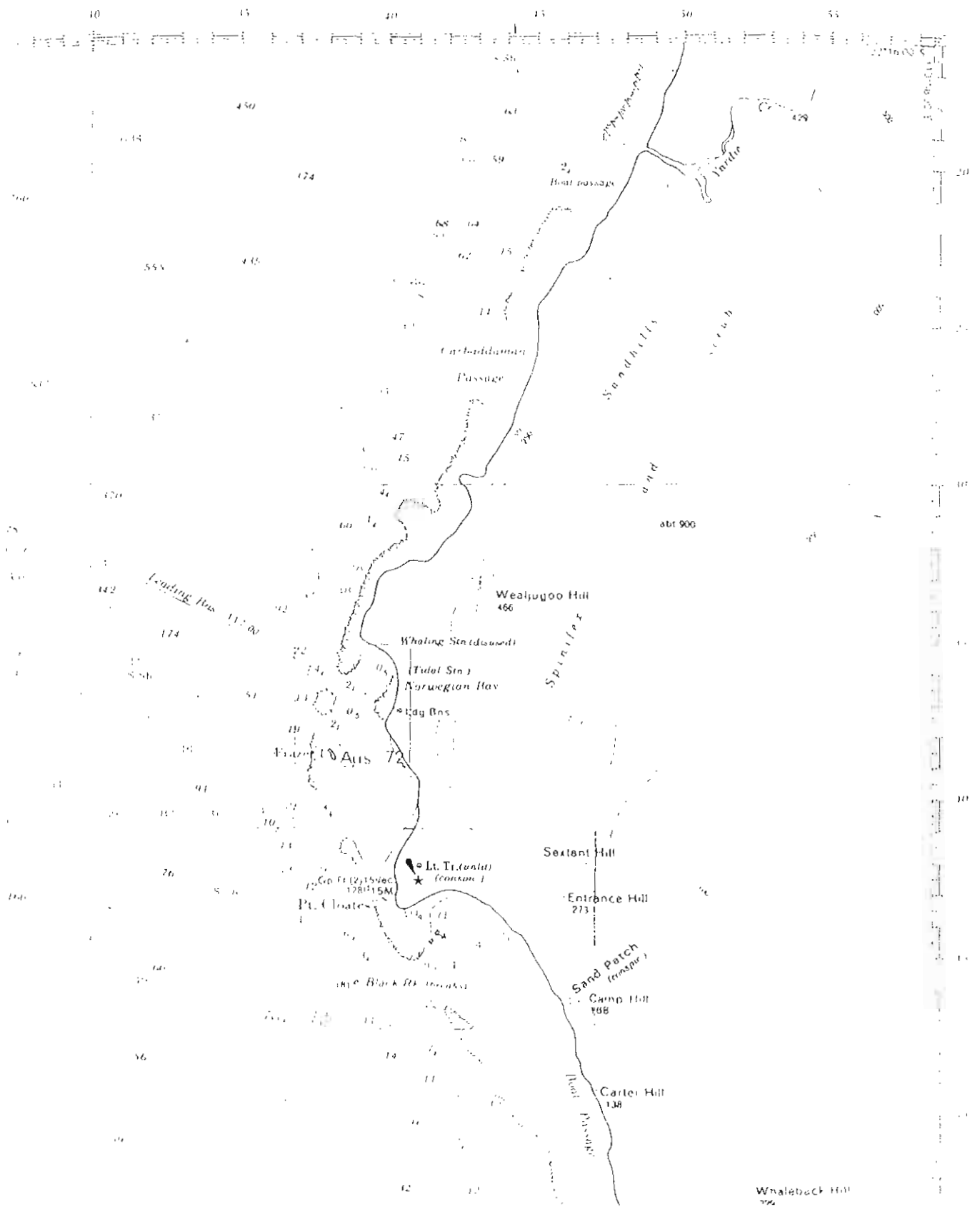


Figure 6. Map: AUS 330, 1968 1: 300 000, showing the site of the Norwegian Bay Whaling Station.

Technical Data

Date of Inspection: January 1982

Personnel: M. Stanbury, Milton Clarke, Syd Dickhart (MAAWA), Peter Gesner and Zoe Inman.

Approximate Location: The site of the whaling station is 68 km south-west of the town of Learmonth on North West Cape. The remains lie in isolation on the north-eastern shore of Norwegian Bay.

Charts: AUS 72, *Anchorage on the West Coast of Australia* 1956.
AUS 745 *North West Cape to Point Maud*. 1985. 1: 150 000.
AUS 330, *Point Cloates to Quobba Point*. 1968. 1: 3000 000.
BA 1055, *Bedout Island to Cape Cuvier*
BA 3018, *Plan of Point Cloates Anchorage*

Maps: 1652 *Point Cloates*, 1974. 1: 100 000.

Plans: General arrangement, R. Stewart-Dawkins, c1929
Site survey, M. Stanbury, 1982, 1:1000

Latitude: 22° 35.7'S

Longitude: 113° 40.1'E

Compass Bearings:

Directions: The most convenient land access point for vehicles is Jarvis Well, on the coastal road northward from Point Cloates to Yardie Creek (*Figure 3*.) From there, the whaling station lies on a compass bearing of 287° at a distance of approximately 1.8 km. The track ends abruptly at the base of a sand-hill and is no longer passable. From this point, the site can be reached by foot.

Sailing Directions: From a base camp at the shearers quarters of Ningaloo Station, small boats are able to negotiate the shallow reefs at the southern entrance to the bay and can be moored close to the shore. There is generally a heavy, breaking surf which makes the landing of equipment and personnel difficult.

Site Photographs:

B/W: MA 1091 Neg. No. 11, "SS *Finn* aground on Fraser Island, 1923"
MA 2007 - MA 2010, MA 2023 Negs. Nos. 1-36, Expedition, 1982.
MA 2112 - 2117, artefact drawings/plans
MA 2174, & MA2531, Maps
MA 2640 Neg. Nos. 3-12, Expedition, 1982
MA 3766 & MA 3767, SS *Finn* and Fraser Island Light tower.
Prints located in the map drawer marked "Whaling- Point Cloates - Norwegian Bay"

Colour:

Slides: MA/NWW 742 "SS *Finn* 1988"

Video:

Historic: MA 1014 Neg. Nos. 7 & 8, "Whaling Station"
MA 1018 Neg. Nos. 3-9, "Whaling Station"
MA 1091 Neg. Nos. 6-8, "Whaling Station c1923-4"
MA 2051 & MA 2052. "Whaling Station c1950"

Site Conditions on Inspection:

Swell: Nil

Visibility: Poor

Current: Nil

Sea-bed coverage: Coarse coral sand aggregate.

Chemical Measurements:

Temperature:

Salinity:

pH:

Dissolved O₂:

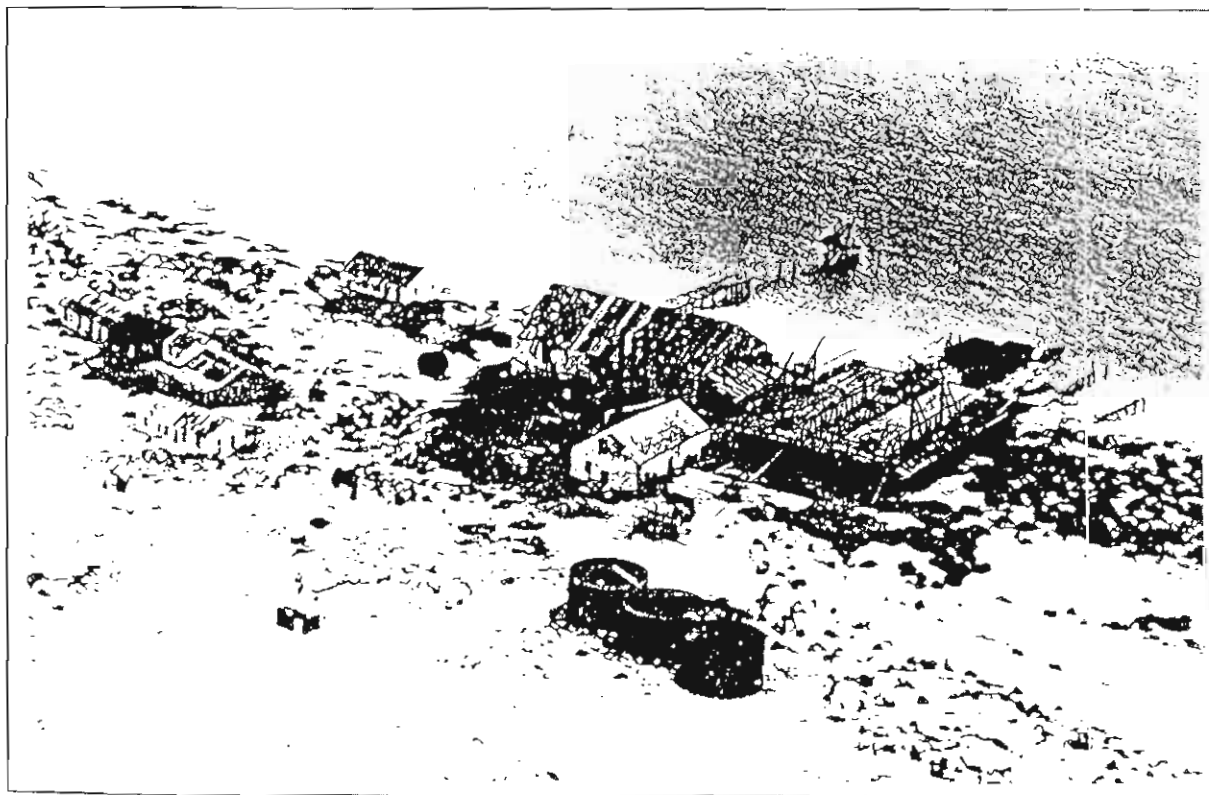
Corrosion Potential:

No measurements were deemed necessary in this instance, however, all chemical measurements will be recorded if a full archaeological investigation of the site is undertaken.

Biological Data:

Colonising fauna: Virtually no marine growth on this site.

Site Condition and Integrity: A vast array of material lies scattered over the seabed in the vicinity of the jetty and slipway. A more detailed examination of this material is required before an accurate assessment of the condition and integrity of the site can be made. However, from the reports of local informants and photographs taken recently, it appears that the site has undergone marked deterioration since 1982.



*Figure 7. Aerial view of Norwegian Bay Whaling Station in 1946, prior to reconstruction.
(S. Fowler, courtesy of R. G. Chittleborough)*

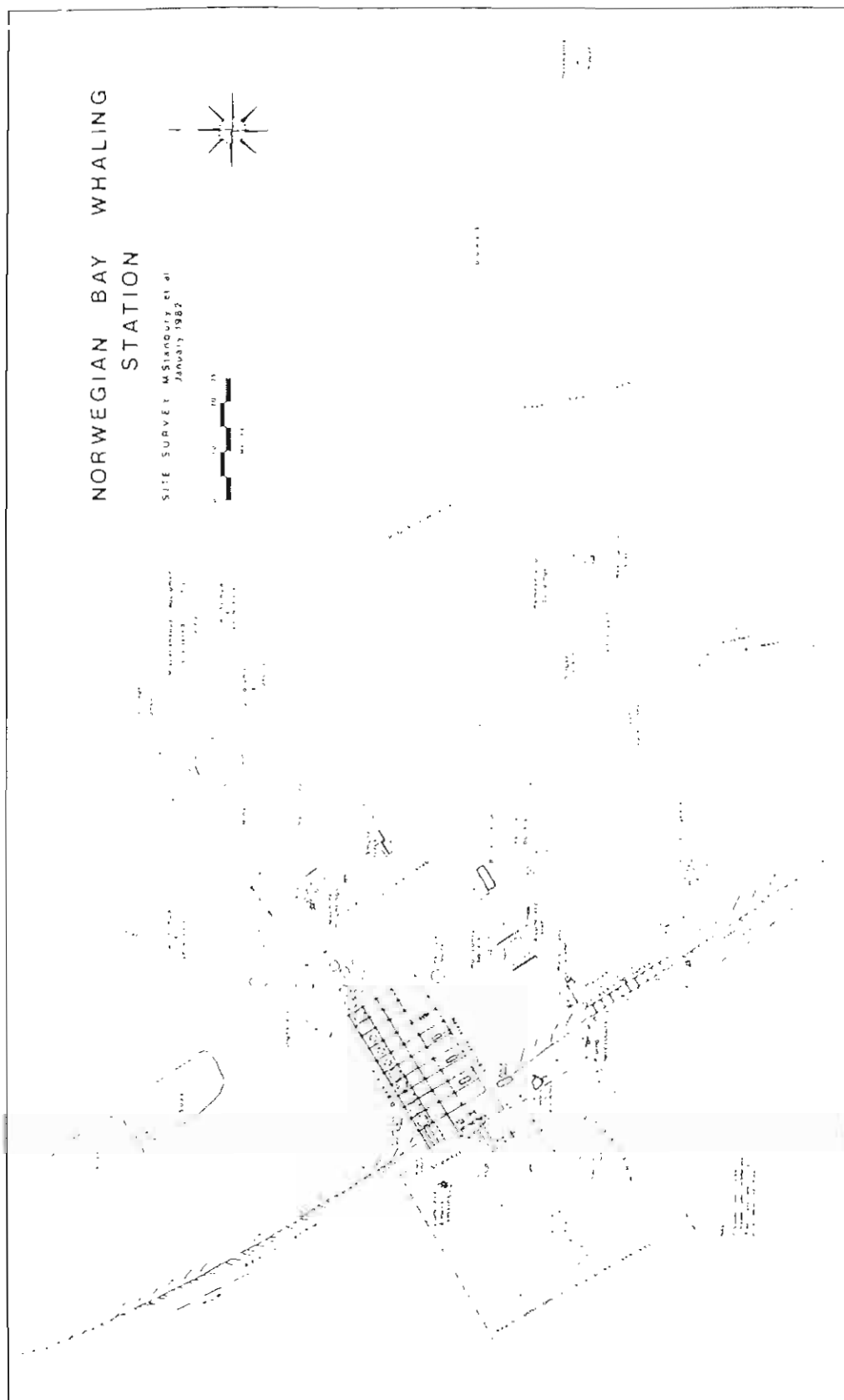


Figure 9. Plan: Norwegian Bay Whaling Station - Site survey, 1982. (Drawing: M Stanbury)

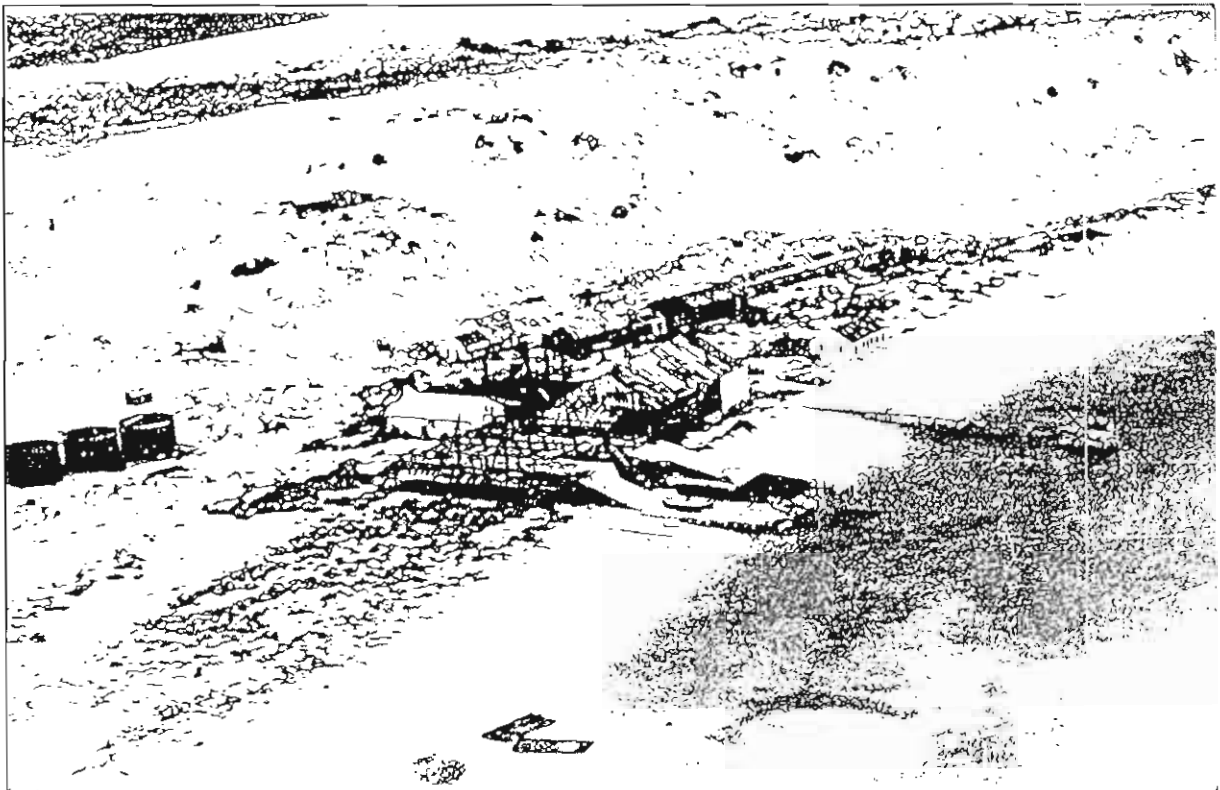
Management Considerations

- (i) Natural forces: The remaining structures show signs of extensive and rapid deterioration, due in part, to the damaging effects of cyclonic storms and general wave action.
- (ii) Present and future human forces: Vandalism has been, and will continue to be a significant problem on this site.
- (iii) Projected general site stability: The combined effects of natural erosion and human interference will continue to significantly undermine the structural integrity of the whaling station unless some immediate action is taken to preserve the remains.

Description of Site

Whaling station remains above Mean Low Water mark, (MLW).

The site occupied an area of approximately 4 ha with the main layout running in a NW-SE direction, parallel to the shoreline. The onshore structures consist of remnants of two jetties, slipways, flensing decks, steel digesters, oil storage tanks, water tanks, boilers, and the cement foundations of various processing plants, maintenance facilities and workers' quarters. The processing plant, accommodation units and accessory buildings extend from MLW some 200 metres inland and 200 metres along the coastline. A roadway lined with whale vertebrae formerly led from the whaling station southwards along the coast, but is now impassable due to dune encroachment.



*Figure 10. Aerial view of Norwegian Bay Whaling Station, 1946.
(S. Fowler, courtesy of R. G. Chittleborough)*

Whaling station remains below MLW. (Source: Stanbury, p. 47)

The sites of the former jetties and slipways can be determined from the numerous submerged and semi-submerged metal and wooden piles extending for some 30 metres from the beach out to sea. The submerged remains of the larger jetty to the south extend for at least another 10 metres out to sea from the mean low water mark (MLW). The wooden piles of the lower flensing deck are still visible, particularly at low tide, and extend out to sea for approximately 30 metres. The seabed drops away quickly from the shore-line so that within two metres of the shore, the water depth is 2 metres. Visibility in this area is generally poor and sharks are prevalent. A vast array of material lies scattered over the seabed, including bottles, fuel drums, railway line, lead piping and other iron equipment. Fire bricks similar to those forming the Garrett boiler fire-box located on the site (See *Figure 12*), were found scattered on the seabed. Also present were numerous modern glass bottles. A representative collection was obtained, comprising:

- (i) A pale green pickle jar
- (ii) A clear glass pickle jar marked "JOHN SUTHERLAND & SONS PTY LTD., MELBOURNE, PICKLES".
- (iii) A beer bottle marked "BCD & PIESSE LTD. PERTH".
- (iv) A beer bottle marked "SWAN BRAND PRODUCTS".
- (v) A pale green condiment bottle marked "REINDEER BRAND, H. RAYNER & SONS PERTH".
- (vi) A tall blue/green bottle with a Japanese monogram and marked "1800 cc"
- (vii) A brown beer bottle marked "PROPERTY OF AUSTRALIAN GLASS MANUFACTURERS".
- (viii) A small dark green bottle with Japanese script around the base.

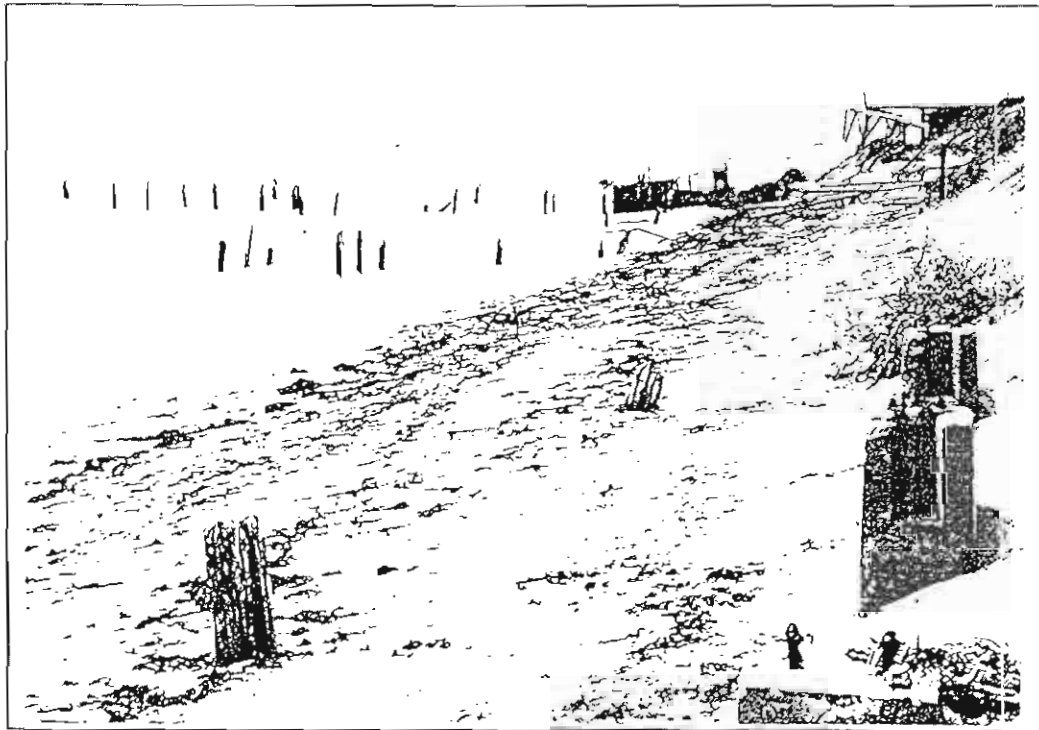


Figure 11. Remains of the main jetty piles, piping and iron debris (1982). (M. Stanbury)

The remains of what may be a sunken barge was located, but because of the poor visibility, this could not be positively identified. Owing to lack of time, the underwater remains were not accurately surveyed. Rusting remains of winches, cables and lengths of piping are scattered widely along the beach. (Source: M. Stanbury, Field notes, 15 Jan 1982)

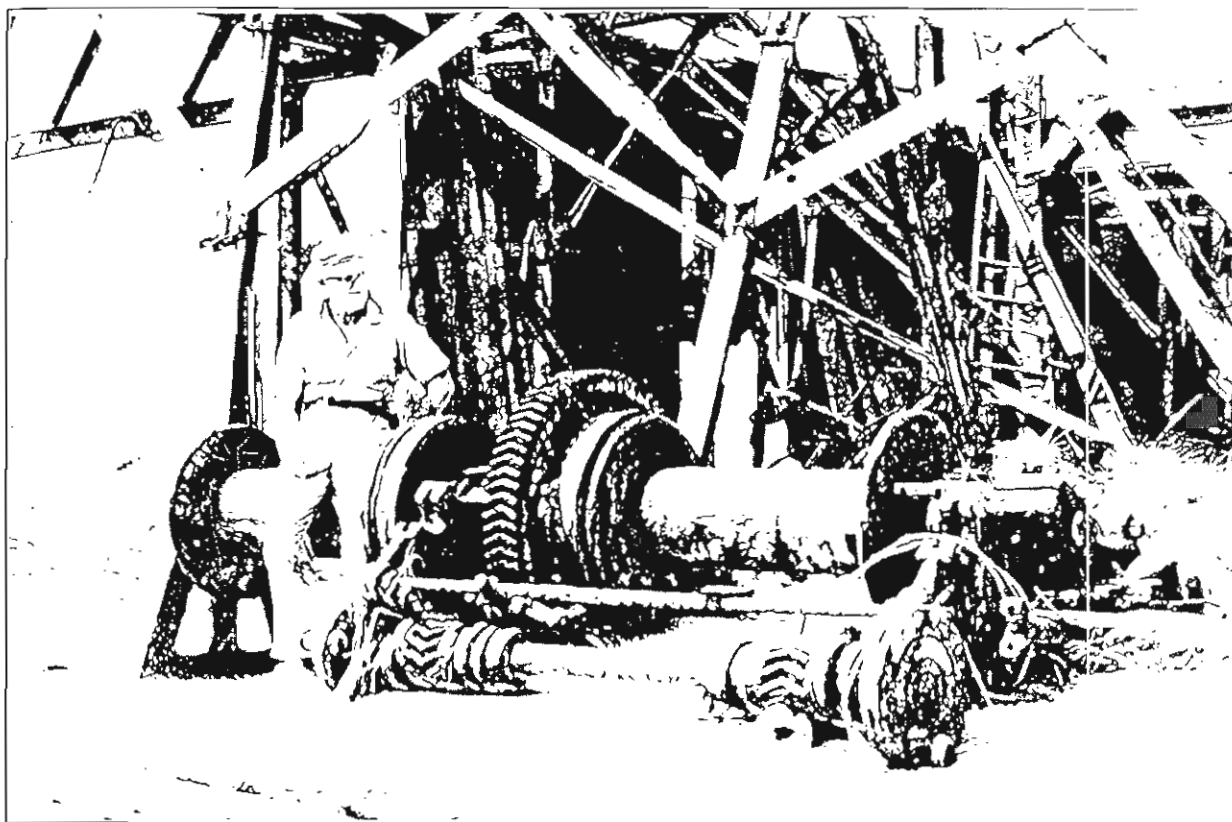


Figure 12. Remains of the steam winches between the two flensing decks, (1982)
(P. Baker)

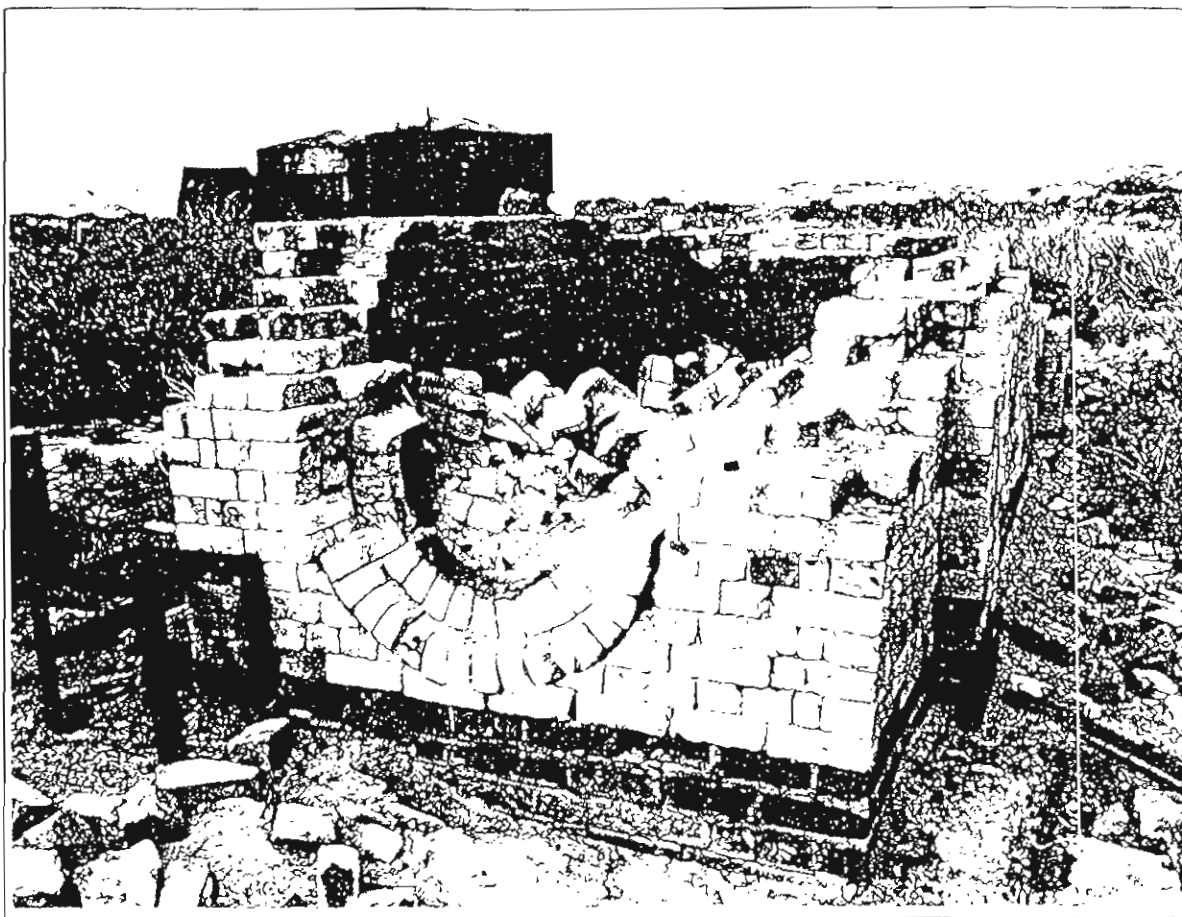


Figure 13 Brick firebox for the Garrett boiler (1982). (A. Gibson)

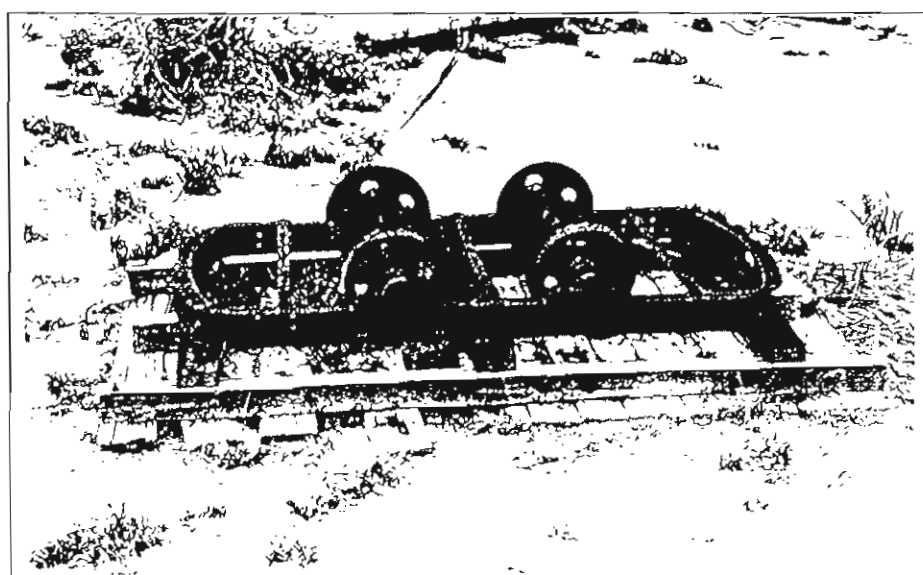


Figure 14 Tram rail bogey with wooden platform attached, (1982). (M. Simbu v, p. 47)

Site Identification Comments

(From notes by D. Cumming and the report by Myra Stanbury.)

A Norwegian Whaling Company operated steam powered whaling ships with harpoon guns and factory ships from the bay north of Point Cloates in the seasons 1912 to 1916, and established a shore based facility including a 160 ft jetty in this bay in 1915. The North-West (Aust) Whaling Company purchased the station in 1920 and operated three whale chasers, the *Fynd, Fin and Frey*. The Norwegian Bay Whaling Company leased the site and operations, and then operated four whale chasers until 1929.

After extensive damage in 1944, the station was re-opened in 1949 and modernised. Its operating company took over the Carnarvon Whaling Station on Babbage Island in 1956, and closed the Point Cloates Station in 1957.

Clearly, the jetty was an important part of the whaling station, particularly in the years prior to the road access being built.

It was described thus by Stewart-Dawkins (1929):

One strongly built main jetty 200' (61 m) (or more) long provided the double set of tram rails and also with steam winch and crane head. There is fairly deep water at this jetty especially at high tide and all cargoes inwards and outwards passes over same. One platform 115' x 83' (35.08 m x 25.3 m) complete system oil, water and steam fittings as arranged throughout works and jetty. Special tanks, pumps, piping and tramways with mobile trucks have been provided for the economical and expeditious shipment of oil and guano for export, also for the handling of all kinds of cargoes, coal, stores, etc. for the station from ships in the harbour (1929:8).

Photographs taken in 1924 (Morrissey coll. *Figure 1*) show the jetty *in situ* to the south of the slipways. It is also shown on the 1946 aerial photographs (Fowler coll. *Figures 7 and 10*), but here, a considerable portion of it has collapsed. Stephens (1982, pers. comm.) reports that the jetty was rebuilt in the 1950s and it is shown on Australian Admiralty Chart AUS 72, based on surveys in 1953.

According to Morrissey (1982, pers. comm.), prior to 1924, the whales were flensed on the upper deck. On completion of a new lower deck, however, all flensing was carried out here. The "new" lower deck is shown in *Figures 15 & 16*, and extended between 80' (24.4 m) to 100' (30.5 m) out to sea.

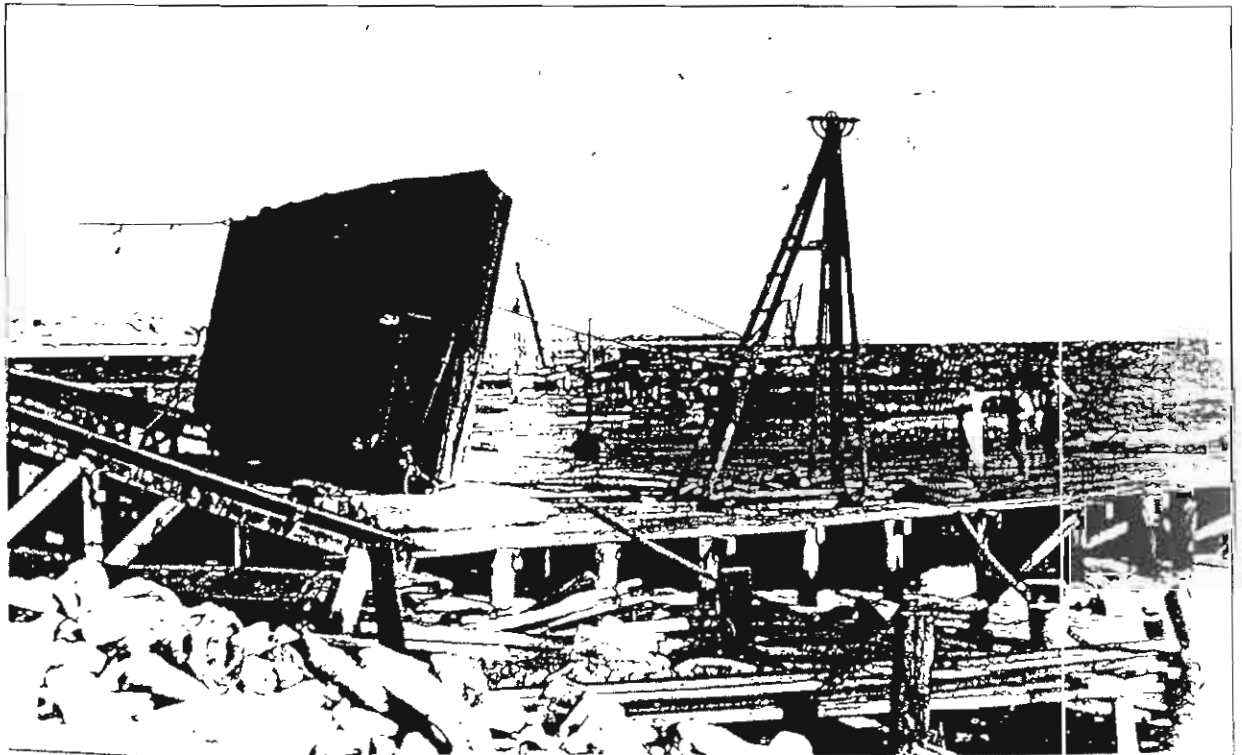


Figure 15. Flensing deck, c 1924. (J. Morrissey)

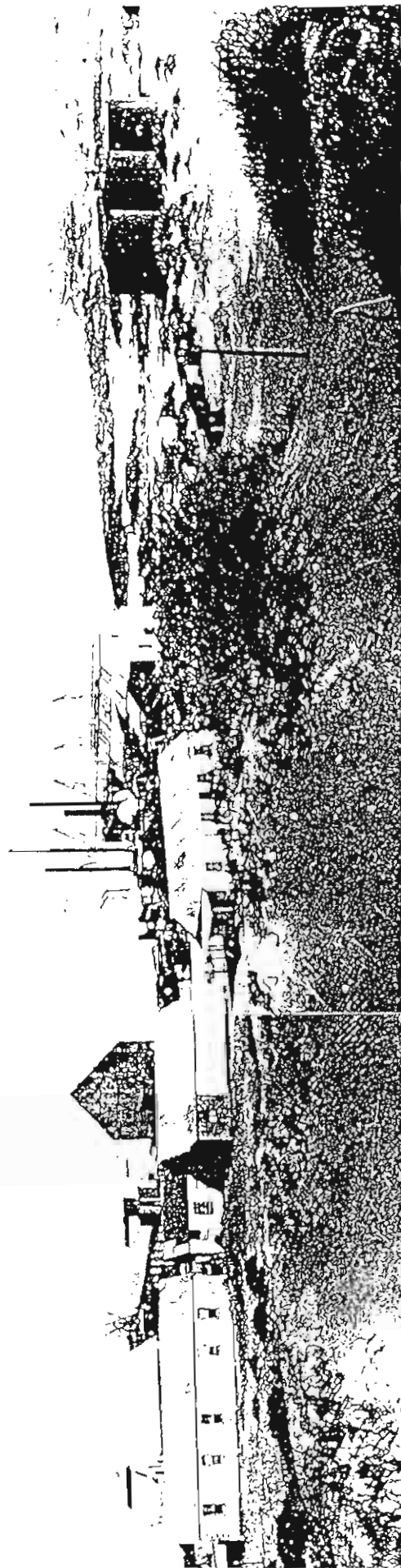


Figure 16. Norwegian Bay Whaling Station 1924

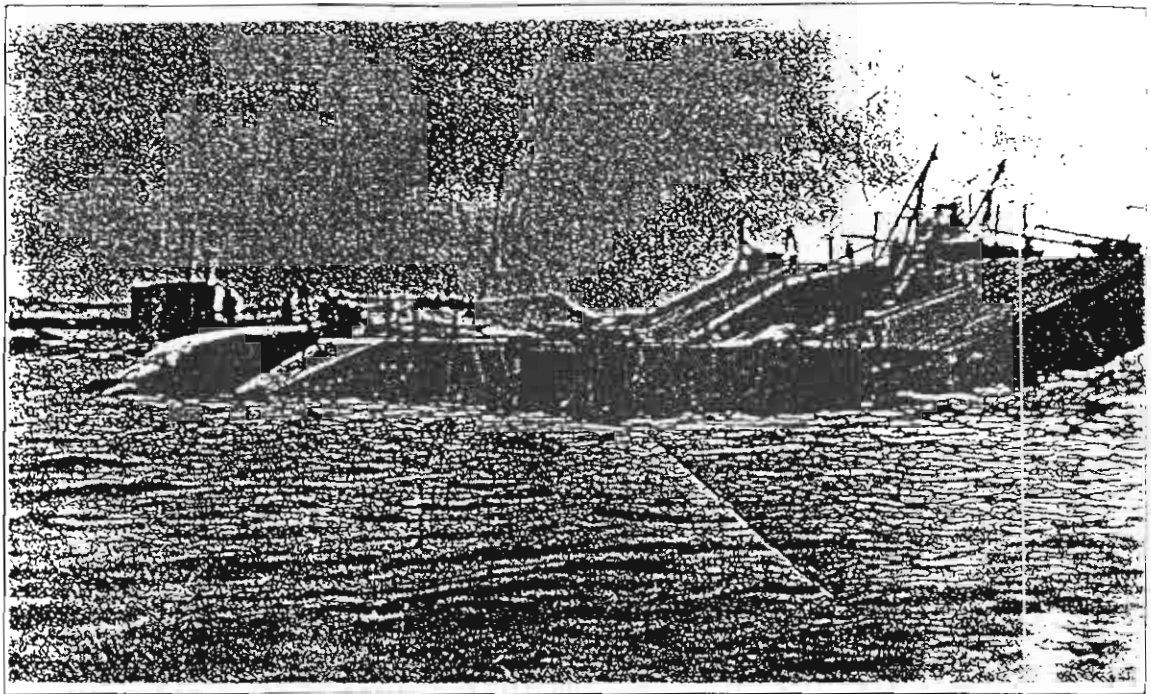


Figure 17. "New" flensing decks, c 1950 (M. Stanbury)

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Associated Shipwrecks and Land Sites

SS Finn

The *SS Finn* was one of two small Norwegian whalers, originally operating out of Frenchman Bay, Albany. After the closure of the southern station, the *Finn* was engaged in the northern whale fishery at Point Cloates. It is shown here on Fraser Island, where it was blown ashore and wrecked during a cyclone in 1923. (WA Maritime Museum; File No MA 22,80)

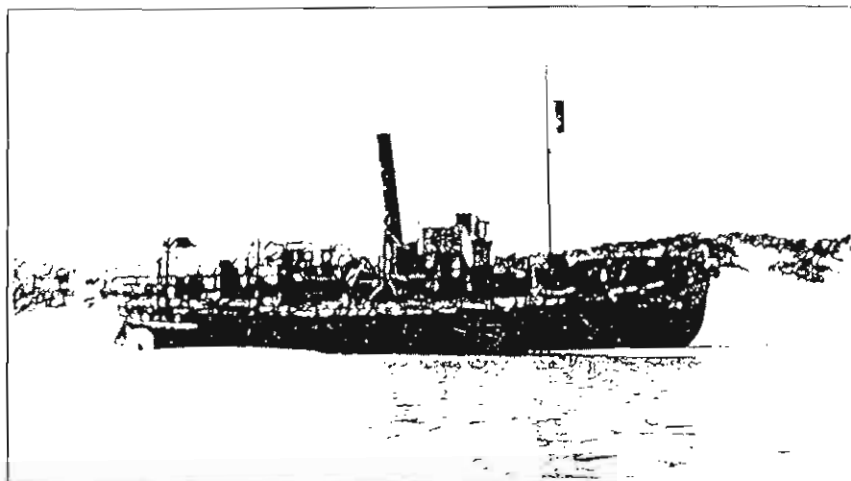


Figure 18. *SS Finn* aground on Fraser Island, c1924. (J. Morrissy)

Barge

An iron barge whose hull was divided onto tanks for carrying whale oil, is reported to have sunk in the region of the jetties. (Paxman 1982, Pers. comm. and Sledge 1974, WAM in Stanbury p. 46.)

Lights and Lighthouses



Figure 19. Point Cloates Lighthouse, 1910. (W. Andrews)

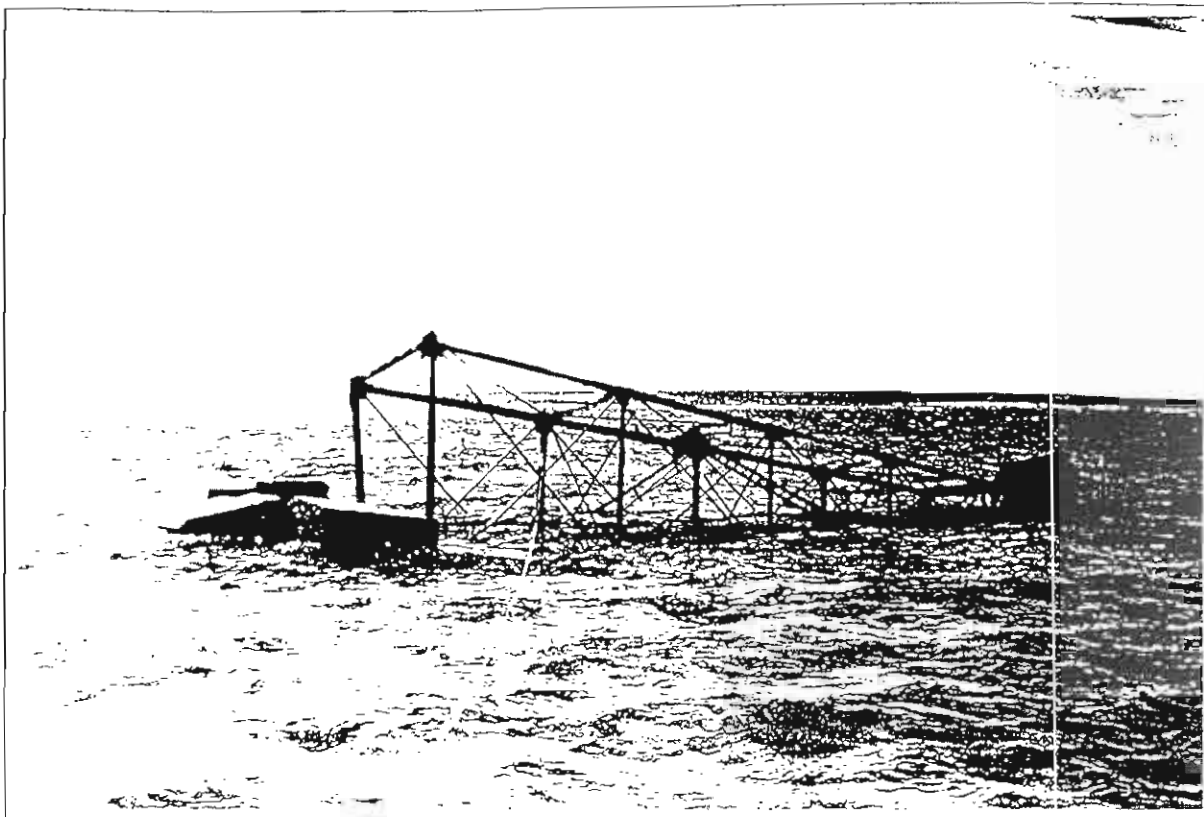


Figure 20. Fraser Island light tower, 1988 (WA Maritime Museum NWW 739)

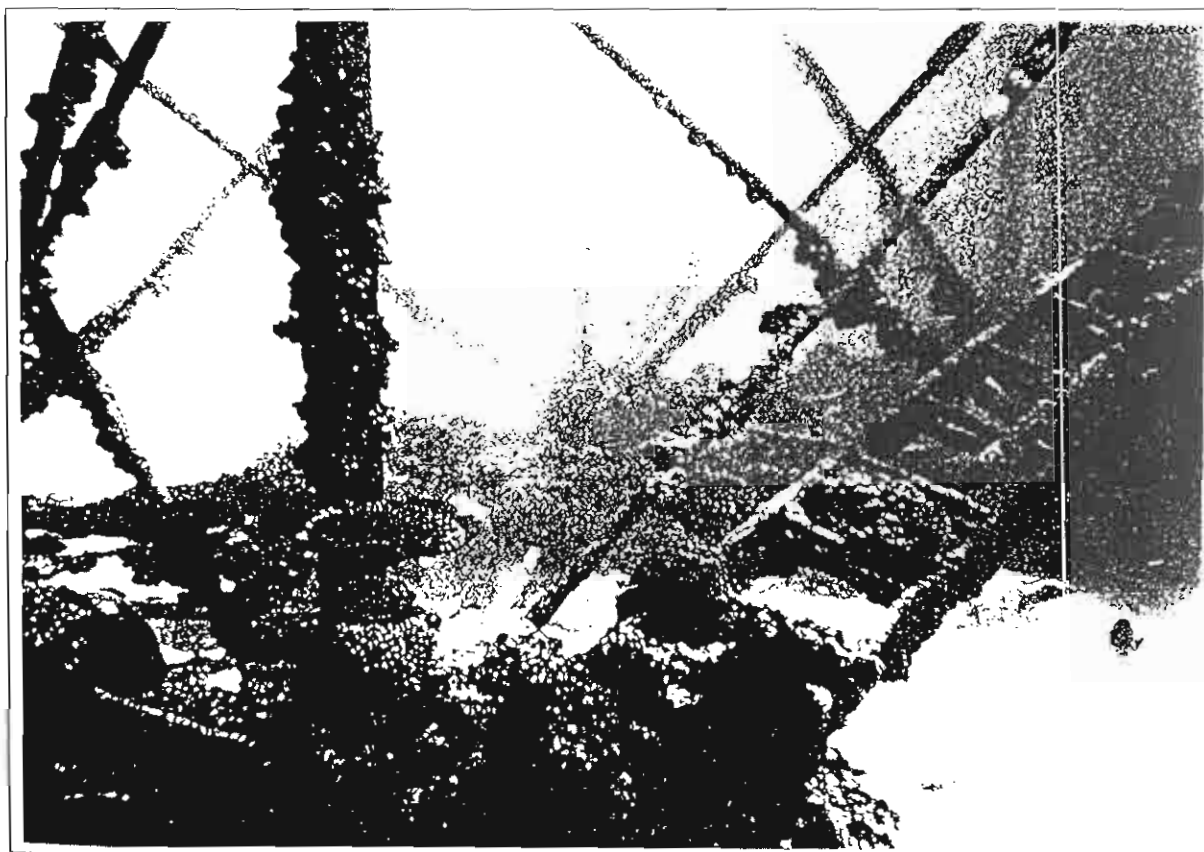


Figure 21. Fraser Island light tower, 1988 (WA Maritime Museum NWW 739)

Assessment of Site Significance

- (i) Historical: The site is a focal point of historic interest on an otherwise barren stretch of coast and has generated interest from tourists to the area.
- (ii) Technological: The whaling station at Norwegian Bay was the first modern shore station to be constructed in Western Australia, utilising new forms of technology both for catching and processing the whales.
- (iii) Scientific:
- (iv) Educational: Heritage remains have the potential of being a focus for educational activity if properly marked and documented. Because of the wealth of material still evident on the site, it has enormous potential for interpretation and education.
- (v) Recreational: The site is ideal for passive recreational activities such as walking and swimming. However, the remoteness of the site and the difficulty of access limits this potential. The site lies within the boundaries of the Ningaloo Marine Park and has been designated as a marine sanctuary (Cloates Sanctuary Zone)
- (vi) Cultural: Built by Norwegian whalers, the site is a reminder of the overseas cultural influences that assisted in the development of many of the State's early economic enterprises. Prior to the construction of the access road, the jetty served as the only link between the whaling station and the outside world for the isolated community of whalers.
- (vii) Archaeological: The site is part of a thematic archaeological resource that will enable researchers to document the evolution of whaling technology in Australia.
- (viii) Rarity: The Norwegian Bay whaling station is probably the only site in Australia with an archaeological resource that demonstrates three distinct phases in the modern technological development of the whaling industry between 1912 and 1956.
- (ix) Representativeness: The whaling station at Norwegian Bay was the first modern shore station to be constructed in Western Australia, and represents the beginning of the modern era of whaling.

Discussion

The Norwegian Bay whaling station is one of four 20th century whaling sites in Western Australia with substantial archaeological remains. The other sites are, Babbage Island at Carnarvon and the Frenchman Bay Whaling Station and the Cheynes Beach Whaling Company at Albany, now Whale World. These sites should not be considered in isolation, but rather as a thematic archaeological resource that will enable researchers to document the evolution of whaling technology in Australia.

Recommendations

The options are:

- (i) Recommend that the site be gazetted as an Historic Site
- (ii) Erect a marker on the site that will include interpretive material.
- (iii) Consider an archaeological survey of the site, with provision for the rehabilitation of the excavated areas and the conservation, display and interpretation of any artefacts recovered from the site

Further Comments

It is recommended that the Norwegian Bay Whaling Station be more widely publicised as a reminder of an important era in the development of WA's whaling industry. Further to this, local residents should be encouraged to seek a grant to research, document and present the history of the site.

Dena Girardi
Maritime Archaeology Department
WA Maritime Museum

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