

WRECK INSPECTION REPORT

80 Mile Beach unidentified (#1)

Dept. of Maritime Archaeology
W.A. Maritime Museum
Cliff St. Fremantle
6160

August 1996

M. McCarthy & K. Thom

Report: Department of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Maritime Museum, No: 114

Technical Data

Site Name: 80 Mile Beach unidentified # 1

Date of Inspection: 6/6/1996

Personnel: M. McCarthy

OIC

Col Lewis (Finder)

Kerry Thom (Port Hedland Region Maritime History Assoc.)

Hamish Thom

Nathan Thom

Approximate Location: c. 1 Km north of the 80 Mile Beach Caravan Park

GPS. 19° 44.98'S 120° 40.72' E.

Chart No: AUS 324 & AUS 325

File No: 116/80

File Name: Eighty Mile Beach Area

Sailing Directions: Leave the 80 Mile Beach Caravan Park, through its beach gate and proceed circa one kilometre north up the beach at low water spring tides.

Compass Bearing: N/A

Sextant angles for A - D Above: N/A

Visual Transits: N/A

Site Photographs:

Colour: 80 Mile Beach Wreck

Site Conditions on inspection:

The site was visited at low water spring tides and as a result the site was totally dry, though water filled any depressions created by excavation.

Sea and Swell: N/A

Surge: N/A

Visibility: Excellent

Current: N/A

Sea-bed coverage: sand

Chemical Measurements : None taken

Temperature

Salinity

pH

Dissolved O₂

Corrosion Potentials (Reading and location)

Biological Data :

Colonising fauna: None visible: The site is normally covered in sand and clay

Site Condition and Integrity : From discussions with the caravan park operator and reporter of the site, Mr Col Lewis, and with other passers by (some of whom were regular visitors), the wreck is rarely visible. As a result it is well protected when covered by the sands. When it is uncovered the wreck is readily accessible and it has considerable passing traffic, however.

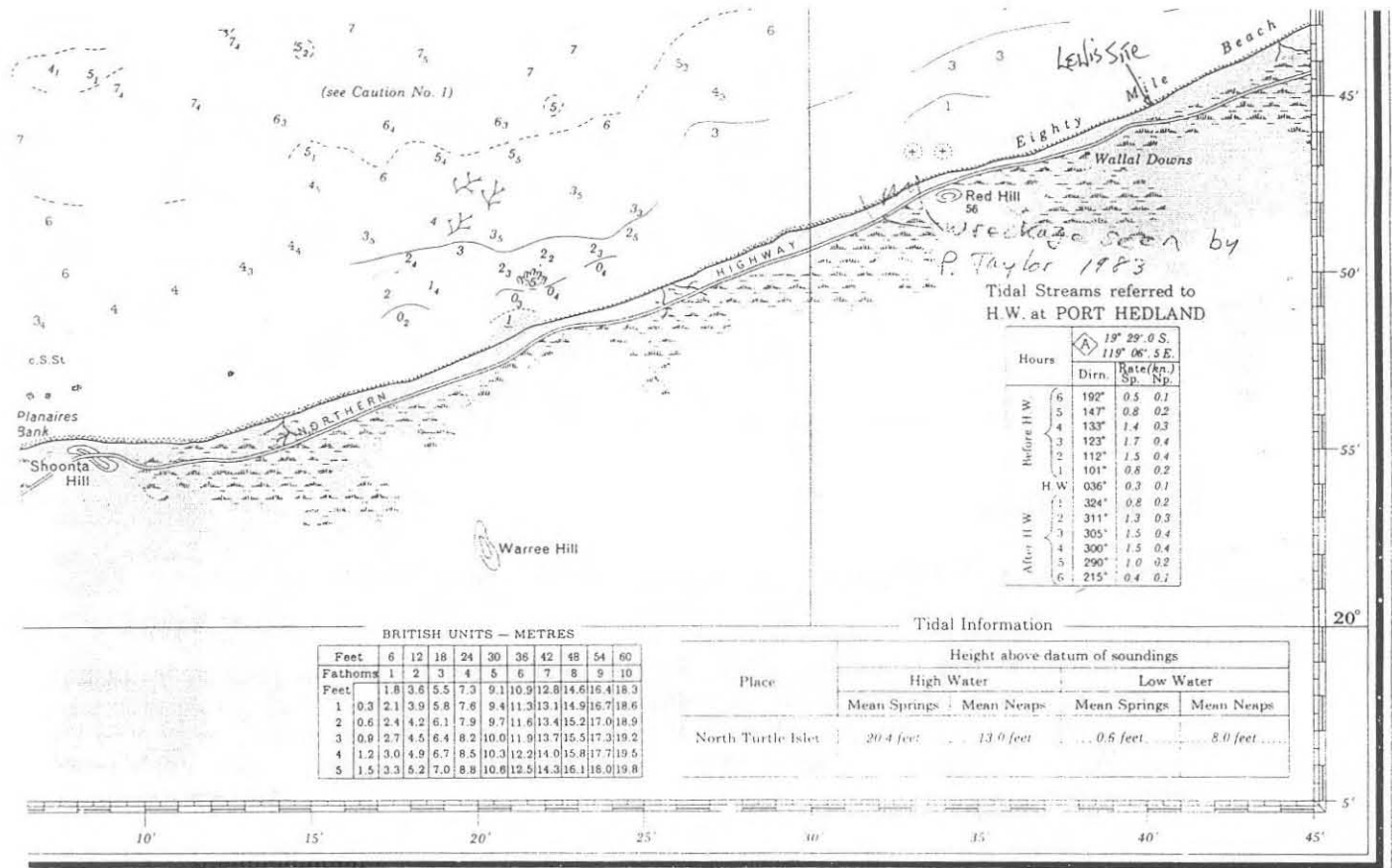
Management considerations :

(i) Natural Forces The wreck lies on a sand/clay seabed and is normally completely buried. From reports on file, it is apparent that the site is exposed on an irregular basis. See wreck site history, following.

(ii) Present and future Human forces As indicated, though the site is normally buried, it is occasionally part or all exposed, leading to it being 'picked over' by visitors to the nearby caravan park. Attractive loose artefacts, such as loose easily visible fastenings, sherds and the like have now almost totally disappeared. There was clear evidence of recent interference in that sheathing, pump segments and other heavy material had been removed to the shoreward of the wreck, to lie at the base of the sand dunes. These were returned to the site and buried.

(iii) Projected General site Stability : Unless the site is clearly marked, this activity will continue whenever it is exposed.

Sketch Map showing access to Site or Chart Excerpt: (AUS 325)

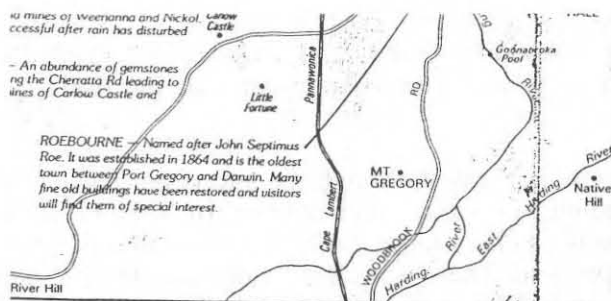


4.N.

(42 04 x 24 91)

Pos. Original 1966

Aus. 325



152 - 142 - 102 - 50 - Pardoo R/H
291 - 281 - 241 - 189 - 139 - Sandfire R/H
577 - 567 - 527 - 475 - 425 - 286 - Roebuck R/H
611 - 601 - 561 - 509 - 459 - 320 - 34 - Broome

PORT HEDLAND - BROOME via the Great Northern Highway



Description of Site

The wreck, which measured 13.5 metres by 3.5 metres, appears to lie broadside on to the beach 25 metres from the base of the present sandhills and in close proximity to a ridge of clay at mean high water. A chain mound, two pump barrels, assorted ballast stones, copper/zinc alloy sheathing, sheathing tacks and some iron work are the main items visible above the sand and clay seafloor.

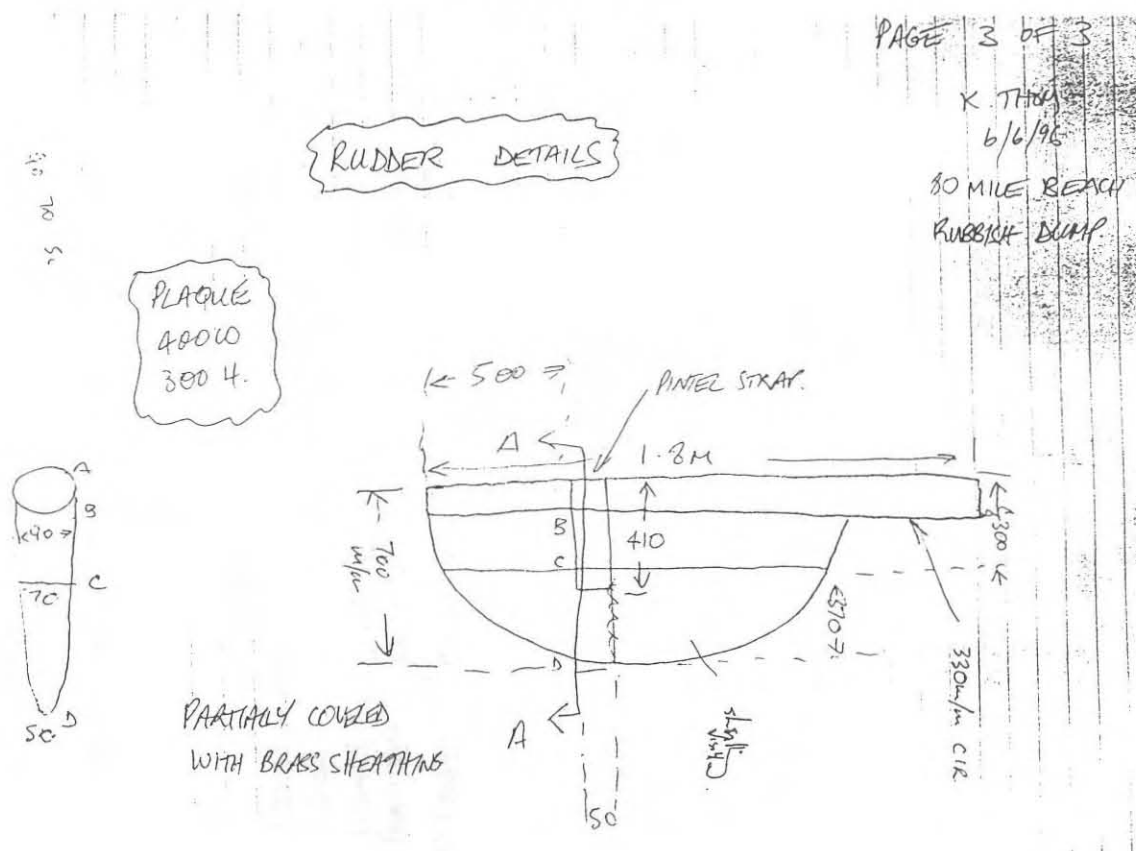
A number of test excavations were conducted revealing some sheathing remains, fastenings, further ballast stones and a few heavily eroded frame timbers. The small scantlings of the timbers that were excavated and the small frame bolts visible were consistent with those encountered on small lugger-sized vessels, such as the *Ancel* and *Trixen* in the Maritime Museum's collection, and on the wrecks of vessels known to be pearling luggers, e.g., the Parkes lugger wreck in the Monte Bello Islands (Sledge, 1978: 11-13). Thus it was concluded that the wreck was the remains of a pearling vessel or similar. We were also advised by passers-by that the remains of some centrefire bullets had been unearthed the day before our visit and that these were consistent with the common .44 and .303 calibre munitions. A number of small coastal craft are known to have carried similar for hunting and other purposes. These also help date the remains as a post 1900 phenomenon.

Sketches of the site were produced by Mr Kerry Thom of the Port Hedland Region Maritime History Association. These appear below.

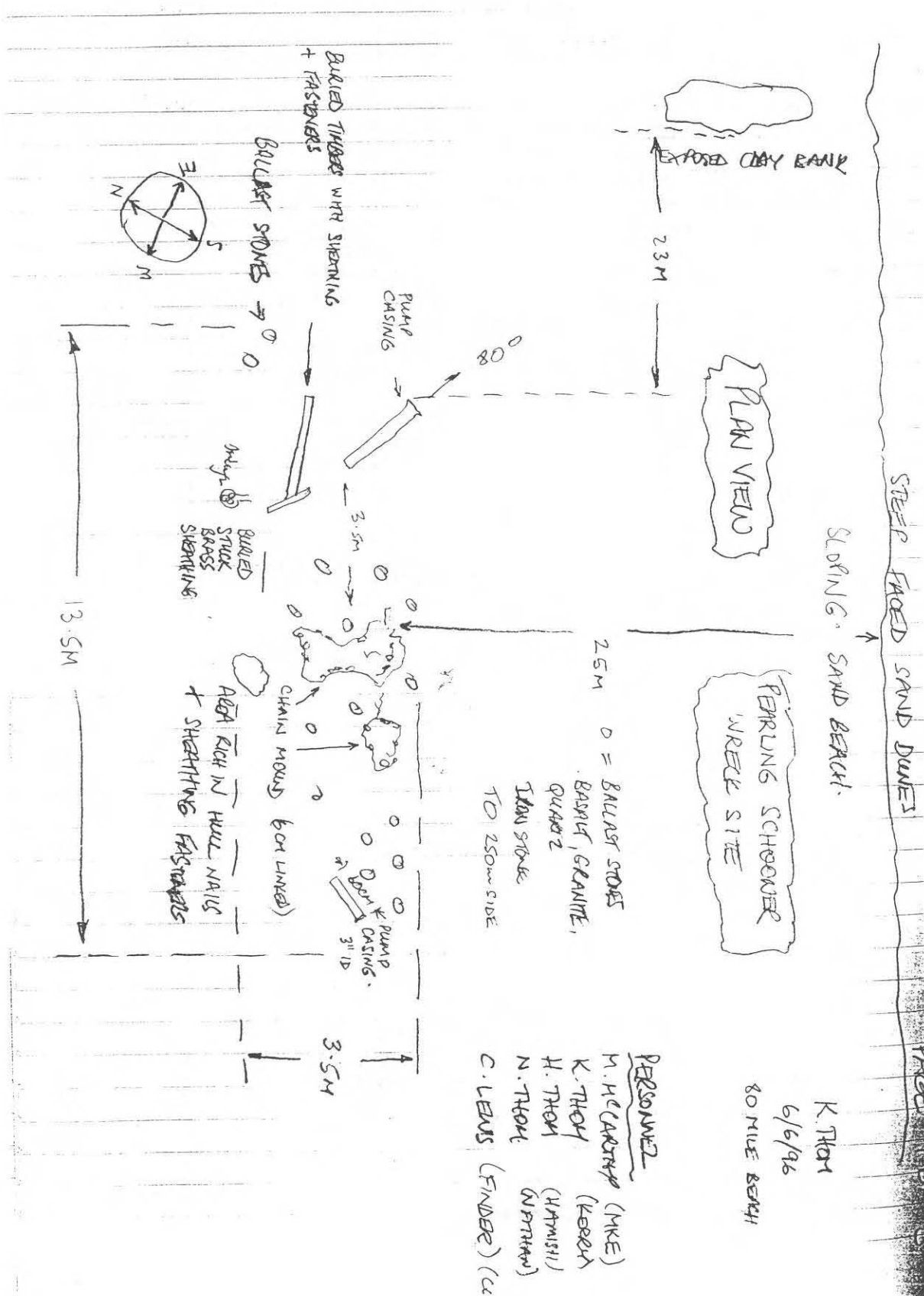
A rudder which had been recovered some time previously on the mud flats to seaward of the site (which was not visible at the time) was displayed at the caravan park. From there it was taken to the rubbish dump. When viewed it proved to be in excellent condition, with the sheathing and timber work all sound and with all pintles in place. These remains were also consistent with material from known pearling luggers.

Sketch of the Rudder

by K. H. Thom



Sketch of the Site (plan view) by K.H. Thom



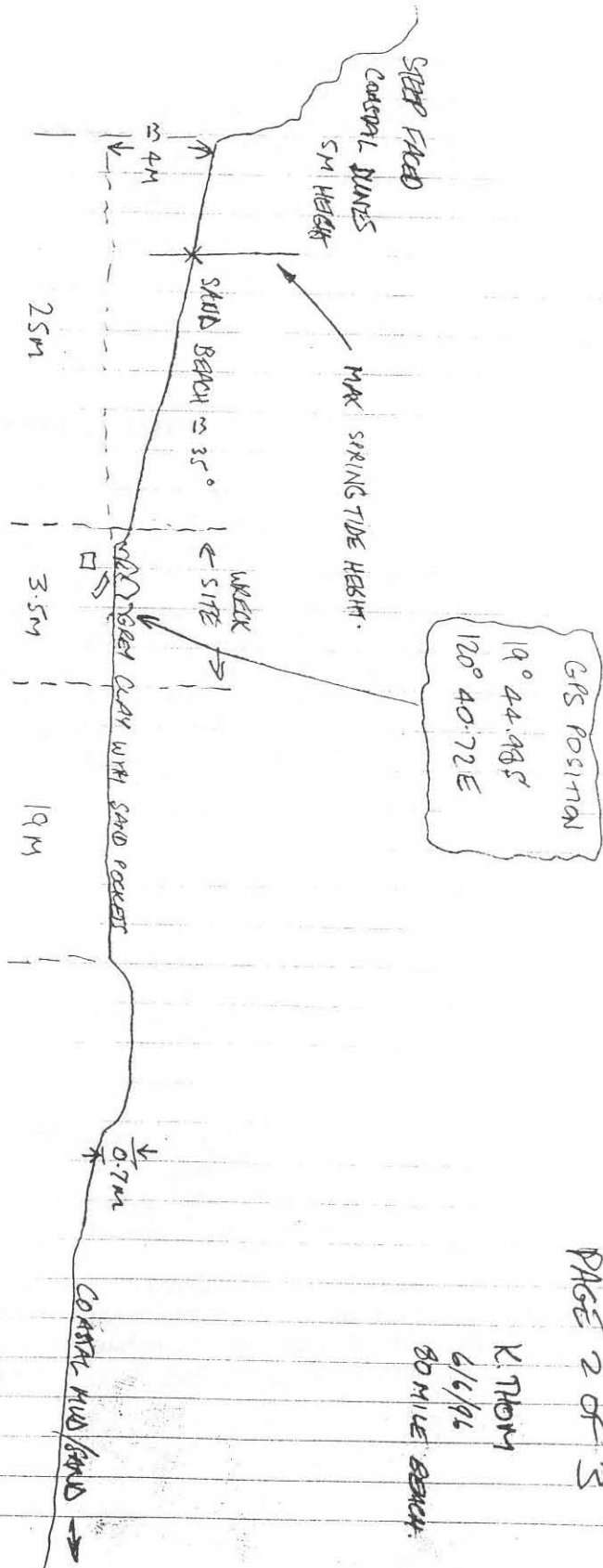
K. Thom
6/6/96
80 MILE BEACH

PERSONNEL
M. McARDY (MKE)
K. THOM (LEEDS)
H. THOM (HAWAII)
N. THOM (MONTANA)
C. LEWIS (FINDER) (CA)

by K.H. Thom

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1. THIS AREA NORMALLY STAY COVERED.
2. SPRING TIDES WITH EASTERLIES UNCOVERED THE SITE.
3. RESIDENTS SAY THEY HAVEN'T SEEN THIS UNCOVERED BEFORE.
4. SITE BECAME UNCOVERED OVER A 3 DAY PERIOD.



SECTION THREE SITE

K. THOM
6/6/96
80 MILE BEACH

Material Raised

(EMB: Eighty Mile Beach)

Timber samples: Identified as eucalypt species.

14 copper sheathing tacks. (EMB 5). Length 20mm

1 small copper plank spike. (EMB 3). Length 80mm

1 small brass bolt (EMB 4). Length 75mm

1 brass screw (EMB 7). Length 15mm

2 square shanked copper nails. (EMB 6). Length 25mm

2 ballast stones (one quartz-like), the other basaltic in appearance. (EMB 1&2)

Site Identification Comments

Due to the size of the remains, the presence of copper/zinc alloy fastenings and sheathing and the scantlings of the fastenings and timbers, and the apparent presence of 20th century munitions, it is evident that the wreck is that of late 19th to early 20th century vessel in the traditional pearling lugger size range i.e., around 5-10 tons. This precludes such wrecks as the 90 tone brigantine *Anne and Mary*, which foundered on the 80 Mile Beach in June 1887, for example. Other wrecks such as the 48 ton schooner *Julius*, lost in 1892 and the 33 ton *Myth*, lost in 1910 are also not considered as possible wrecks for this reason.

This still leaves a very large list of possibilities, as can be seen from the list of 27 below, which is taken from the Maritime Museum's file entitled *Wrecks of the 80 Mile Beach Area*. A perusal of *Unfinished Voyages 1881-1900* (Cairns and Henderson, 1995: 89; 186), also indicates that there could be many more, as yet unfound lugger wrecks in the 80 Mile Beach area.

Ra Dua? (1863)

Dart (1887)

Ranger 1887

Dairy Maid (1887)

* 18 luggers were lost and 140 pearlers drowned in 1887

Rockhampton 1894

Eleanor 1914

Lorna Doone 1923

Madana 1931

Bessie 1908

Biddie 1919

Tifera 1923

Verona 1931

The vessels underlined are considered the best possibilities for this site. Unless artefactual material is located, such as coins and ceramics which would assist in dating these vessels, it would prove difficult to identify the remains as any of the above, however. Until then this site will be known as the Eighty Mile Beach Unidentified # 1

Wreck- site History

(i) Wreckage along the 80 Mile Beach has been consistently reported to the Maritime Museum, dating back to correspondence received from the van Boeyen family of Mt Goldsworthy in 1974 (80 Mile Beach Wrecks file). The remains of three luggers were also noted at the time by Mr Bruce Grey, the then manager of Anna Plains Station (Sledge, Wreck inspection Day book, November 1974). In the same year the Cloonen family of Port Fairy, Victoria, reported some wreckage 'nine miles by road' towards the coast from Wallal Downs Station and approximately 500 metres from the sandhills on the shore. This appeared as three ribs visible above the sand. In 1983, Mr Peter Taylor wrote of what appears to be the same wreckage. He was able to identify a Muntz Patent stamp on sheathing with the date 1872, 'brass bolts' of 6-8 inches (150-200mm) long, steel bolts 300 mm long with copper nuts, a silver spoon inscribed "E.P.B.M" (Electro Plated Base Metal), a number of iron 'pigs' (cast ballast iron), the remains of a water tank, 'large chunks' of haematite iron ore and possibly chain plates.

In June 1983 the Mosley Family of Bateman's Bay NSW reported finding the fluke of an anchor 40 metres from a clay bank on the 80 Mile Beach, in a direct line with a group of fisherman's stakes. They excavated the anchor and recovered it. A photograph appears below, together with their site-location plan. The remainder of the wreck was buried. Their data shows that the anchor appears to have come from the site currently under investigation, for the former access road from the highway marked 400 metres south of their site was relocated at the position marked on the current inspection. so too were the fisherman's stakes.

In 1990 a Mr P. Dale of Falcon WA donated a ship's barometer, which he had found on the beach at an unknown location. The finder of this site, Mr Col Lewis, indicated that he had seen another possible wrecksite around 18 kilometres further up the beach, but much further out to sea from the high water mark.

Salvage of all these sites is expected to have been extensive in the months and years following their loss. The wrecks would have been clearly visible from shore and the remains would have represented far too good an opportunity to miss for the crew, owners and passing vessels. Station hands, indigenous people and other residents are also expected to have accessed the wrecks in times gone by.

(ii) Modern Salvage. There is little to interest the modern salvor in what remains today.

(iii) Casual interference. It appeared from discussions with the numerous visitors that this was the first time that the wreck had uncovered in the memory of the regular visitors, two of whom had been visiting the area for 8 years and had not seen it previously. Thus the wreck is protected to an extent by the infrequent burial. It is evident that tourists are frequenting the 80 Mile Beach in ever increasing numbers. They are expected to have 'picked over' the visible wrecks, including this for small souvenirs. Only those that lie almost totally buried are expected to remain much as they were before the onset of tourism.

Assessment of Site Significance

As one of the few known pearling lugger wrecks, the site is of archaeological and historical importance. Because it uncovers so infrequently it cannot be used as a focus point for tourism, or educationally-based programs, however.

Management Proposals

Given that the wreck uncovers so infrequently, but that when it does, the remains are at considerable risk from tourists who regularly promenade past the site at low water spring tides, it is suggested that the site be marked with a small plaque opposite and with a larger plaque to be erected at the nearby caravan park.

Mr Lewis and his wife Jo have indicated that they would be pleased to remount the rudder from the site in a prominent shady place at the caravan park and to fix on it, in a non destructive way, a plaque advising visitors of the many wrecks that lie on the beach. Preparations are now underway to construct the plaques and to send them up to the Lewis family.

Recommendations

The wreck lies above low water mark, it lies in Western Australian State Waters. Because it cannot be identified as a pre-1900 site, the remains cannot be protected under the terms of the 1973 Maritime Archaeology Act (State Waters), however. When the proposed changes are put in place that allow wrecks more than 75 years old to be protected under that legislation, it is proposed that this site be gazetted as most likely a pre 1920s wreck.

References

Cairns, I., and Henderson, G., 1995, *Unfinished Voyages, Western Australian Shipwrecks (1881-1900)*, UWA Press, Nedlands.

80 Mile Beach Wrecks File, Department of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Maritime Museum, No. 116/80.

Sledge, S., 1978, *Wreck Inspection North Coast (WINC)*, Report, Department of Maritime Archaeology, Western Australian Maritime Museum, No. 11.

Appendix 1

Excerpt from Sledge (1978)

The wreck is in 3 to 6m depth about 10-20m offshore. Mark and Bob went to the spot described and could see the wreck with a glass-bottomed bucket.

We brought the hookah there and set up on shore. Bob and Mark began to measure and draw. Tony and I anchored over the wreck and took compass and sextant bearings. Pat took photos U/W and surface film. Ben Cropp, who had asked to film us working, brought over Hugh Edwards and Wally Gibbons who filmed activities.

Visibility was in excess of 10m, with a slight southerly current after the start of flood tide.

The axis of the site is SW-NE, stern inshore. The wreck lies over on its port side which had collapsed so that the side of the keel (and port timbers) lies flat against the bottom. (Fig. 7) starboard side is missing. At the stern a small brass rudder gudgeon was found partly buried in sand, and still attached firmly to the hard keel wood (Cec said the type of wood indicated she was built or greatly repaired at Broome where Wandoo was used), a stern post staple of brass was seen. (Fig. 8)



The keel runs virtually intact from this staple 10.20m forward, but no clearly defined bow section was noted.

Forward of the keel scattered knees and planks extend about 3m to a rectangular iron box 1.60 x 0.70 x 1.07m with the top eroded away. I believe it is a water tank.

The portside timbers lie south of the keel and extend out to 2.20m. These consisted of Wandoo frames (section measurement 11 x 5 cm) with carvel planking about 3 cm thickness of a lighter wood, which is quite soft. Keel section 10 x 20 cms. Deadwood on top of the keel at the stern measured a height of 65 cms above the grass staple. What appeared to be a part of the stern (or keel) lay in deeper water a few metres N of the SW end of the intact section of keel.

A large amount of copper sheathing was evident and the planks were fastened by copper. Samples were taken. The pintle was also recovered for the collection. No other small artifacts were located, which is explained by the fact that the lugger had been under repair and

Appendix 1

Excerpt from Cairns and Henderson (1995).

In April 1887, the pearling fleet operating off the north-west coast of Western Australia was struck by one of the most damaging cyclones on record. The majority of the pearling craft were working in the vicinity of Eighty Mile Beach, about 290 kilometres east of Cossack, when the area was lashed by strong easterly gales on Friday 22 April.¹ The fleet was devastated, with at least twenty vessels being lost and some fourteen others suffering damage.

The scattering of the fleet made it very difficult to assess what damage had been done, and an early report, published on 30 April in the *Victorian Express*, describes the disaster as a 'catastrophe which threatens to surpass in every respect any other similar event in Australian annals'. Though the article goes on to explain the impossibility of estimating the loss of life and property, estimates of 400 to 500 lives and over thirty vessels lost are promptly supplied.² There was, however, a great amount of confusion, which cannot be blamed on the press, and it was probably exacerbated by the fact that luggers appear not to have always been referred to locally by their correct names. In any case, these could easily be distorted by telegraphic errors. There was also some confusion over the ownership of craft, particularly in the case of partnerships, and some transactions were not officially recorded. A number of vessels reported missing or lost were later found to be safe, and the extent of damage was in several cases exaggerated. The *Annie Taylor*, for instance, which was actually only dismasted and knocked about³, was reported to have gone to pieces.⁴ Several other vessels reported to be safe were also slightly damaged, some being dismasted. To avoid confusion, these have not been listed here.

The first report of the disaster appears to have been brought to Cossack by the SS *Australind*, which had arrived at Cape Gourdon on 25 April, to find forty-eight of the pearling fleet there, many of them in a damaged state. On the way to Cossack, the steamer encountered the *Eloise*, which had lost its foremast, and took in tow the schooner *Sree Pas Sair*, which had been dismasted and was attempting to reach the port under jury masts. The *Sree Pas Sair* had previously encountered several distressed luggers to which supplies had been given⁵, and the schooner's master, Captain J. J. Haynes, appears to have been the source of the somewhat exaggerated early reports, declaring that eleven schooners and twenty-six luggers had been

Annie Taylor,
Charity, Cocoa
Nut, Dairy Maid,
Dart, Dawn, Derby,
Edith, Eloise, Ethel.
Faith, Florence,
Harriet, John S.
Lane, Le Grand,
Lord Loftus,
Maggie, Mary Ann,
Mavis, Myra,
Osprey, Pearl,
Ranger, Rose,
Rover, Sree Pas
Sair, Telephone,...

...*Theresa, Two*
Unidentified
Luggers,
Unidentified
'Japanese Boat',
Uno, Victoria
and Zela

sunk. Some exaggeration is perhaps understandable in the circumstances. The experience must have been extremely alarming for those on board the surviving vessels, and with no reliable information available, the spread of rumour and unfounded conjecture was inevitable. Haynes had apparently seen the drowning of Captain French of the *Dairy Maid* and the bodies of many other drowned men floating in the water. He also mentioned a hearsay, and apparently incorrect, report that Captain Mayne of the *Eloise* had been struck by lightning and was critically injured.⁶

Though fears were held for a number of vessels including *Dawn, Expert, Gipsy, Harriet, Herald, Jessie, Mavis* and *Myra*, all of these had either survived the ordeal and limped back to port or were located elsewhere, though a number were in a damaged condition. Another twenty-four or more vessels were less fortunate. These included the schooners *Dairy Maid, Florence, Lord Loftus, Osprey* and *Rover*, and the luggers *Cocoa Nut, Edith, Le Grand, Maggie, Mary Ann, Pearl, Ranger, Rose, Theresa, Uno, Victoria* and *Zela*, plus two unidentified luggers owned by Reddell⁷, and an unidentified 'Japanese boat' from the deck of which all but one of the crew were swept away.⁸

The remains of most of these vessels do not appear to have been found, except for the *Dairy Maid*, part of which was located on the beach in Roebuck Bay⁹, and the *Osprey*, discovered lying in 15.5 metres of water 9.6 kilometres west of the pearling ground.¹⁰ Neither were the bodies of the 136 or more victims found. Of these, sixteen whites were identified by name, but the number of those who were members of other races could only be estimated, from the average number employed on each missing vessel.

Establishing ownership of the different vessels is made difficult by the conflicting information available, but some fleet owners suffered very heavily, while others were more fortunate, their vessels escaping unhurt or with relatively minor damage. Clark's fleet was the most severely depleted, with the schooner *Florence* and the luggers *Cocoa Nut, Edith, Victoria* and *Zela* all listed as lost.¹¹

As an example of the confusing reports, when the lugger *Maggie* (Official Number 89385) disappeared, a W. Bruce was listed as missing in the lugger. Then, in a later report, the vessel was said to be safe, the owner's name again being given as Bruce. In the final police report, however, the vessel is listed as lost and the owner is given as E. Bird. An Elias Bruce is also reported to have been lost, together with several Malays, with an unidentified lugger.¹² The name of *Maggie*'s owner was Elisha Bruce. He was aboard at the time and was drowned.¹³

The owner, John Brennan, and several others were lost when the 16-ton lugger *Mary Ann* (Official Number 89258) foundered. It was probably Brennan's only boat, but he might have

been in partnership with Sullivan, who was lost with the *Le Grand* (Official Number 89284). Sullivan's name does not appear in the register, but he is named in the reports as the *Le Grand's* owner.¹⁴ There was also some uncertainty about his name. Making inquiries later in the year, Colonel Angelo, the Roebourne Government Resident, could only ascertain that the drowned man's initial was J. Different earlier reports, however, had referred to the loss of both a John and a Frank Sullivan. In the register for the lugger *Maggie*, its master's name is given as Daniel Sullivan. Elisha Bruce, who owned the vessel, was in charge when it was lost, so Daniel Sullivan, or a relation named John or Frank, might have been aboard the *Le Grand*.¹⁵

The schooners *Lord Loftus* and *Osprey* were both lost, together with their respective masters, Dennis and Graves, the Malay crews of both ships, Graves's son and a Captain Murray.¹⁶ The two vessels were said to be owned by Brown.¹⁷ This appears to be correct in the case of the *Lord Loftus*, but in earlier reports the respective ownership had been allotted to Reddell for *Lord Loftus*, and to Scott and Henderson for *Osprey*.¹⁸ This information does not agree with the vessels' registers. The confusion probably resulted from informal arrangements involving partnerships or absentee owners, or from recent unpublicized sales of the vessels.

Findlay and Baynes lost their lugger *Uno* (Official Number 78165), but their schooner *Sree Pas Sair* and the lugger *Telephone* survived dismasted.

Captain Larkham was reported to have lost the *Ranger* (Official Number 89295) and the *Rover*.¹⁹ but the registered owner of these two 12-ton luggers was Frederick John Gibbins. John Larkham was named as the master of the *Ranger*.

Captain Reddell recorded the second heaviest losses, with the wreck of the schooner *Dairy Maid*, the lugger *Rose* and two other unidentified luggers. Captain French, master of the *Dairy Maid*, was lost in the wreck, together with a man identified as Hodgson and several unidentified Malays.²⁰

George Smith's schooner *Harriet* escaped with dismasting, but he lost the *Theresa*.

There are confusing accounts concerning the *Pearl*. In an early report, a vessel of that name, which should have been at Port Hedland at the time of the disaster, is referred to as being the property of Findlay and Baynes.²¹ This would have been their schooner (Official Number 89265), and in a later report, dated 9 June, the schooner *Pearl* is said to have been safe at Lagrange Bay during the cyclone. In the same account, however, a man named Archie Walton is reported lost, with five others, in the lugger *Ethel*.²² Walton's name is incorrectly spelt as Watson, but is corrected in a later edition.²³ There is no further mention of the *Ethel* in the lists of casualties, but a lugger *Pearl*, owner Walton, appears in the final police report.²⁴ If the

earlier report of the schooner *Pearl* being safe is correct, two possibilities arise. There may have been two *Pearls* in the area, a schooner owned by Findlay and Baynes and a lugger belonging to Walton, the latter being lost. Alternatively, the name *Pearl* in the final list may have been caused by a telegraphic error, and the lugger owned by Walton was actually the *Ethel*, in which the owner, or one of his relations, died. As Walton was the owner of six luggers plus the brig *Lady Denison*,²⁵ it seems unlikely that he would have been aboard one of the luggers, and both the *Ethel* and the *Pearl* may have been Walton luggers which were lost.

At Derby, the Adelaide Steamship Company's ketch *Derby* (Official Number 75320), which had been purchased with the assistance of a government subsidy of £150 and was stationed at the port as a lighter in 1885²⁶, was also supposed to be irreparably damaged. In June 1887, her master, Thomas Donahue, was to write that the lighter was 'now...a condemnable wreck through the late storm on the night of the 22nd', but the vessel survived.²⁷ The 46-ton sailing lighter was built at the Canning River in 1878, and was finally lost in 1894.

Price and Hassell's *John S. Lane* (Official Number 51586), though reported safe, appears also to have been wrecked, as the loss was later recorded in the vessel's register.²⁸

Two other luggers, *Charity* and *Faith*, do not appear in the local accounts, but disappeared with all hands after leaving Port Darwin for the Western Australian pearling grounds before 22 April. Though it is not certain that they met their end within Western Australian waters, it seems probable that they were in the area affected by the cyclone.

Owned by Turnbull, Paine and Affleck, of New South Wales, the 9.7-ton *Charity* and the 9.9-ton *Faith* were sister ships. Both were built in New South Wales and had only been launched in January 1887. The *Faith* (Official Number 93544) measured 11.2 metres by 3.3 metres by 1.5 metres, with one deck, two masts and an elliptic stern, and the *Charity* (Official Number 93545), which was commanded by Captain John Turnbull, was almost identical.

The 15-ton lugger *Dart* (Official Number 93498), which appears in the Board of Trade Wreck Register as having foundered on the date of the cyclone, actually survived until the 1940s, when it was purchased by the Commonwealth Government. Registered at Sydney, the vessel had been built at Berrys Bay, New South Wales, in 1886 and was owned by James Burns.

The *Edith* was a 10-ton lugger (Official Number 83750) built at Berrys Bay, New South Wales, and registered at Sydney in 1883. Owned by Captain Stephen Clark of Sydney, the carvel-built wooden vessel had one deck, two masts, an elliptic stern and a billet head. It measured 11.2 metres by 3.2 metres by 1.4 metres.

The *Ethel* may have been the 14-ton schooner (Official Number 61099) built at Perth in