

The *Countess of Selkirk?* site at Cape Pasley, east of Esperance

Maritime Heritage Site Inspection Report

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WA Maritime Museum 1996

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Acknowledgments

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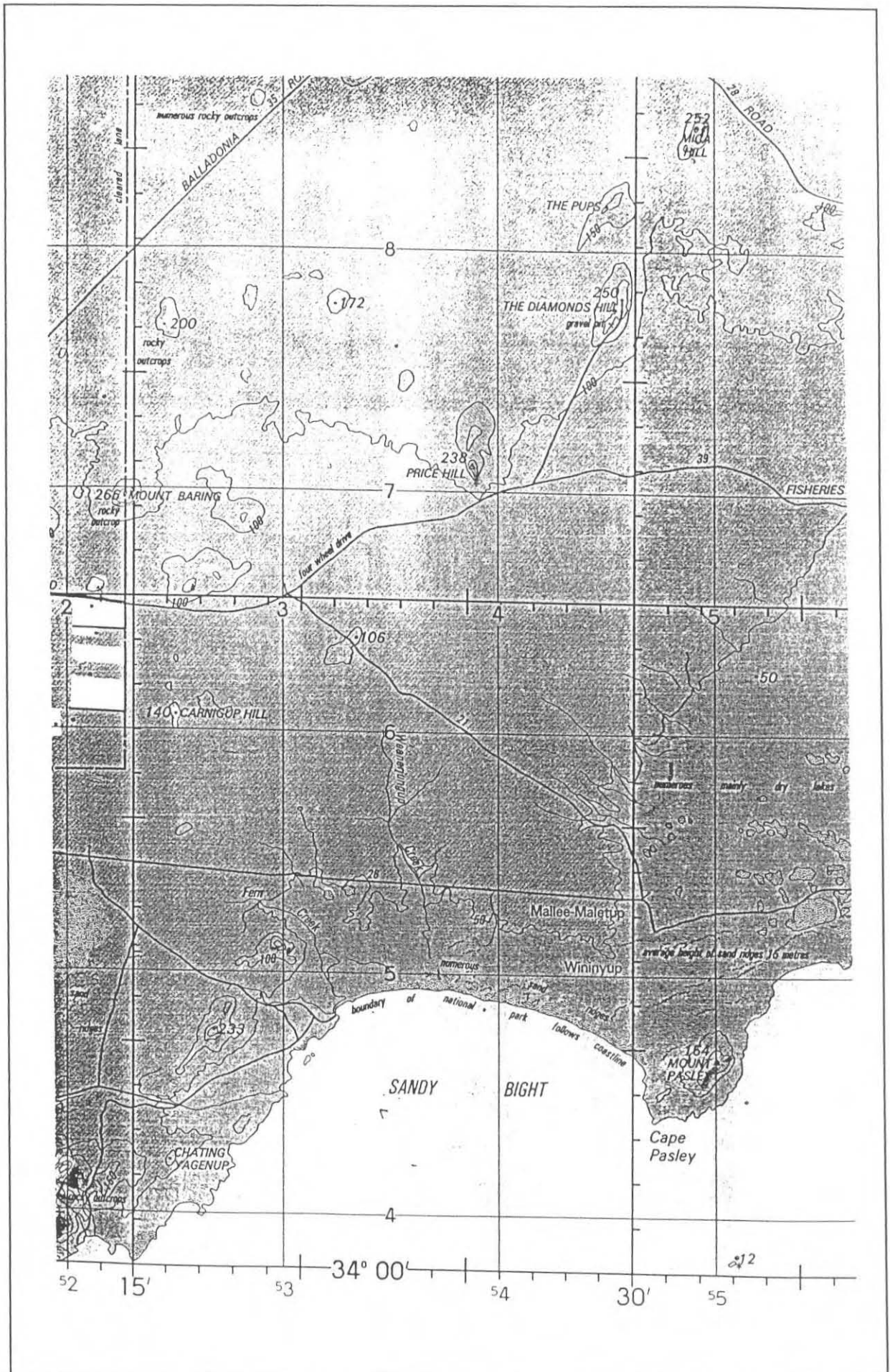
The Department of Maritime Archaeology of the WA Maritime Museum wishes to thank

Mr Tom Dimer
 Mr Brent Montgomerie
 Mrs Dawn Montgomerie
 Ms Katie McCarthy
 Mr Allan Longbottom
 Mr Mike Paxman (CALM)
 Mr Mark Tyrell

Introduction

The purpose of this site inspection was to make a preliminary assessment of the *Countess of Selkirk* site at Cape Pasley east of Esperance. This site was reported to the WA Maritime Museum in September 1994 by Mr Tom Dimer of Maddington, formerly of the Nanambinya Station. An archival analysis has also been conducted.

Figure 1. Map Excerpt showing the Cape Pasley region:
(Malcolm 1:250000)



Background

Rumours of a possible Portuguese ship, the *Countess of Selkirk* or *Countess of Sulkaat* have circulated around the Esperance area for generations and were based on the apparent finding of ship's timbers and a brass nameplate in the Cape Pasley region around the turn of the century. Little of this filtered out of the region and the find was not acted upon by the authorities.

A letter of 14 May 1971 from Mr Ian Hay, then Manager of Aroona Station east of Esperance, is the first indication that the WA Museum had of what he called a possible 'Portuguese ship *Countess Sulkaat* or *Countess Selkirk*' (Esperance Area Wrecks, File 69/71). In his letter to the Museum Hay stated that a

...stockman employed on Cape Pasley Station at about the turn of the century, rode over, and subsequently picked up a name plate bearing the above inscription. The stockman handed the plate over to the Station owner who wrote to the Lloyds and later the Dutch shipping registrars for details. Before a reply was to hand the Station owner was drowned while fishing near Point Malcolm. The location of the wreck died with him (I. Hay to WA Museum, 14/5/1971)..

Hay also indicated that they had searched the area indicated to him with little result.

Last weekend we tackled this lonely area on a tractor and discovered the enclosed piece of timber and a much larger piece with metal spikes through it (a sample of which is enclosed) and a screw, also enclosed (I. Hay to WA Museum, 14/5/1971, Esperance Area File).

In reply, Dr Ian Crawford, then Senior Curator, Division of Human Studies at the WA Museum indicated that the pitch of the screw did not match those of modern screws, that machinery used for the making of them dated to the 1770s and that the screw matched those in an 1880s catalogue 'very closely' (Crawford to Hay, 27/5/1971). He concluded, as a result, that the nameplate and any associated site was late nineteenth century.

Having ascertained that the name plate had possibly been sent to Adelaide for identification, Dr Crawford then wrote to the South Australian Museum. They wrote back to the effect that they were aware of the mystery having been contacted on numerous occasions previous by local Western Australian interests. The officer replying was sympathetic and had a great interest in things nautical. He made a thorough search of South Australian repositories as a result and his replied

Although I have made exhaustive enquiries on your behalf here, at the Nautical Museum (Port Adelaide), and at the Art Gallery of South Australia (which holds a collection of maritime relics), we are quite unable to help you (Seton, to Crawford, 22/2/1972).

Advice was also sought of the Science Museum of Victoria on the basis that the nameplate may have been sent there, but they too had no knowledge of it (Kendall to Henderson, 6/7/1971). The Esperance Bay Historical Society also enquired about the matter, but the WA Museum was unable to add further light on the matter in the light of these negative results (Henderson to Esperance Bay Historical Society, 6/7/1972). The wood and the fastenings were apparently not kept for they do not appear on the Department of Maritime Archaeology Registers.

There is little doubt that there would have been many visits between 1913 and 1972 as the Dimer Brothers, Mr Evans and the Turnbulls would have told others of their story. There was an expedition around 1954-5, for example. In this instance a party comprising Messrs Frank McCudden, Cyril Meadows and Bill Johnson went to follow up the legend in a 'Republic

Truck', but found no evidence of a wreck (Notes of conversation, Esperance Area File, 69/72).

None of these visits produced evidence of a wreck, however and it was considered as a result of these various inquiries that the Cape Pasley report was spurious, or that it was somehow related to the Dutch East India ship *Gulden Zeepard* which sailed along the south coast in 1627 or to a number of legends based on pre-settlement or other maritime visits to the south-east coast (e.g Henderson, 1980: 12). These includes an unidentified pre-settlement wreck (possibly a sealer or whaler) on the beach east of Eyre and the wreck of the Dutch ship *Batoe Bassi* in 1880. See Appendix 1 for a list of wrecks in the region.

There the matter rested until Mr Tom Dimer formerly of Nanambinya Station east of Esperance came in to the WA Maritime Museum on 14 September 1994 to cast light on what had been dismissed until then as an unlikely possibility.

Tom Dimer's Account

Tom Dimer, then a 10 year old boy, his 20 year old brother Harry Dimer left Nanambinya Station for the 'Nail Cap Outcamp' in 1913 to search for straggler cattle. With them was a visiting linesman, Fred Evans and a Mr F. P. (Fred) McIvor the Outcamp Manager of Thomas River Station (which was owned by a Mr Turnbull). In travelling through the dune country just west of Cape Pasley the men came across a piece of timber to which was attached a nameplate carrying an inscription. Tom Dimer described the timber as the 'bow' of a ship.

The men took the plate off the timber and returned to the hut, where they stayed for about one week. Tom Dimer describes the plate as being around 4' by 2'6" in size (1.2m X 0.8m), of copper or brass and fastened with coach screws. He stated that the inscription read *Countess of Selkirk, Countess of Sulkaat*, or similar.

McIvor in the meantime rode back to the site searching for more material and in the process his horse put its foot into a decayed timber, which to him represented the hull of the ship. He returned and related this story to the young Tom Dimer back at the camp.

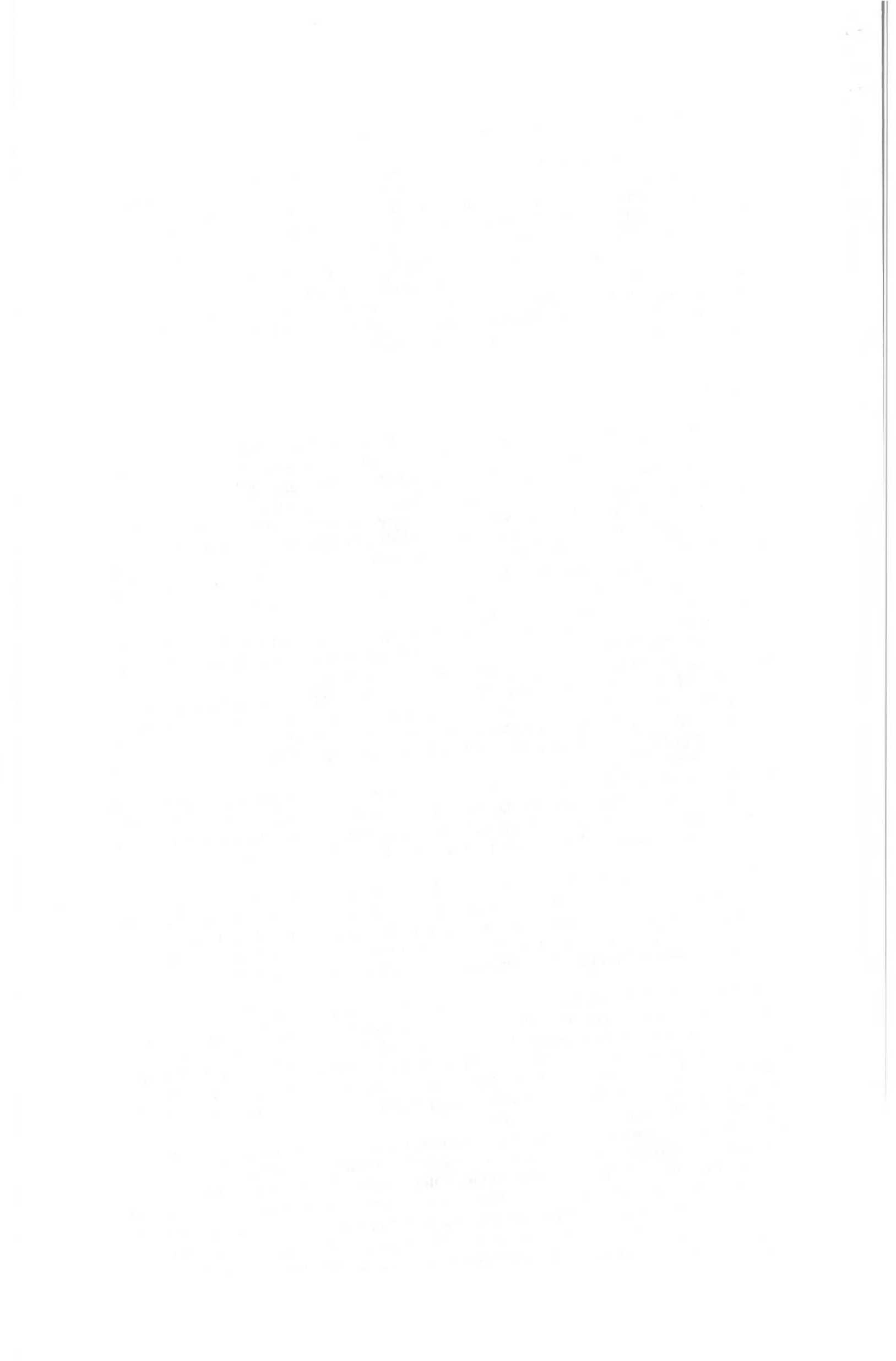
Soon after Mc Ivor went fishing with Mr and Mrs Turnbull and was washed off the rocks at Poison Creek by a wave and drowned. His body came ashore a week later just east of the mouth of Poison Creek. His remains were carried across the fore dune and the creek and were buried in a grave that was later marked with a headstone.(Coate, 1986: 101). This bears the date 20 February 1913.

Mr Dimer was told that Fred Evans (who looked after one section of the telegraph line from Esperance to Israelite Bay) took the plate to the telegraph station in Israelite Bay in July 1913 for forwarding on to the Adelaide Museum by ship. Mr Dimer also indicated that Evans was a reliable, honest man and that he had no doubt that he would have sent the plaque on as promised.

Interest remained in the possibility that a wreck lay in the area, but nothing further pertaining to a wreck, was found. Mr Dimer, for example, went back '20 times since' (Dimer to McCarthy, 26/10/1995). Others undertook expeditions to the area, but were similarly unsuccessful. Mr Dimer, for example also mentioned other unsuccessful expeditions including one of 1944 and one involving the Douglas's at an unspecified time.

After discussions with Tom Dimer it became evident that he has an excellent memory and that he could be relied upon to properly recount such events. As a result, it was concluded that there had indeed been a nameplate attached to timbers in the Cape Pasley area. Being considered of historical significance, the report was officially recorded so that Mr Dimer could be legally considered for any recompense or reward under the terms of the Maritime Archaeology Act 1973 should a wreck be found and so that Museum funds could be reallocated for the examination of his report.

In his report, Mr Dimer described the location and features of the site in detail, allowing it to be relocated with considerable certainty. This resulted in a number of attempts being made to raise an expedition with members including Mr Dimer, his family and his associate Mr Allan Longbottom of Grass Patch. These failed for a variety of reasons. With Mr Dimer's blessing the services of his acquaintance Mr Brent Montgomerie of Esperance were sought and duly obtained. Montgomerie frequented the area in his employ monitoring fish catches on the beach and he proved an ideal guide. The first attempt with him as guide was made in August



1995, but it was abandoned when heavy rain fell overnight and Poison Creek was found to be too deep to traverse, however.

A further attempt was made in October 1995 resulting in the following report.

Site Details

Site Name: *Countess of Selkirk* site at Cape Pasley

File Name: Esperance Area Wrecks

File No: MA 69/79

Date of Inspection: 18-21/10/1995

Personnel: M McCarthy, B Montgomerie, D Montgomerie, K McCarthy,

Approximate Location: Cape Pasley

Charts: BA 1059

Maps: Malcolm: Australia 1: 100000

Plans: See sketches in Wreck Inspection Day-book No. 7: 131-4.

Universal Grid Reference

Malcolm 1: 100000 465 465

GPS: 33° 55.45'S, 123° 30.45'E. (Second Gully site)

Directions: Take a 4WD ex Esperance to the east crossing the Poison Creek- which can fill in winter and become impassable. Proceed at times of low tide and low swell along the beach to Cape Pasley. High tide and heavy swell can prove impassable. Stop at a rocky promontory which prohibits further progress just west of Cape Pasley. On the left 400m west of the promontory appears a blowout. Further west are two other blowouts, the last 1.2 Km from the point. This is the area in which Tom Dimer was told the *Countess of Selkirk* plaque was found.

Site Photographs:

Slides: To be catalogued.

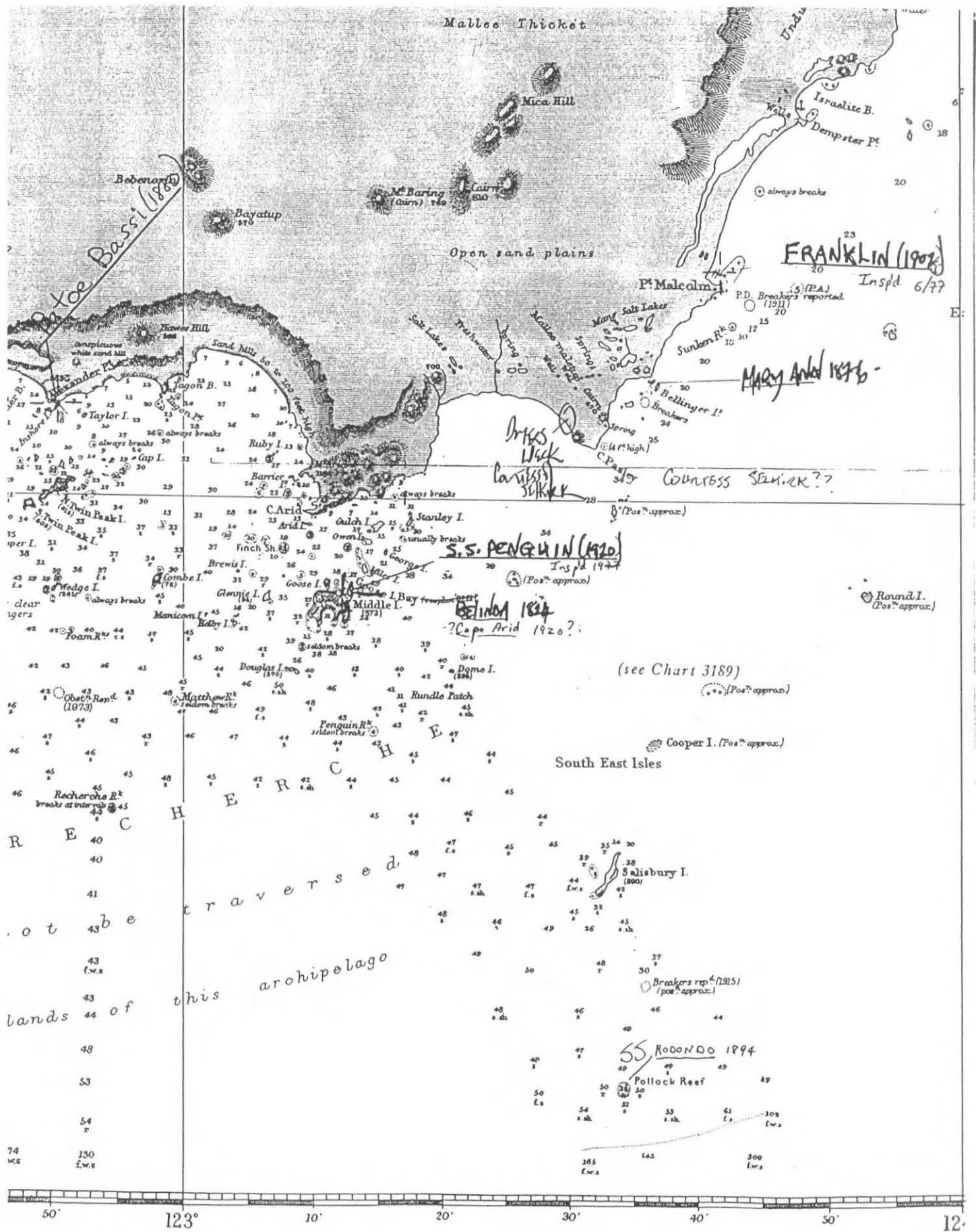
Video: In unedited form.

Site Conditions on Inspection:

Swell: Heavy

Fine though one period of very strong winds

Figure 2 Chart Excerpt



Description of Site

The *Countess of Selkirk* site is the western-most of three blow-outs lying west of Cape Pasley stretching from 400m to 1.2 Km east of a rocky promontory. These appear on the aerial photograph as sites #1, #2 and #3. The blowouts examined are extensive and in some cases bedrock is exposed on their eastern edges.

Three areas were examined by traverse.

#1 The eastern-most and smallest gully was examined first. It contained evidence of an early Aboriginal occupation of what is now a deflated dune. Early European material was not found.

#2 The middle gully was larger and it too contained evidence of Aboriginal occupation in the form of grindstones and shells, but no evidence of European activity.

The third and largest gully situated 1.2 Kilometres from the rocky point at the eastern end of the bay showed no evidence of either early European or Aboriginal material.

The first two gullies were then subject to metal detector and magnetometer search using an aquatic 'Aquascan' magnetometer and then a G 816 Portable Proton Magnetometer in a 5 metres line spacing close plot survey. Runs were conducted in a north-south-north direction beginning from the top of the dune at the northern end commencing down its face, across the gully up the face of the next dune and over it into the next gully and up the opposite dune. The reverse path was then take an a distance 5 metres west and the process was repeated until the entire floor and sides of gullies #1 and #2 were examined. Readings were read into a tape recorder for plotting.

Figure 3 : Sketches from the Wreck Inspection Daybook showing the search procedure

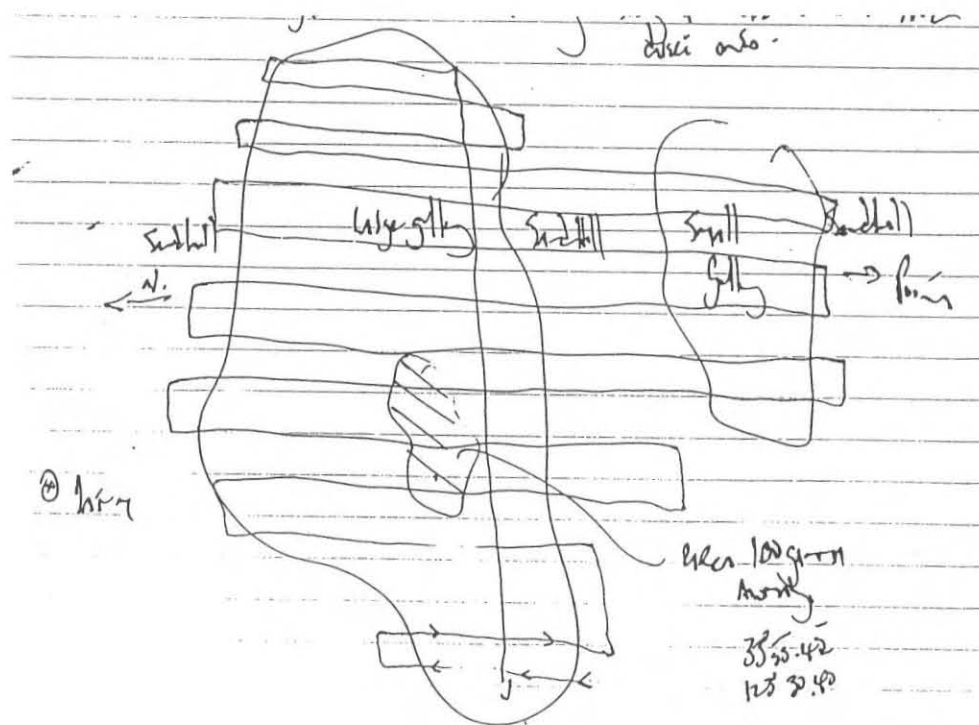
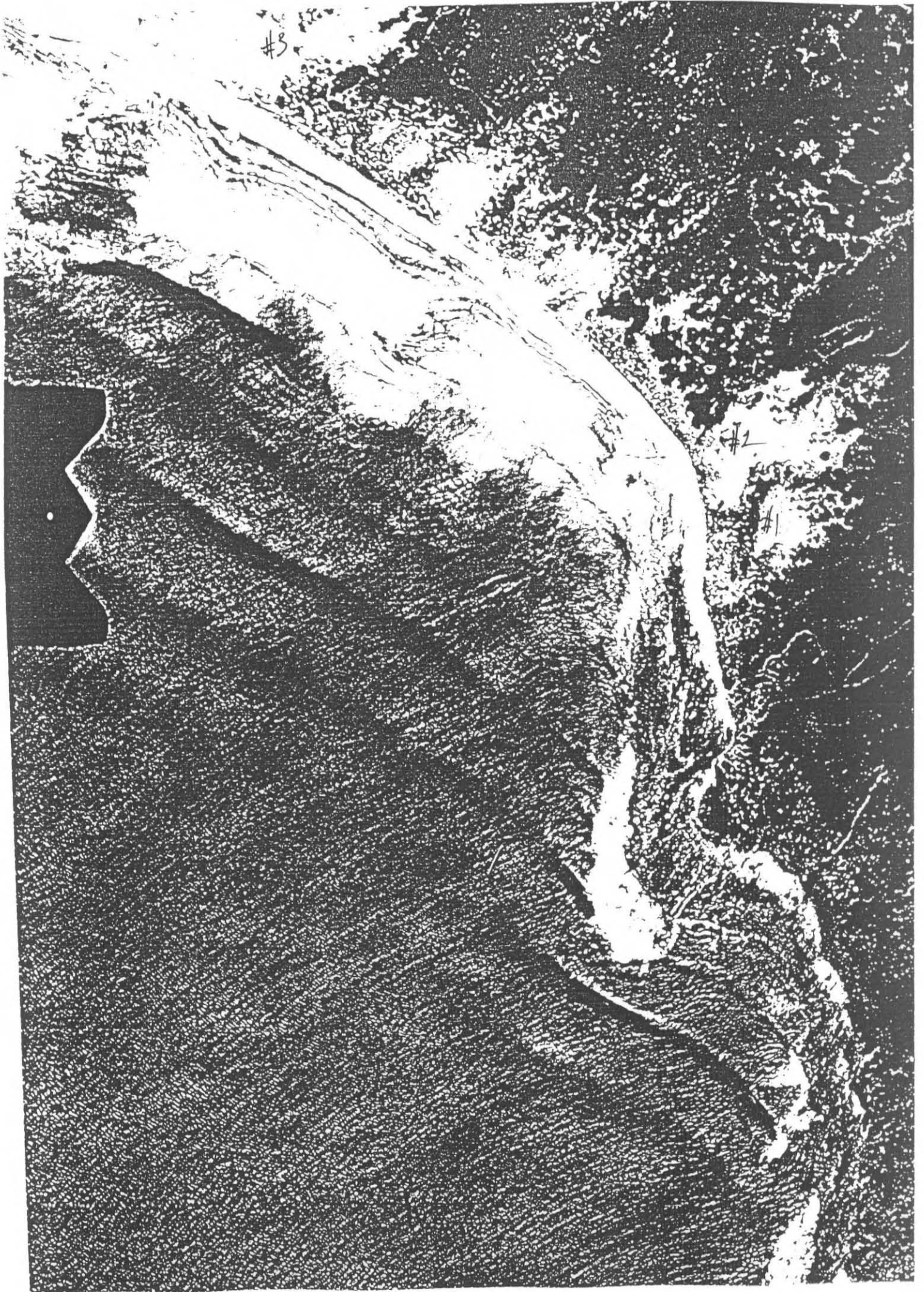


Figure 4 Aerial Photograph showing the three blowouts examined:
(Cape Pasley, WA 2943)



Results

Initially there was interest in the location of a 100-150 gamma magnetic anomaly on the eastern edge of the dune separating the first and second gullies (Figure 3). This was located at # 33° 55.45'S, 123° 30.48'E. A series of east-west runs from the dune wall through the bottom of each gully was also conducted. Eventually it became apparent that the magnetic shift was not consistent with the signature of isolated ironwork such as anchors, crab-winches, a chain mound or the like and it was surmised that it was produced by geological formations or materials such as a layer of mineral sands around the level of the water-table. When the readings were replicated in the third gully, some 500 metres away, using similar remote sensing techniques, these suspicions were confirmed.

A metal detector search was also undertaken along similar lines, with no early European material located.

The surface of the gully's was visually searched by both the metal detector and magnetometer teams producing no evidence of a wreck or European material apart from modern detritus.

Aboriginal material was noted however.

The region to the east of the gullies, adjacent to a rocky point was searched and also proved interesting. Here a great deal of flotsam was located, including fragments of a clinker-built boat possibly decades old. These remains and a great deal of other artificial material attest to the area being a trap for floating debris.

Conclusions

- (i) There was no evidence of a wreck in the location of the nameplate site.
- (ii) The area immediately east of the blowouts on a rocky promontory appears to be a trap for floating debris.
- (iii) There is evidence of an Aboriginal occupation of the area and this appears to predate European settlement.

Comments

It is possible then that ship's timbers carrying a brass or copper nameplate with the name *Countess of Selkirk* (or similar) was washed ashore at this place and that it was pushed higher into the dunes by the occasional heavy storm. It may also have been transported there by Aborigines before the area was settled. Ship's names rarely appear in the manner described by Mr Dimer, i.e on a brass nameplate attached to the bow, however. The name therefore could have been affixed to a deck fitting, or be associated with a consignment of cargo. A portion of deckhouse bearing the name *Neck Bremen* came ashore at Scorpion Bight in late 1898, for example (Eucla Recorder, 10/12/1898).

Given that the wording on the plaque could not be confirmed, a random search for the names was undertaken amongst various shipping registers. The name Selkirk is common in the literature and in ship's names. The term Countess is equally common as is the term County. The name Sulkaat was not encountered.

It is concluded as a result, that the nameplate could have been on a ship's timber, but could equally be associated with a deck fitting or an item of property emanating from a wreck or incident at sea. Material is known to float for thousands of sea miles before coming ashore and the south-west coast of Australia is especially noted as an end-point for material of that sort. In 1871, for example, a figurehead from the clipper *Blue Jacket* washed ashore at Rottneest Island after the ship had been destroyed by fire off the Falklands three years earlier (Henderson, 1980: 41).

Assessment of Site Significance

Educational/Recreational: Heritage remains, even the sites where little is visible, have the potential of being a focus for educational/recreational activity if properly marked, interpreted and documented. The dune area could be marked as the site of the fabled *Countess of Selkirk* (Sulkaat) shipwreck with explanatory information as part of a regional land use strategy.

(vi) Cultural: There are clear ramifications in a story such as this as a focus for comment on pre-settlement Aboriginal occupation, the early grazing industry and the place of people like Mr Dimer in regional history.

(vii) Archaeological: The presence of Aboriginal material lying close to bedrock at the base of a deflated dune needs be noted.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the *Countess Selkirk?* story be included in interpretive material provided by regional heritage interests such as the Esperance Bay Historical Society and CALM and that it appear on tourist maps and be considered by the Nomenclature Committee for inclusion as a potential place name.

The story of the Dimer family is another important element in the history of the area. Further to this, local interests are encouraged to ensure that the Dimer name be also put to the Nomenclature Committee and that Mr Dimer's notes and draft manuscript of his life in the Esperance area are retained for education and publication in due course. Having been examined by this Museum, Mr Dimer's reminiscences were found to be of acknowledged importance and of a broad general interest. Having only a small maritime component this Museum could not publish it however.

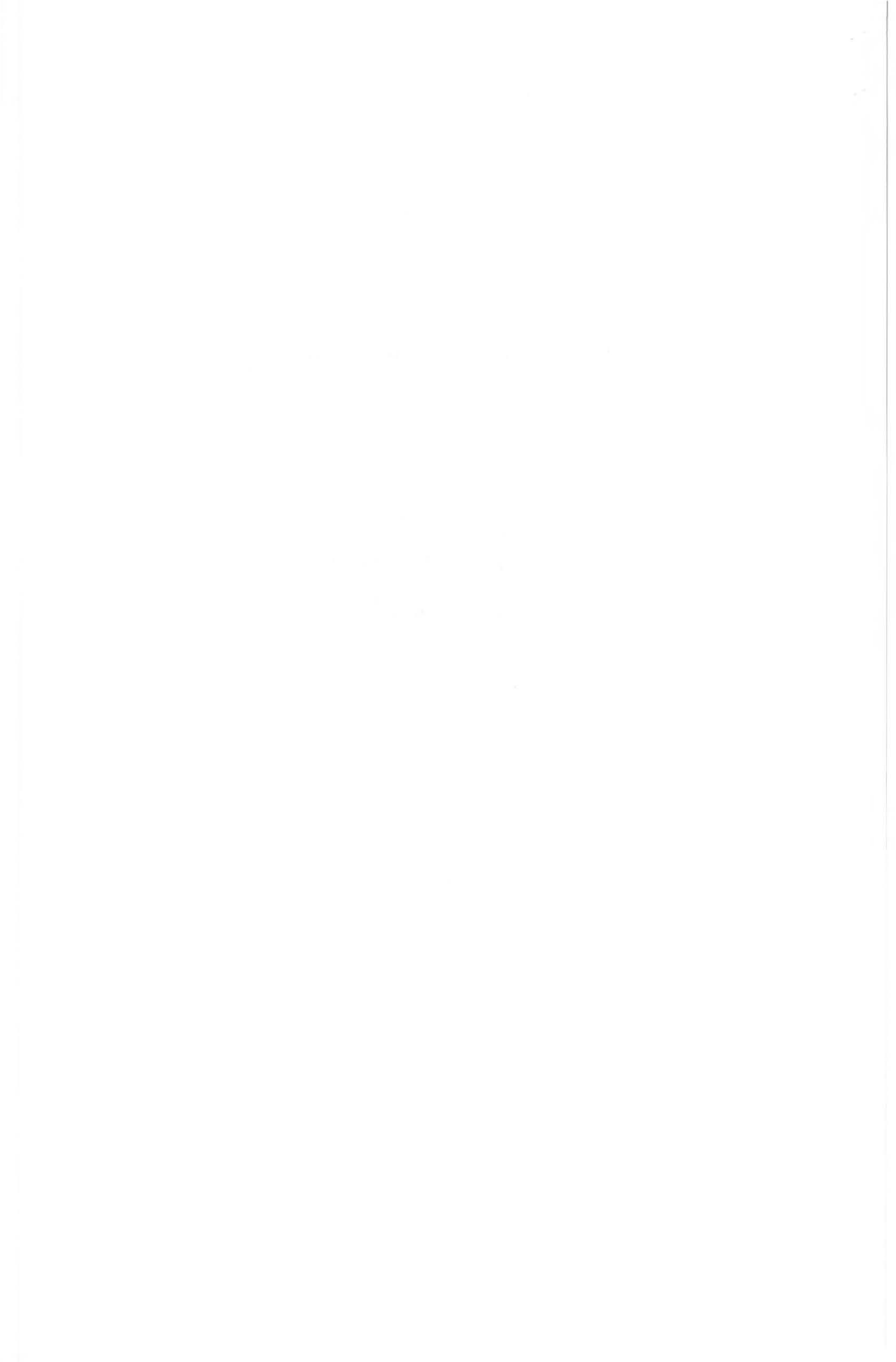
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- Wreck Inspection Day Book, No 7, Department of Maritime Archaeology.
- Esperance Area File, 69/72, Department of Maritime Archaeology, WA Maritime Museum.

Appendix

Notes on: shipwrecks on the south-east coast

- 1) *The Gulden Zeepard* Story
- 2) *The Neck Bremen* account
- 3) The Eyre Unidentified site
 - 4) *The Batoe Bassi.*
 - 5) *The Mary Anne*
 - 6) *The SS Rodondo*
 - 7) *The SS Franklin*



Unnamed Wreck Near Esperance

The Dutch East Indiaman *Gulden Zeepaard*, commanded by Pieter Nuijts, a member of the Council of India, sailed along much of the south coast of Australia in 1627, but returned safely to Batavia.¹ Nothing in the available contemporary records indicates that either a pre-Australian settlement Dutch or Portuguese vessel was wrecked on the south coast of Australia. In February 1937, however, the *West Australian* published a report of an address by local historian Malcolm Uren, who was reported as stating, 'A high pooped Dutch Ship, whose name from a worn inscription found on a rock appeared to have begun with the letters M-I-S, met her doom in Victoria Harbour, near Esperance.'² In a letter to the Editor, several weeks later, Alfred Douglas, a resident of the area, contradicted the statement regarding the letters M-I-S, and explained as follows:

Mr. Campbell Taylor, who had joined the crew [of a vessel carrying Alfred Douglas] during their sojourn in the harbour, happened to mention the aborigines' legend about the ill-fated Kibra (Mr. Campbell Taylor being our guide). With him was the late Captain Fred Douglas, myself, Edward Pettit and a Dutch officer, he being a member of the crew. Mr. Taylor led us to the east side of the harbour, where there lay a flat rock partly encrusted with shell-fish. Mr. Taylor told us that the natives had shown it to him years before. After knocking off some of the encrustation, the little party could make out the figures 1600 quite distinctly. There was also an inscription which could not be distinguished, as wind and weather had done their work of destruction only too well, but the Dutch officer believed that it was a Dutch name, as he could make it out better than we could; but where Mr. Uren got the letters M-I-S from I don't know. I definitely say that they are nothing to do with the Dutch ship's name lying in Victoria Harbour east of Esperance. It was 53 years ago on the 15th of this month since we first saw this name on the flat rock at Victoria Harbour.³

Mr Douglas, who at that time was a very old man, told of an Aboriginal legend of a ship having been wrecked a long time ago at Victoria Harbour or at the Duke of Orleans Bay, further east of Esperance.⁴

A Dutch wreck, the *Batoe Bassi*, does lie in the area, at Inshore Island, but that vessel was lost so recently as 1880. This site has been located by skin-divers. Rumours have also circulated as to a supposed Portuguese vessel, named *Countess Sulkaat*, wrecked ashore near Cape Pasley, but material sent to the Museum from this site would appear to be late nineteenth century (if not later).⁵ The rock carvings, when considered in isolation, cannot be taken as substantive evidence of any shipwreck.

6	THE EUCLA RECORDER.	Saturday, Dec. 10, 1898.
District Items.		
EYRE.		
<p>Another of those painful uncertainties with which ocean life is unfortunately so closely allied, has been brought to notice by a discovery made by Mr. J. W. W. Graham at Scorpion Bight, 28 miles East of Eyre, of a considerable quantity of wreckage consisting chiefly of the upper part of a deck house and attachments. The name, "Neck Brema," is done in raised wood-work on each end of the structure, the dimensions of which are about 11 feet long by 9 feet wide. When found it had only been ashore for a day or two at most. Being made of teak throughout it is impossible to conjecture the length of time it has been in the water. No wreckage belonging to this vessel was found at any other point than the one mentioned, nor any evidence to show whether the vessel to which it belonged was a steamer or sailer.</p>		
ISRAELITE BAY.		

REPORT OF WRECK INSPECTION
Ref. 166/76

EYRE Unidentified Wreck

Date of Inspection: 19, 20 November 1976

Personnel: C. Powell Officer in Charge
N. North (Conservation)
F. Taylor (Honorary Volunteer)
A.J. Carlisle

Approx. Location: 44 kms East of Eyre on the Great Australian

Bight (W.A.) Lat. 32°18' S
Long. 126°51' E

Compass bearings: from Hill approx. 4.2 Km W of wreck site
to 1.) Norina microwave tower 338°

2.) tip of promontory Scorpion
Bight 258°

Visual Transits: Star picket placed on old telegraph line inland from wreck
site 3 sets (2 ea) star pickets at edge of forshore dunes
1. directly inland wreck, 2. at interval to westward,
3. at interval to eastward.

Transit Photos: Numbers to be determined.

Site Photos: Numbers to be determined.

Description of Site:

Several iron hanging knees (deck beam supports) and about two dozen iron hull timber fastening bolts visible at mean low water mark partly buried in sand. One deck support measured 1.1 meters length of horizontal leg and 1.6 meters length of vertical leg. All material heavily concreted. The concretion on one of the bolts was broken open at the Lab and revealed iron corrosion estimated at 85%. A more detailed description of the wreck site and related campsites is provided in Dr Neil North's report (attached

Identification Comments:

Although stories passed down among the local aborigines point towards a date of wrecking sometime in the late 18th century, it would be premature to declare that the site is Pre-Settlement without more substantial evidence, notwithstanding that we have no evidence to preclude the possibility as yet. It is probable that the wreck antedates the mid-1870's when homesteads were established in the area, and the telegraph line constructed.

Recommendations:

Research is continuing, and I concur with Neil and Colin to recommend that an inspection team return to the site with equipment and personnel suitable for a thorough search of the campsite, inshore reef and outside the reef edge where the bulk of the wreckage is likely to be located and well-preserved. Because there is no reasonable doubt that the site reported first to the Museum by Mr & Mrs A.J. Carlisle (c/- Post Office Forrest, Trans Line WA 6434) is that of a ship wrecked prior to 1900 and because the material indicates a vessel of considerable size, and the wreck is likely to be of historic significance, I suggest that the site be recorded in the Government Gazette as a Maritime Archaeological site and an interim reward payment be offered to the finders.

SCOTT SLEDGE
9 December 1976

Batoe Bassi

A telegram announced the stranding of the barque *Batoe Bassi* on 5 June 1880 near Inshore Island, to the east of Esperance.¹ The *Batoe Bassi* had been bound from Tjilitjap, in Java, for Melbourne with a cargo of 300 tons of sugar, 3,000 coconuts, rice and spirits. The vessel sprang a leak at sea, but the Malay crew were too sick to pump the vessel out. Two of the twenty-four crew had died during the voyage and most of the rest were laid up with what was described as rheumatism.²

Captain B. H. Buir had no alternative but to beach her. He ran the vessel ashore, and south-easterly winds filled her with water, destroying the cargo. The crew, including three women, were all safely landed. The mate, A. Brinkmann, sought assistance in Albany to refloat the *Batoe Bassi*, but he was reluctant to commit himself to pay the £100 charter fee for the 50-ton *Agnes*, so the Government ordered the telegraph assistant at Esperance Bay to go to the wreck with a field telegraph instrument, to place the captain in communication with his consignors in Melbourne.

The vessel was soon a complete wreck, its back broken. The hull was sold at auction at Albany and realized a mere £3, while the vessel's gear was sold at a nominal value. (See map on p. 198.)

The 293-ton *Batoe Bassi* was built of timber at Drammen in 1864.³ Her dimensions were 35 metres by 7.5 metres by 4.12 metres.

The wreck was rediscovered in 1969 and reported to the Museum by two groups of divers, and several items, including coconuts, were raised. Part of the timber hull is still recognizable on the seabed, in latitude 33° 54.6' south, longitude 122° 50.2' east. The site is protected under the Historic Shipwrecks Act.

Mary Ann

The 104-ton topsail schooner *Mary Ann* was built at North West Bay in Tasmania in 1849, and was owned in Hobart during the early 1850s. The mariner and grazier Captain James Dempster bought the schooner in 1868 and had her fitted out in Melbourne for the North West (Western Australia) pearl fishery.¹ However, when the vessel arrived at Fremantle, he also contemplated using her for collecting bêche-de-mer, and he later traded with her to Mauritius.

In 1875, the *Mary Ann*, now owned by Messrs Pearse and Owston, began conveying telegraph poles to the head of the Great Australian Bight for use in the construction of the Eucla telegraph line. The vessel was chartered to William Miles and commanded by John Christie. In May 1876, the *Mary Ann* was engaged to take some officials and plant to Eucla. That task completed, Captain Christie left Israelite Bay on 12 July for Middle Island, but progress being slow, he decided to anchor the next evening under the lee of Bellinger Island.⁸

The wind direction changed overnight, putting the *Mary Ann* on a lee shore. In getting under weigh on the 13th, Captain Christie hove the anchor cable short and set his topsails, but the *Mary Ann* would not cant, and began to drag her anchor closer to the shore. The sails were furled and extra cable let out to stop the vessel, but attempts to warp her further out to sea were unsuccessful. In the evening, a fresh north-easterly wind combined with a heavy swell to push the vessel ashore, dragging her 900-kilogram anchor behind her. The six crew and six passengers got on shore safely with their personal effects, but the 27-year-old *Mary Ann* became a total wreck.⁹

The loss of the *Mary Ann* did not affect the schedule for completion of the line. In 1877, Perth was connected, for the first time, by telegraph with London via Albany, Esperance, Israelite Bay, Adelaide and Darwin.

The *Mary Ann* (Official Number 31932) was a wooden sailing vessel of carvel build, with standing bowsprit, square stern, scroll head and no galleries. She had one deck, two masts, and the dimensions 24.7 metres by 5.9 metres by 2.8 metres.¹⁰

Rodondo

The steamer *Rodondo* (Official Number 79508) left Port Adelaide on 2 October 1894¹, with over 160 passengers and a crew of thirty, on its first voyage to Western Australia. Early on the morning of the 7th, the vessel was some 60 kilometres south of Capes Arid and Paisley, in the vicinity of Israelite Bay. It seems that the master, Captain Hill, was completely unaware of the vessel's proximity to the coast, as the vessel had left Neptune Island, some 13 kilometres south of Cape Spencer, in South Australia, and steered a westerly course which should have taken it 112 kilometres further to the south. It was later suggested that the ship's compass may have been affected by the presence of a large boiler carried as deck cargo.

At 2.00 a.m., when the master and chief officer were in bed and the second mate had charge of the vessel², it suddenly struck amidships on Pollock Reef. The water had been calm and there was no warning. According to a passenger named Todd, the captain, rudely awakened, seemed to lose his head and, when asked what they had struck, said, 'God knows, we can't be within 300 miles of the mainland'.³ Fortunately, the vessel floated for twelve hours, allowing most of those on board to escape and make their way to South East Island in seven boats and two rafts. All the officers and crew were saved, but it seems that when the ship first struck, some of the passengers panicked and rushed the boats, two of which were hanging from the davits. The sudden weight caused one of the boats to fall from the davits, precipitating its passengers into the water, where four men named Falls, Parry, Wormwood and White were lost.

This was at the height of the Kalgoorlie gold rush, however, when hopeful prospectors were heading for Western Australia in their thousands, and passengers' stories suggested that more may have been drowned. The tickets had not been collected from the Adelaide passengers and there were possibly also a number of stowaways. An apparently unsubstantiated report stated that one man had shot himself while struggling in the water and a passenger named Fitzgerald claimed to have lost 300 sovereigns.⁴

Meanwhile, the schooner *Grace Darling* was beating up to Middle Island when those on board noticed lights on one of the islands. Captain Fred Douglas decided to investigate and shortly afterwards picked up a boat containing twelve of the *Rodondo*'s officers and crew. When Douglas heard that the steamer had foundered off the South East Island, where the surviving passengers and crew were stranded with practically no food, he at once set off to rescue the castaways, who included four women and two children. There was much praise later for Captain Douglas and his crew, particularly an Albany lad named Andrews, who single-handedly brought off several loads of people, five at a time, in a small dinghy.

Two of the local telegraph operators were passengers aboard the little coastal schooner, and the vessel's cabin was soon turned into an impromptu telegraph office as the two wrote out telegrams which the survivors wanted sent. When the schooner pulled into Point Malcolm, the two telegraph operators went ashore in the first boat and one set off on a fast camel for the Israelite Bay Telegraph Station, some 19 kilometres away.

At Point Malcolm, where the male survivors were landed, there was a sheep station owned by Pouton and Sharp. The conditions were extremely uncomfortable, as there were no tents and very little clothing, but the station owners could provide a plentiful supply of fresh mutton and flour, for which they were to be reimbursed by the government, and the survivors were housed in the station woolshed and issued with woolpacks to use as bedding. Douglas kept the women and children on board the *Grace Darling*. One of the children was a small baby who, at the time of the wreck, had been tied to a life buoy and thrown to a seaman in one of the boats. Unfortunately, the baby became detached in transit and fell into the water. Though promptly fished out, the child, obviously suffering from immersion as well as the subsequent hardships, was described as being in a sickly condition. Its health greatly improved after the two children, with Mrs Cousten, who appears to have been their mother, were taken to the telegraph station at Israelite Bay to stay with Mrs Ryan, wife of the telegraph station master.

The *Rodondo* was a 714-ton iron screw steamship. Built at Liverpool, England, in 1879, the brig-rigged vessel measured 73 metres by 9.2 metres by 6.5 metres, with two decks, two masts and an elliptic stern. The two engines, built in 1879 by James Jack and Company of Liverpool, provided 150 horsepower. Registered at Sydney, the vessel was owned by Howard Smith and Sons.¹²

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Iron single screw steamship, ON79328m 730g, 395n.: B1880 (8) D. & W. Henderson, Patrick, Glasgow 200.1 x 26.3 x 19.4: 1 dk & awning deck. Compound steam eng, 280nhp, by shipbuilder. Owners:- Spencers Gulf S.S. Co. Ltd reg. Port Adelaide: Dec. 1882 The Adelaide Steam Ship Co. Ltd. Wrecked, Point Malcolm, Western Australia, April 18, 1902.

The illustration below shows the vessel in the process of salvage. Today the engine block is all that is visible, though there are substantial remains on the seabed.

