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LORD HOWE’S RICH MARITIME HISTORY UNCOVERED

An anchor lost from the First Fleet armed tender, HMS *Supply*, in 1788 is just one of numerous maritime jewels being searched for by archaeologists from the NSW Heritage Office conducting surveys in the Lord Howe Island Marine Park.

“While bad weather hampered the extent of the recent survey work, important aspects of the world heritage area’s maritime history were documented,” said Deputy Premier and Minister responsible for the Heritage Act, Dr Andrew Refshauge.

A 1903 shipwreck, Ovalau - whose position had been lost to recreational divers for some years - was relocated on the first day of a remote sensing survey. The wreck site was found by using a magnetometer that measures anomalies produced by iron objects within the earth’s magnetic field.

The Ovalau was named after an island in Fiji and provided a regular service to both Lord Howe and Norfolk islands. The ship exploded and sank off Lord Howe Island after a cargo of copra caught fire. No lives were lost and the survivors were helped ashore by the Islanders who provided food and shelter until they could return to Sydney.

“This makes a significant contribution to the range of sites available to scuba divers visiting Lord Howe Island,” said Dr Andrew Refshauge.

The Ovalau, in 19-30 metres of water, represents the important history of sea transport providing supplies and services to this isolated location. It is one of about 13 wrecks lost within the vicinity of the island. Two of the island’s offshore reefs are named after early whaling shipwrecks - George (1830), and Wolf (1837).

The site was found with the assistance of Islanders who volunteered a wealth of information about Lord Howe Island’s maritime heritage.

“This exciting discovery is an important piece of the jigsaw puzzle that represents this regions rich oral, photographic and written maritime history,” said Dr Refshauge.

“Some of this information has never before been recorded. Documenting it and correcting published accounts against local knowledge is extremely valuable in recognising the island’s important place in Australia’s development.”

The work on Lord Howe Island was conducted by Heritage Office Maritime Archaeologists, staff from the Lord Howe Island Marine Park and island dive charter operator Brian Busteed who alerted the Heritage Office to the potential existence of the anchor. The project was partially funded by the dive training organisation PADI through their Project Aware program.

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"I am delighted to acknowledge this successful partnership between the NSW Heritage Office and Marine Parks Authority.

“That partnership is being extended today with our joint signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations to manage Historic Shipwrecks and other protected relics located in waters covered by State Marine Parks.

“A new document prepared by the NSW Heritage Office and the Marine Parks Authority, Marine Park Shipwrecks and other underwater relics - Management Principles, will assist in the management of sites like the Ovalau and in promoting underwater cultural heritage as a long term asset of marine parks in this State.

“Confidence in reaching out to the future is very much based on our understanding of history. This is the importance of recording and managing our heritage in all its forms.”

*Photographs of the site are available on request.

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