Shipwrecks – Byron Bay

Sailors clinging to their disintegrating ship, battling overwhelming seas, clutching at floating debris, gasping for momentary breaths in foaming surf - these are the images and experiences of shipwreck.

The NSW coast and waterways are littered with thousands of shipwrecks. Their timbers, iron plating, anchors and cargoes have become fragile records of a heroic maritime history. They are the last remnants of a time when industry, commerce, and families were directly or indirectly reliant on transport by sea.

River boats, trains and road transport linked the inland regions of the State with the ships that plied our coastal and international shipping lanes. Freight and passenger vessels came in various shapes and sizes, their form influenced by their ocean going habits or the shallow river bars of small coastal ports. Technology and cargoes also shaped the construction of the ships while commercial and political decisions determined when and where ships, rail or road were the dominant transport network.

The ships that form our maritime heritage were built locally and at ports around the world - from the small riverside slipways on the NSW coast to the mighty shipyards in England, Scotland, Canada and the USA.

Commercial and public interests did not always result in good record keeping for these vessels, the people who served on them, the passengers who entrusted their welfare to them or the cargoes that they carried. Often they were too mundane, just workhorses that kept the economy together. Many ships passed on with no surviving image to record their appearance. The day to day experiences of the passengers and crew were rarely written down. The remains on the seabed often contain the only surviving clues.

Generally, ships are not totally destroyed when they are wrecked. Parts are preserved, covered in sand, mud and marine growth. A flat expanse of sand can cover a large part of the story of the ship and the people who were associated with it. The only visible clue may be the fluke of an anchor. If this or other visible evidence of the ship is taken away, the site may be lost forever or inadvertently damaged by modern day anchors, dredging or other human activities.

We as a community can help to preserve the information held within shipwreck sites. By becoming aware of their location and place in history we can relive the joys and fears of the people they carried. We can also feel something of the trepidation and anguish of those who waited upon their arrival.

This information sheet lists some details of ships that have been lost in or near Byron Bay. If you wish to obtain more information or if you wish to share information from other sources, please contact:

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Shipwreck Databases: *Maritime Heritage Online* at http://maritime.heritage.nsw.gov.au/, or
                         Australian National Shipwreck Database at http://aima.iinet.net.au.
See also the *Shipwreck Atlas of New South Wales,* (ed 3), available from the NSW Heritage Office.

Location

Legislation

All shipwrecks over 75 years of age are automatically protected from disturbance under the State NSW *Heritage Act* 1977 & Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976.*

Relics off the NSW coast likely to be associated with historic ships are also protected under the Commonwealth Act. Relics in NSW lakes, rivers and harbours over 50 years of age are protected under the relics provisions of the *Heritage Act.*

The Heritage Office should be notified as soon as possible if a shipwreck or other underwater relic is located or prior to any activity likely to disturb shipwrecks and relics. Severe penalties apply for non-compliance with the legislation.

The Shipwrecks of Byron Bay

Andrew Fenwick - timber schooner, 74 tons gross, 23.77m length, built at Tweed River, NSW in 1875. Register of British Shipping, Sydney, folio 39 of 1875, Official No. 71834. Wrecked on a beach near Cape Byron during a voyage to the Richmond River with a cargo of flour in November 1875.

Anne Theresa - fore-and-aft timber schooner 61 tons, 23.95 metres length, built at Williams River, NSW, 1883. Register of British Shipping, Sydney, folio 75 of 1883, Official No. 83774. Sprang a leak after bumping bar at Richmond River. Forced to run aground on beach at Bryon Bay, 7 February, 1891.

Bannockburn - timber brig, 111 tons gross, 28.70 metres length, built at Cape Hawke, NSW, 1880. British Register of Shipping, Sydney, folio 30 of 1880, Official No. 75064. One of five vessels blown ashore on Belongil Beach, Byron Bay during an extreme gale on 7 July, 1889.

Columbythe - timber ketch used in the beche-de-mer trade. No further details found. Capsized off Byron Bay forcing owner, Marshall Dempster, to cling to upturned keel for several days. Finally ran ashore at Tallow Beach. Vessel travelled from South Sea Islands and already driven ashore twice passing down Australian coast. Lost on 28 February, 1924.

Fawn - timber brig, 216 tons gross, 31.39 metres length, built at Aberdeen, Scotland, 1862. British Register of Ships, Sydney, folio 49 of 1886, Official No. 45415. One of five vessels blown ashore on Belongil Beach, Byron Bay during an extreme gale on 7 July, 1889.

Hastings - timber schooner of 88 tons gross, 28.28 metres length, built at Brisbane Water, NSW, 1882. British Register of Shipping, Sydney, folio 82 of 1882. One of five vessels blown ashore on Belongil Beach, Byron Bay during an extreme gale on 7 July, 1889.

Inglis - timber brigantine, 99 tons gross, 28.56 meters length, built at Wynyard, Tasmania, 1875. Register of British Shipping, Launceston, folio 10 of 1875, Official No. 61077. Lost when loading timber off Brunswick River and driven ashore in Byron Bay on 23 August, 1879.

Jane - timber brig, 159 tons gross, 27.10 metres length, built in Nova Scotia, Canada, 1846. Register of British Shipping, Sydney, folio 18 of 1880, Official No. 32039. Employed in timber trade between Sydney and Byron Bay. Wrecked ashore at Tallow Beach in gale whilst waiting to load pine on 26 July, 1886.

Spurwing - timber schooner, 89 tons gross, 26.97 metres length, built at Brisbane Water, NSW, 1885. British Register of Shipping, Sydney, folio 5 of 1886, Official No. 89387. One of five vessels blown ashore on Belongil Beach, Byron Bay during an extreme gale on 7 July, 1889.

Tassie II - wreck lies alongside the remains of the main jetty at Byron Bay in 2-3 metres of water. Believed to be a small trader, no details located. Believed lost c.1943 or 1944 while engaged loading ammunition for United States forces.

Tuggerah - timber ketch, 62 tons gross, 24.14 metres length, built at Terrigal, NSW, 1881. Register of British Shipping, Sydney, folio 57 of 1881, Official No. 83645. Wrecked ashore in Byron Bay after the anchors failed to hold on 13 March, 1894.

Tweed - timber screw steamer, 284 tons gross, 40.23 metres length, built at Terrigal, NSW, 1889. Register of British Shipping, Sydney, folio 4 of 1890, Official No. 93621. Wrecked ashore at Byron Bay from Sydney when seas disabled tiller. Lost 22 January, 1893.

Volunteer - timber schooner, 82 tons gross, 24.99 metres length, built at Manning River, NSW, in 1860. Register of British Shipping, Sydney, folio 44 of 1860, Official No. 36857. Capsized off Cape Byron in gale with loss of crew, cargo of 120 casks of tallow washed ashore and gave name to Tallow Beach. The *Volunteer* was lost on 7 August, 1864.

William - timber brigantine, 188 tons gross, 32 metres length. Built at Prince Edward Island, 1861. Register of British Shipping, Sydney, folio 40 of 1874, Official No. 42903. Wrecked on a voyage from Sydney to load cedar during gale of 14 September, 1876.

Wollongbar - prominent shipwreck exposed at Belongil Beach in 2-3 metres of water. Steel twin screw steamer of 2005 tons gross, 87.02 metres length, built at Troon, UK, 1911. Register of British Shipping, Sydney, 38 of 1911, Official No. 131493. Grounded in shallows after driven to sea from jetty in gale. Vessel partly salvaged after loss on 14 May, 1921.