Shipwrecks
Sydney’s Northern Beaches

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 several of the ships that have been lost on or near Sydney’s Northern Beaches. 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

See also the Shipwreck Atlas of New South Wales, (ed 3), available from the NSW Heritage Office.

Location

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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.
Shipwrecks of Sydney’s Northern Beaches

**Collaroy** - Collaroy and its beach were named after the stranding of a paddle steamer there in 1881. The 54.86 metre iron vessel, *Collaroy* had been on a passage from Newcastle to Sydney when it ran aground in thick fog on 20 January. Captain Thomson ordered everybody ashore, the women and children carried through the breakers. A crew member drowned while placing the steamer’s anchors out in the ship’s boats. Four tugs arrived to help, some bringing heavy anchors and chain. The wreck lay ashore until salvaged in 1884. Built in 1853 at Liverpool, UK, *Collaroy* was finally wrecked in 1889 near California after conversion to a sailing vessel. The NSW Heritage Office located an Admiralty-pattern anchor offshore in 2001 and a Lt Rodgers Small Palm type, originally found in 1963.

**Denmark Hill and Rover** - The timber barque *Denmark Hill* sank at Pittwater, inside Palm Beach, on 26 April 1839. Loaded with coal, the 252-ton vessel had earlier grounded in Newcastle Harbour. After setting off for Sydney, leaks opened and the vessel hailed the passing steamer *Sophia Jane* for help. Two crew were drowned whilst passing towing hawsers between the vessels. The *Denmark Hill* was finally beached in the vicinity of today’s Palm Beach jetty and became a total wreck. In 1842, the small timber cutter *Rover* sank when it struck the wreck of *Denmark Hill*. The *Rover* was built at the Hawkesbury in 1839 of 10-tons and 8 metres in length. The 28-metre long *Denmark Hill* had been captured as a prize of war in 1814.

**Duckenfield** - The 368 ton single screw iron steamer *Duckenfield* operated over the 60 miles from Newcastle to Sydney, predominantly carrying coal. In a moderate southerly with poor visibility *Duckenfield* struck Long Reef on 24 May 1889. Captain Hunter and a crew of thirteen abandoned ship while the 36.6 metre vessel lay on the reef, but one sailor drowned. The *Duckenfield* drifted off and sank in 24 metres. Subsequently, a team of divers began salvage operations which lasted over a year. Built in 1875 for coal merchants J & A Brown, its compound engine remains the dominant feature on the popular wreck site.

**Euroka** - The iron steamer *Euroka*, was a 170-ton vessel built at Balmain, Sydney in 1897. The 37-metre steamer was converted from paddle to screw in 1910 and operated on the ’Sixty Miler’ run between Newcastle and Sydney. After loading coal at Lake Macquarie for Sydney, *Euroka* grounded several times. Once at sea, water was noticed entering the engine room. At 5pm on 19 October, Captain Benton gave the order to abandon ship and the vessel drifted onto the north-east point of Long Reef. Today the site is broken up in five metres of water.

**Myola** – The 655 ton steel steam collier *Myola* was built for Howard Smith’s coal trade. Built in 1913 by Smiths Dock Company Ltd. in Middlesborough, UK, the vessel had a length of 55 metres and was powered by a triple expansion steam engine. Loaded with 675 tons of coal, *Myola* left Newcastle on 1 April 1919, bound for Sydney. Encountering heavy seas, the steamer began to list to port. When off Long Reef, a heavy wave struck *Myola* which soon sank. The steamer *South Bulli* observed distress flares and spent an hour in the wild sea picking up survivors. Four of *Myola’s* crew drowned. The wreck was discovered in 1994 in 48 metres of water off Long Reef.

**Ships Graveyard – Narrabeen** - This man-made reef habitat system was begun in 1976 by sinking derelict vessels. Many were collected as hulks from Sydney’s waterways, including Berrys Bay, Kerosene Bay and Homebush Bay. Today a popular deep dive destination (40-60 metres), significant wrecks include the ex-Manly ferries *Dee Why* (1976) and *Bellubera* (1980), the bucket dredge *Coolooli* (1980), the tug *Himma* (1977), and *Meggoi* (1976). This latter vessel was built as the “Hunt-class” minesweeper, HMAS *Wexford* in 1919 and later known as HMAS *Doomba*. A range of barges, lighters and other harbour craft lie within the zone, 4 km off Narrabeen.

**Sophia Maria** – The timber vessel *Sophia Maria* was swamped by waves between North Head and Long Reef on 14 June 1803 and driven ashore a total wreck, possibly near Dee Why, without loss of life.

**Sylphide** – The timber barque *Sylphide* was wrecked in collision with the iron steamer *Ballina* on 16 June 1852. The vessel sank within thirty minutes off Dee Why without loss of life. *Sylphide* was built in Germany during 1852 of 36 metres in length and 295 tons gross. Later wreckage sighted off Blue Fish Point, North Head was thought to comprise the vessel.

**Whale** The small 14-ton timber sloop *Whale* left Sydney for the Hawkesbury River on 23 July 1814. The vessel and its two crew were lost mid-voyage and it is possible that Whale Beach is somehow associated with the loss. The *Whale* was a small vessel built at Scotland Island in 1810 by Andrew Thompson.

**Windsor** - Survivors from the wreck of the sloop *Recovery* walked from Port Stephens to Newcastle. Stripped of their clothing by a group of Aborigines, the two men and a women left Newcastle and got passage to Sydney on the 20-ton timber sloop *Windsor*. The vessel was wrecked on Sydney’s Long Reef in June 1816, from where they walked to Sydney.

**Other notable shipwreck events** *Experiment*, 1836; *Three Sisters*, 1836; *Messenger*, 1860; *Mimmie*, 1868; *Mountain Maid*, 1868; *Susannah Cuthbert*, 1875; *Emily Ann* 1899; *Greyhound*, 1894; *Marvel*, 1895; *Minnie*, 1898; *Perseverance*, 1998; *Kallawatta*, 1928; *Standard*, 1931

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