

no attempt to save the ship, preferring to sample the cargo of wine from the safety of the shore as they watched the ship break up. The wreck is located approximately 5.5 km offshore from the Moore River, just inside of the Ville de Rouen Reef. Wreckage lies scattered over a distance of 87 metres, at a depth of 7–9 metres on a reef bottom surrounded by sand. It is covered in most areas by weed growth but is still largely identifiable, making it an attractive dive site. An anchor from *Ville de Rouen* is on display outside the Guilderton Country Club. GPS position: Lat. 31° 21.63' S; Long. 115° 26.78' E.

### SS *Venus* 1923

SS *Venus* was built in Fremantle in 1897. It was a wooden sailing steamer of 63 tonnes. The vessel was bound from Fremantle to the Abrolhos Islands for the cray fishing season when it was driven ashore during a storm on August 21, 1923, 8 km to the north of *Seabird* and 11 km south of Ledge Point. Of the six crew, two drowned. The wreck lies bows-on to the beach with the boiler visible at low tide, protruding from the water about 8 metres offshore. Most of the wreckage is buried in the seabed and only becomes visible after storms have scoured away some of the sand.



*Venus* wheel

### *Seaflower* 1923

The 53-tonne wooden schooner *Seaflower* was lost on September 19, 1923, in the same area as *Seabird*. *Seaflower* was bound for Fremantle with a cargo of whale oil and guano when it was wrecked approximately 14 km north of the mouth of the Moore River. The vessel capsized in

mountainous seas, tossing the crew of five overboard. All but one man drowned and the lone survivor endured a 16 km walk to reach safety at a farm near Gingin. *Seaflower* is believed to have foundered on an offshore reefs, where it could have broken up and the pieces drifted to shore. The ship's compass is now on display at the Guilderton Country Club.

### *JP Webb* 1951

The steam-driven hopper barge, *JP Webb* was lost on its maiden voyage, *en route* from England to Melbourne. The 983-tonne barge had been built in Glasgow for the Melbourne Harbour Trust and was designed for dredging work in Port Phillip Bay, Victoria. The ill-fated vessel was launched in April 1951, only to run aground four months later on what is now known as Webb Reef. It lies 1.6 km west of Ledge Point at a depth of 3–6 metres. The boiler is clearly visible from the surface, lying about 1 metre below the water. The site has been extensively salvaged but remains an attractive and easily accessible wreck dive in good conditions. GPS position: Lat. 31° 07' S; Long. 115° 22' E.

### *Key Biscayne* 1983

The 2738-tonne jack-up oil rig *Key Biscayne* capsized during a violent storm. At the height of the storm the towlines broke and the rig began to list dangerously. It now lies upside-down with the bottom of its platform in 20 metres of water. This dive site is only suitable for very experienced divers. Persons wishing to visit this site should contact the local dive charter operators for further information.

For further information on historic shipwrecks contact the WA Museum Shipwreck Galleries or the WA Heritage Council:

<http://www.museum.wa.gov.au/collections/maritime/march/march.asp>

<http://tourism.heritage.wa.gov.au>

Text by Clare Edgar and Rebecca Van der Poll, work experience WA Museum, 1995. Updated by Jessica Berry, Tracey Miller and Jessica Reynolds, WAM 2008.



#### Diving notes

Wrecks are often hazardous. Access to the wrecks require a boat. Divers need to be fit and qualified. A divers' flag must be displayed. Never dive alone or leave a boat unattended. Persons diving on these wrecks do so at their own risk. These wrecks are part of Western Australia's heritage. They are protected under legislation. Please enjoy them but do not disturb them.

# SHIPWRECKS OF THE SILVER COAST

## Introduction

The shipwrecks in this pamphlet are located along the coastline within the Shire of Gingin. The farthest point south is Wreck Point, the site of the wreck, *Emily* and the farthest point north is between Lancelin and Wedge Island, the location of the wreck of *Oleander*. Some 14 shipwrecks have been located, spanning 330 years of seafaring mishaps. The oldest is *Vergulde Draeck* (Gilt Dragon), wrecked in 1656 and the most recent in 1983 with the sinking of the jack-up oil rig, *Key Biscayne*.



*Vergulde Draeck* artefacts

The Gingin Shire includes the town of Gingin, which is located within a pastoral region, 84 km north of Perth. The coastal town of Guilderton was named after the Dutch guilders found in sand dunes nearby. The coins and the skeleton found with them are from *Vergulde Draeck*. It is situated at the mouth of the Moore River 90 km to the north of Perth and 48 km west of Gingin. 100 km north of Perth lies the town of Seabird, named after the schooner, *Seabird* which wrecked off the coast in 1874. Ledge Point is located 120 km north of Perth. It is reputed to have been

named by J.W. Gregory during his 1847–1848 survey of the Western Australian coast in the schooner *Thetis*. Lancelin, the larger of the coastal towns, is well known for the annual windsurfing classic, held off its shores each summer. Seabird, Ledge Point and Lancelin are all renowned for the rock lobster industry. Since the 1950's, these coastal towns have grown from clusters of fishermen's huts to thriving communities. All of the wrecks listed below are accessible by boat and some can be reached from shore. Many of the wrecks are spectacular dives.



*Vergulde Draeck* astrolabe

### *Vergulde Draeck* 1656

The Dutch United East India Company ship *Vergulde Draeck*, sailed on a trading voyage to Batavia (now Jakarta) on October 4, 1655, with a crew of 193 men, a cargo of trade goods worth 106,400 guilders and eight chests of silver coin to the value of 78,600 guilders. On April 28, 1656, it struck a reef off the coast, about mid-way between what is now Seabird and Ledge Point. Within minutes the ship began to break up. Two boats were launched but only 75 crew reached the shore with a few of the provisions and stores. Pieter Albertz, the ship's master, ordered seven of the crew to sail to Batavia for assistance while he and the remainder waited ashore. Two vessels set sail from Batavia in search of the survivors. Several other expeditions were mounted in the following year but all failed to find any of the missing crew, although some wreckage was noted in the region of Fremantle. The wreck was found on April 14, 1963 by a party of divers. It lies on a reef, 5.6 km from shore and 12 km south-south-west of Ledge Point. It is an excellent dive

site in calm conditions. GPS position: Lat. 31° 31.36' S; Long. 115° 21.48' E.

### *Emily* 1868

*Emily* was a 40–tonne schooner-rigged vessel with two masts. It was built in Fremantle as a coastal trader and was launched in April 1868. Before the end of May *Emily* had completed its maiden voyage between Fremantle and Port Irwin (now Dongara) and had sailed again for Irwin. On June 13 it set out on the return voyage to Fremantle with a crew of four and a cargo of copper ore, but during the night a gale blew in from the north west and the schooner was driven ashore. Pieces of the wreck were found on the beaches of Rottneet Island but its location was not discovered until two months later, when the hull was found on the beach just south of the town of Two Rocks at a site now known as Wreck Point. The wreck lay partly covered in sand with some of the cargo of copper ore still in the hull. Over the years, the wreck was forgotten and its location is now unknown.

### *Seabird* 1874

The 40–tonne, two-masted schooner *Seabird* was built in 1865 at the Vasse River (now Busselton). On June 11, 1874 *Seabird* left Fremantle heading in a northerly direction. Aboard the vessel was general cargo and 10 passengers of which the majority consisted of ticket-of-leave men (convicts on parole). By June 13 the weather had turned foul. For two days Captain Hanham battled to keep the ship out to sea. Gale force winds finally forced him to seek shelter behind a reef 5 km from the shore, where he anchored for the night. The following day the wind shifted to the north west and the anchor dragged, allowing *Seabird* to come dangerously close to the reef. Hanham slipped the mooring chains overboard and ran it ashore, where it became stranded, approximately 9 km north of Guilderton. While the captain and crew camped near the stricken vessel, the passengers trekked north, believing they were just to the south of Geraldton. After a long and difficult journey, the two fittest men reached Dongara to raise the alarm. A subsequent inquiry found Captain Hanham guilty of negligence. The wreck was auctioned at Gingin and the cargo salvaged. Though the location of the wreck has not been identified, the remains of a small vessel that may prove to be *Seabird* lie in the breakers on a flat reef a few metres from the shore, 1.5 km south of the town of Seabird and 1.5 km north of the iron wreck *Villalta*.

### *Villalta* 1896

*Villalta* left Tacoma (U.S.A.) for Fremantle on November 9, 1896 with a crew of 18 men and a cargo of Oregon pine. The steel barque of 880 tonnes was running at about 6 knots (10 km per hour) when it hit the Leschenault Reef, 7 km south of *Seabird*. With the ship in danger of breaking up in the heavy seas, a lifeboat was launched, but within minutes it capsized and Capt. Harland and an apprentice were lost. Eventually the 16 survivors reached shore. Some time later the *Villalta* shifted its position. The ship slid off the Leschenault Reef and was eventually beached. A wreck believed to be *Villalta* lies approximately 3 km to the south of *Seabird*, in line with the leading lights into the Seabird anchorage. The wreck lies 100 metres off-shore and is easily accessible to snorkel divers. Wreckage is scattered over a wide area and partially buried in sand. At the northern end of the site, a section of hull protrudes from the water. GPS position: Lat. 31° 17.97' S; Long. 115° 27.27' E.



*Ville de Rouen*

### *Ville de Rouen* 1901

*Ville de Rouen* was a steel-hulled 1143–tonne barque built in St Nazaire, France in 1891. The ship was sailing from Cardiff bound for the Fremantle Smelting Works with 1300 tonnes of coke and pig iron, 25,000 fire-bricks and 1600 bottles of wine aboard. On October 28 a combination of strong currents and poor visibility caused the vessel to run aground, 1.2 km to the north of its present location. The next day the stricken ship had bumped across the reef and drifted to its present position. The captain and crew made