

WRECK INSPECTION REPORT

7 Mile Beach (Dongara) Unidentified¹



Department of Maritime Archaeology
Shipwreck Galleries
W. A. Museum
Cliff St. Fremantle
April 2018

¹ Image by finder Aletta Bussenschutt

Compiler M. McCarthy

Site Name: 7 Mile Beach (Dongara) Unidentified
Date lost: Post WWII

Reported by Aletta Bussenschutt 31/1/2018

Date of Inspection: 9/02/2018

Personnel: M. McCarthy OIC
Clay Bryce (WAM)
Aletta Bussenschutt (Finder)

Approximate Location: 7 Mile Beach boat ramp, Dongara

Chart No:

Lat: 29°10', 10.9" **Long:** 114° 53', 16.29"¹

File No: 115/80 **File Name:** Dongara Area

Sailing Directions:

Head north from Dongara by road to the 7 Mile Beach Turnoff. Take the sealed road west, stop at the carpark adjacent the (unsealed) 'boat ramp' (in effect a de facto beach launching facility). A short stay caravan 'park' without facilities has also been established there. When standing on the high ground south of the 'ramp' a submerged reef is visible c. 30m away immediately offshore (west). The site lies inshore of that reef around 10 metres from it. See site location image following.

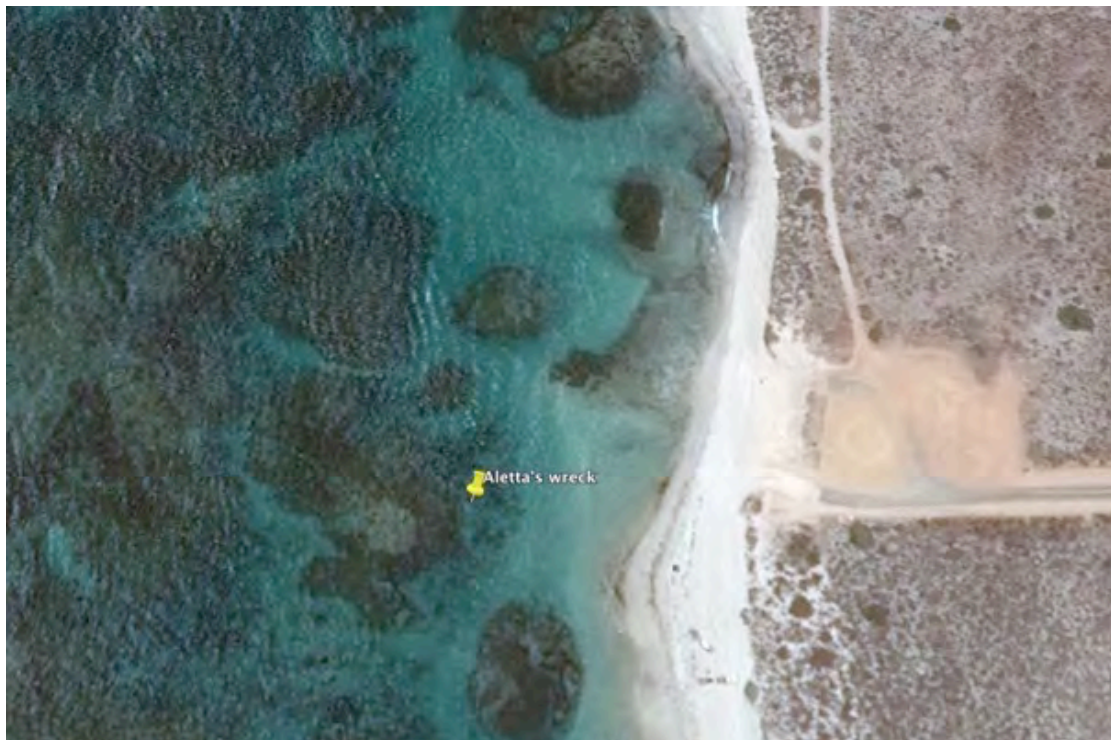
To north lies clear water amongst the reefs, a rock lobster fishing boat mooring area and a relatively clear passage to safe water. To the south

¹ Derived from Google Earth

and west lie shallow reefs that break in moderate seas and swell. A current runs south to north in the southerly winds.

The area provides a good haven for fishing boats with shelter from the prevailing southerlies and south westerly winds. Being close to shore the mooring area is also sheltered from easterly winds.

SITE LOCATION: Showing the 7 Mile Beach road, the carpark, makeshift ramp, the site and offshore reefs. (from Google Earth)



The site is sheltered from the prevailing winds and protected by an outlying reef structure to the west and south that also serves to form a natural boat haven. Fishing boat moorings (chain and in one case a close stowing anchor) are visible on sand to the north of the wreck. Though the area remains in use by large fishing vessels, those moorings close to the wreck appear to be abandoned and are too large for a vessel of this size. As such they are not part of the wreck, but do form part of the 7 Mile Beach boat haven's rudimentary infrastructure, comprising access road, ramp, moorings and an overnight unserviced caravan or camping area.

Site Photographs:

Dongara Unidentified File

Img_0713; 0328-0330 (Finder's images folder)

DSC_017-0159 (Clay Bryce images folder)

Artefacts Raised (Liam Phillips)

Site Conditions on inspection

Sea and Swell: Strong winds building from 15 knots finishing over the course of the dive at c. 30 knots plus. Low swell.

Surge: Nil

Visibility: 4-5 metres

Current: Strong, but swimmable

Sea-bed coverage e.g. weed, sand

Sketch Map showing access to Site (North is down).¹

¹ Sketch by the finder. Explanation: The annotations MMO-PSO were added as an aide memoire by M.McCarthy and reflect the Finder's occupation Marine Mammal Observer- Protected Species Observer.

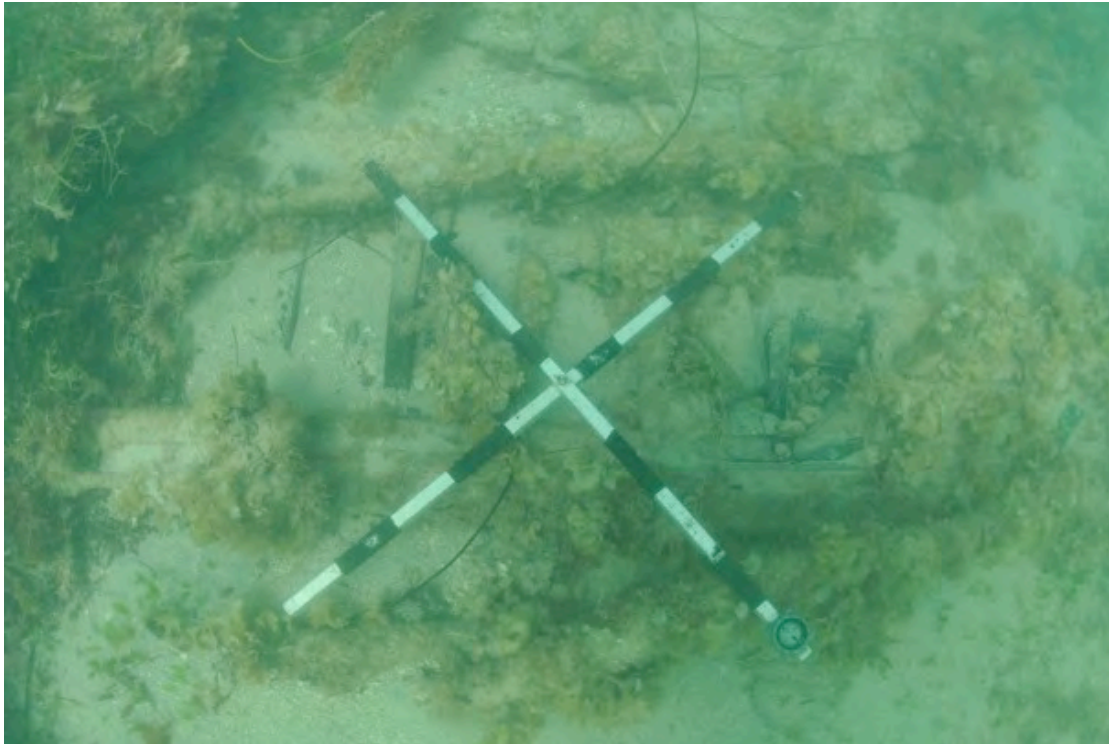


Description of Site

Ms Bussenschutt had reported timbers exposed on the sea bed with copper-alloy fittings, planking and other then unidentified features visible as shown in the image supplied with her report of finding (Front Cover). As advised by the finder, who is an experienced professional marine mammal observer, qualified diver and regular visitor to the area, when found the site has only recently uncovered.

Lying in in relatively shallow 3-4 metre deep, usually calm water, the wreckage seen during the Museum's inspection process measures c. 3 metres long by c. 2 metres wide and lies in a natural basin formed on three sides by weed banks to the east and south and to the west sand and shell sloping up towards a shallow bank.

Figure 1: The wreck from above with a one metre scale. The compass on the scale is to the north (All underwater images following: Clay Bryce, WA Museum)



As can be seen from Figure 1 above and in Figure 2 following, the wreck lies on a north-west—south-east axis, with wreckage running under the high weed bank forward (LHS of the image above) and into the sloping bank to the south (top of the image). Along the bottom of the image is the keel and keelson and across the top a propeller shaft. In Figure 2 a copper alloy dovetail fastening the sternpost to the keel is visible to the right of the image. Frames (cleared of sediment by hand fanning) are visible between the propeller shaft and keelson and beneath them are the starboard planks. A loose timber, later found to be the lower part of the propeller aperture was found in the area hand fanned to the right of the image. (See Figure 7). This was later identified as Jarrah (*Eucalyptus Marginata*), a local species often used in boat building.¹

Parts of the keelson and keel project above the sloping sandy bottom at the north edge of the site (lower part of the image). The 15 cm long bone visible in the foreground was found loose on the site. Clearly, it was used for bait.

¹ By Dr Ian Godfrey, former head of the WA Museum's conservation section and an experienced timber analyst.

Figure 2 Showing a copper alloy dovetail fastening the sternpost to the keel to the right of the image. Frames are visible between the propeller shaft (top) and keel and beneath them are the starboard planks. The bait bone is in the foreground.



In Figure 3 a threaded copper (salmon pink in colour) keel bolt is found passing through the keel and keelson and this is fastened with a copper - alloy (golden colour) nut. In Figure 4 the copper-alloy dovetail joining keel and keelson to the sternpost dominates the image while a close examination shows that the outer planking aft is fastened with standard small boat rivets. In the Figure 5 a loose screw fastening, possibly a 'hangar bolt' of a type that once secured the engine to its bed is visible. Above it a tarpaulin, nearby lie engine control cables. Frames fastened with copper or copper-alloy boat rivets are also visible.

Figure 3: A threaded keel bolt fastened with a nut



Figure 4: The copper alloy dovetail joining the keel and stempost. Inboard is a plank fastened with copper or copper alloy rivets (All are turned green with copper corrosion products).



Figure 5: A threaded through bolt with nut, possibly a 'hangar bolt' used to secure and engine to the floors near a synthetic tarpaulin with grommets (centre). Frames are visible top left and bottom right.



Figure 6: The heavily-colonised engine and below it the propeller shaft.



Material Raised

Top) Hangar bolt? (430mm by 18mm diameter, with screw thread and 35mm nut).

LHS lower) Jarrah Stern Aperture (*Eucalyptus Marginata*)

RHS lower) Animal bone (Cut longitudinally)

Figure 7: The material raised (Photo: Liam Phillips, Flinders University)



Site Identification Comments

While an attempt was not made to excavate under the weed mats in order to confirm the vessel's original length, the visible wreckage at just over 3 metres long from aft of the engine to the sternpost, indicates that the remains are those of a c.7 metre-long engine driven wooden crayfishing (rock lobster) boat built partly of Jarrah, a Western Australian timber. The tarpaulin, engine controls and bait bone appear to date the wreck from the period when synthetic tarpaulins were readily available to before the prohibition on animal baits around 1990.¹ As would be expected of any vessel lying close to shore in a well-known boat haven, the wreck would have been extensively salvaged for easily recovered re-usable materials.

¹ Pers Com., Dr Howard Gray, whose Ph.d. is on the local rock lobster (crayfishing) industry. Apparently animal hair from the roughly-butchered baits was often found on the forepart of the crayfish, proving unacceptable with the advent of the Japanese live rock lobster industry, where contaminants such as animal hide were totally unacceptable.

The sinking of such a small vessel in a known boat haven is not expected to have resulted in any press or official record. Thus the cause of its loss is unknown. With its bows to the shore, inside a shallow reef complex, in sheltered water much deeper than the draught of a vessel of its size, perhaps it was anchored in an easterly offshore breeze (possibly overnight) when it sank. It is also possible the vessel sank after striking a reef further out.

(iii) Modern Salvage: Nil

(iv) Casual Diver interference, if any. None seen.

(v) Modern diver use, if any. Visitation appears to have been limited to the finder and the museum team.

Assessment of Site Significance

(i) Archaeological: The site is the wreck of a small, Western Australian built fishing boat type common in the post war era.

(ii) Technological: The wreck is representative of the post war type.

(iv) Educational: The wreck could be visited by school and other groups as part of a learning or recreational experience and help link them to earlier fishers, their families and their habits. The story of its finding by Ms Bussenschutt could also highlight the families and craft in the local rock lobster industry before the advent of aluminium and fibreglass boats.

Management Proposals

i) It is recommended the wreck is left *in situ*.

ii) A media release to relate the story of the wreck's finding by Ms Bussenschutt could also highlight the families and craft in the local rock lobster industry before the advent of aluminium and fibreglass boats, and seek public feedback to hopefully identify the vessel.