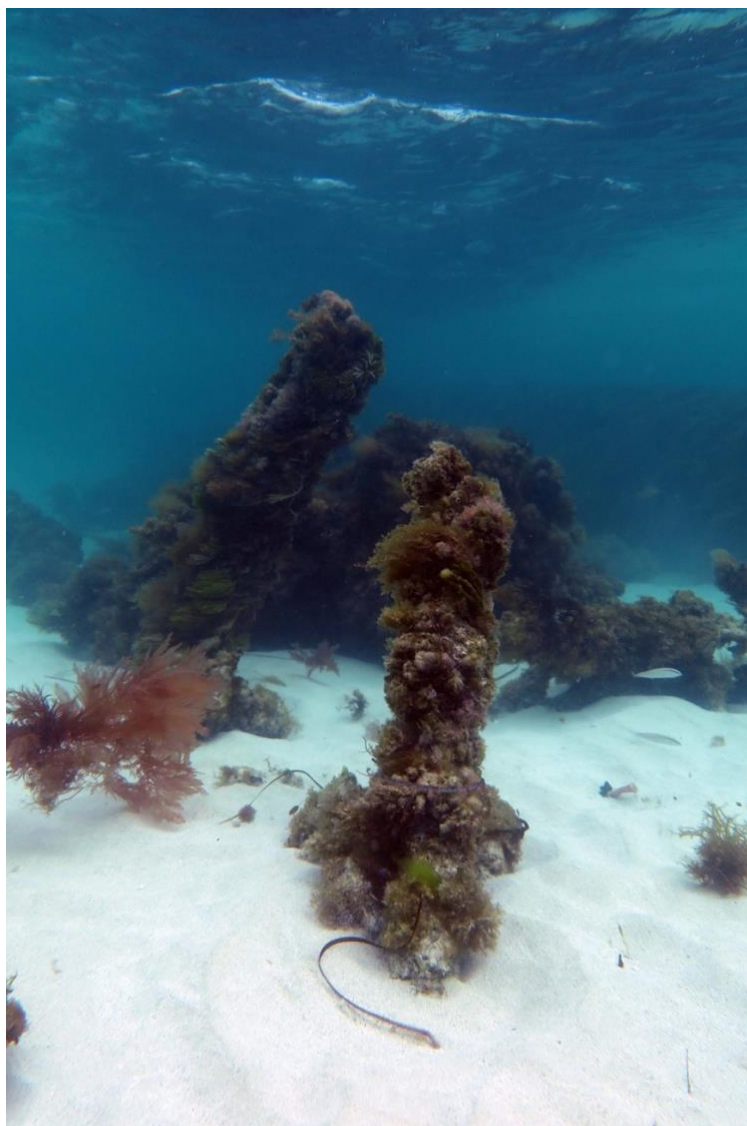


Site Inspection Report

Green Islands Unidentified - *Miss Phoenix* (1949-1961)

Buller, Whittell & Green Islands Nature Reserve – Jurien Bay Marine Park



By: Aurora Philpin and Deb Shefi

Report No. 341 — Western Australian Museum, Department of Maritime Heritage

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), specifically Jurien Bay Marine Parks, for sharing initial video footage of the Green Islands unidentified wreckage that instigated the writing of this report and was later identified as *Miss Phoenix*. Thank you to Jurien Bay Marine Parks for providing vessel support, allowing the WA Museum to record and further research the wreck site. Further, the authors would like to acknowledge the assistance of members of the public for sharing local knowledge on their connection to some of the vessels wrecked in the area of Green Islands. Specifically, the authors would like to thank James Paratore, Marilyn Gazeley and Fred Sharp for sharing their local knowledge.

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Site Name: Green Islands Unidentified/ *Miss Phoenix*
Date Lost: 1961

Reported by: Emma Rowe (DBCA) - 6/06/2023

Date of Inspection: 15/11/2023

Personnel:

Deb Shefi (WAM)
Aurora Philpin (WAM)
Emma Rowe (DBCA)
Roger Whitelaw (DBCA)
Andre Bobojcov (DBCA)
David Scanlon (DBCA)

Approximate Location: The eastern aspect of Green Islands, within a protected bay, 85 m from shore.

Lat: 30°40'48.26"S **Long:** 115° 6'23.26"E **Datum:** (WGS84)

Sailing Directions:

Departing from the Jurien Bay Harbour, travel approximately 30 nm in a south-westerly direction, along the outside of fringing islands until arriving at Buller, Whittell and Green Islands Nature Reserve.

Site Location:

The site is located on the eastern side of Green Islands, within a protected bay-like area, in a sandy seabed, and is identified via the presence of two, noticeably large, linear structures on the sea floor that appear dark from the surface (Figure 1).

Buller, Whittell & Green Islands Nature Reserve is a breeding site for sea lions and forms part of the Jurien Bay Marine Park. The site is protected by Green Islands from southerly, south-westerly and north-westerly wind and swell, providing a natural boat haven on the eastern side in these conditions. The site lies approximately 85 m leeward of the island, in a depth of 1.8 m at low tide.



Figure 1. The eastern aspect of Green Islands in the Buller, Whittell, & Green Islands Nature Reserve; site location is outlined in red (sourced from Google Earth 2023).

Site Photographs:

Images located on WA Museum server.

- Green Islands UNID 2023 Aurora (Green Islands Unidentified 15.11.2023-001-064)
- Green Islands UNID 2023 Deb (Green Islands Unidentified 15.11.2023-065-088)

Site Videos:

Videos located on WA Museum server.

- Green Islands UNID 2023 Aurora (Green Islands Unidentified Video 15.11.2023-001-004)

Site Conditions on Inspection:

Sea and Swell: On the day of site inspection, a southerly wind was forecasted for up to 26 kts. Due to the protection of the island, swell was well below 1 m.

Surge: Nil

Visibility: 10 m

Current: Nil

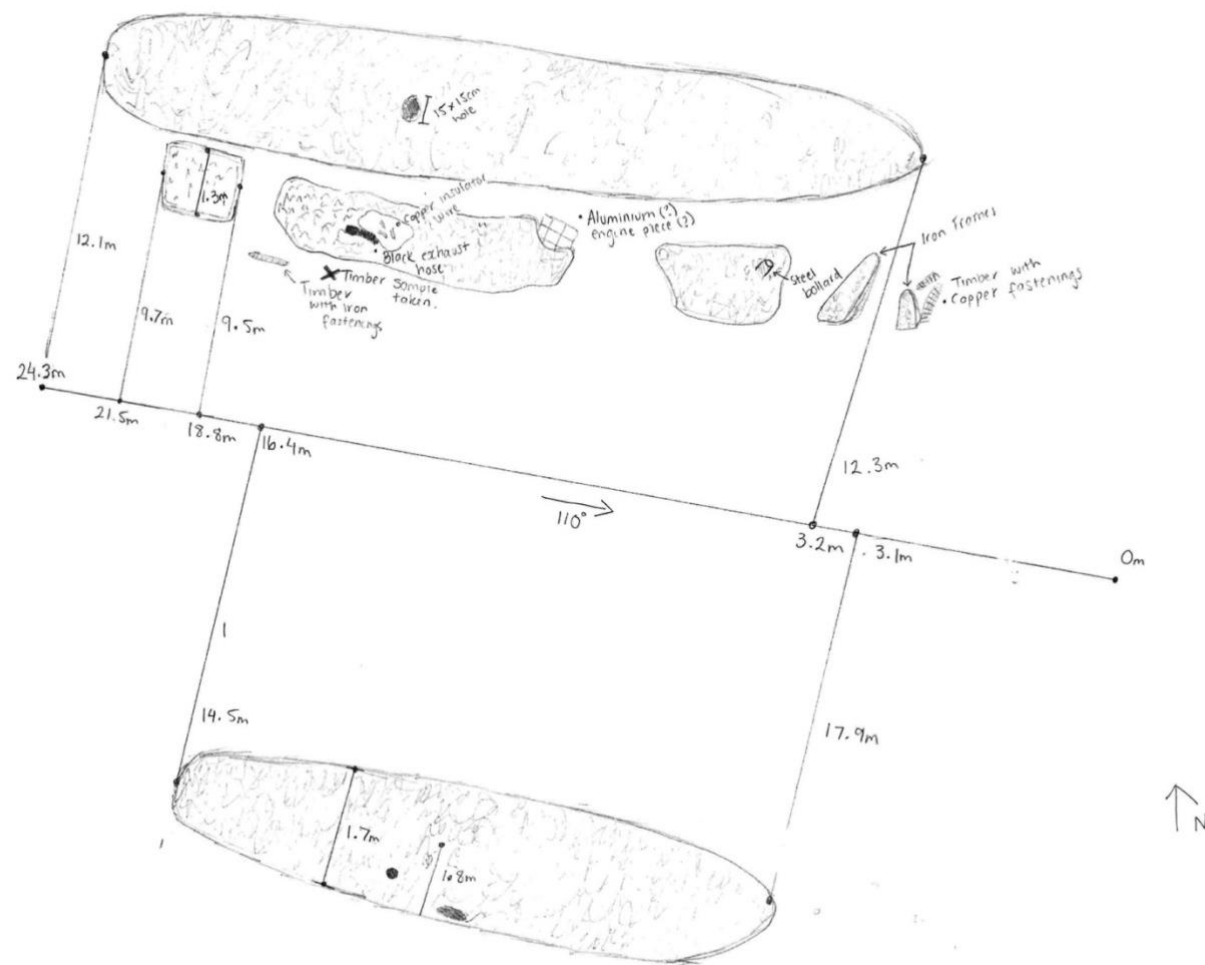
Sea-bed Coverage: Sand

Description of Site

The site is located in a protected sandy bay with flat seabed topography and is identifiable by two large, linear features that are approximately 17 m long and 20 m apart. Additional material is scattered along the eastern feature. The wreckage above the sand is approximately 18 m in length and includes timbers, possible iron and timber frames, as well as iron and copper fastenings. There are modern features amongst the wreckage, including copper insulator wires, a large black possible exhaust hose, a steel bollard and an unknown aluminum feature. Some of the timbers on site appear black in colour, possibly a result of being burnt.

Large mechanical vessel components, such as anchors, anchor chain, machinery, engines, propellers or propeller shafts were not visible during the survey. Remaining material on site equates to what would expect of a stripped vessel prior to sinking. It is also possible that the vessel was salvaged post-sinking as the site is protected and easily accessible.

The two linear features are pontoon-like, each have a width of approximately two metres, length of 17 m, and appear upside down as they taper towards the seafloor on one end. Adjacent to the eastern-most linear feature is a square, hollow object with a width of 1.5 m. After removing some of the marine growth from the edge of the square, its surface appeared black with active iron corrosion plate fragments resting in the interior. The black material was inspected for signs of fiberglass or corrosion but appears to be constructed in plastic. The two linear features both have holes in them. The western linear feature has one small round hole, 5 cm in diameter, while the eastern has an oblong hole the width of a hand. Heavy marine growth, active corrosion, and wood borer activity are present on the site. A sketch map of the site is shown below (Figure 2).



GREEN ISLANDS UNIDENTIFIED SITE SKETCH

AURORA PHILPIN 23.11.2023

Figure 2. Green Islands unidentified site sketch (WA Museum).

Material Raised

One loose timber fragment found adjacent to iron and timber fastenings was raised for analysis. The timber derived from a plank.

Timber analysis was undertaken by Dr Ian Godfrey. Preliminary results indicate the timber is eucalypt, suggesting the vessel was locally built (pers. comm. Godfrey). Further analysis is being undertaken at the time this report was drafted.

Known vessels lost in the project area of relevant size

Prior to undertaking fieldwork, a desktop assessment of known vessel losses in the area was conducted, resulting in a possible four outcomes: *North Cape*, *Nord-Star*, *Miss Phoenix*, or an unrecorded loss.

North Cape (1936-1953)

North Cape was a 112 gross ton freezer boat, built in 1936 in the United Kingdom and registered in Cape Town, South Africa (WAM Vessel Record #17151; Lloyds Register 1950). The vessel had a length of 23.6 m, breadth of 6.2 m and was powered by one four-cylinder diesel engine (WAM Vessel Record #17151). Historic records note the vessel burnt at anchor, 40 km south of Jurien Bay in April of 1953, during its first crayfishing season in Western Australia; the crew fought the fire for six hours before the vessel was abandoned (*The Farmers' Weekly* 1953).

Nord-Star (1946-1960)

Nord-Star was built in Fremantle in 1946 and was an 18.9 m long by 5.2 m wide, wooden motor vessel of 62.3 gross tons (WAM Vessel Record #17130). Prior to becoming a planked trawler with a refrigerated capacity of 15 ton, *Nord-Star* was built for use as a WWII transport vessel (*Geraldton Guardian and Express* 1947; WAM Vessel Record #17130). In June 1960, *Nord-Star* sank off Green Islands, in 7 m of water after striking a reef; three attempts were made to salvage the vessel and all failed (WAM Vessel Record #17130; Dickson 1994:195).

Miss Phoenix (1949-1961)

Miss Phoenix was a wooden fishing vessel propelled under both sail and motor, with a length of 19.8 m, breadth of 5.5 m and gross tonnage of 71.66 (WAM Vessel Record #16693) (Figure 3). The vessel was ketch rigged with two masts, had a cruiser stern and one deck. Inside were two internal combustion, reciprocating diesel engines, running to two propeller shafts (WAM Vessel Record #16693). When *Miss Phoenix* was built by K. W. Thompson in Fremantle in 1949, it was regarded as the largest vessel in the crayfishing industry, with the freezers onboard being able to hold up to 900 kg of crayfish (Dickson 1994:202; *The Daily News* 1955; WAM Vessel Record #16693). On 11 March 1961, *Miss Phoenix* caught fire and was abandoned off Green Islands, where the vessel was gutted and then sank (Dickson 1994:202; WAM Vessel Record #16693) (Figure 4 & Figure 5). As *Miss Phoenix* burnt to the

waterline, the vessel was regarded as beyond salvage (WAM Vessel Record #16693).



Figure 3. Crew members Sam Miragliotta, Jack Lopes (?), Lally Mezzina (?), and Jack Tognolini onboard *Miss Phoenix* (Sourced from James Paratore, WA Rock Lobster Fishers' Federation, 2023).



Figure 4. *Miss Phoenix* on fire (Sourced from Max Gazeley image collection via WA Rock Lobster Fishers' Federation, 2023).



Figure 5. *Miss Phoenix* wreck visible above waterline showing distance offshore Green Islands (Sourced from Max Gazeley image collection via WA Rock Lobster Fishers' Federation, 2023).

As the area of Green Islands is known locally for commercial fishing, and Green Islands was used as a protected anchorage, there is the chance that the unidentified wreckage could be an unrecorded loss. The commercial fishing industry in Western Australia expanded from the 1940s, causing the development of permanent settlements along the central coast (Huddleston 2009: 10). Given the reliance that coastal settlements around the area of Green Islands have had on commercial fishing since the 1940s, a large number of vessels have likely traversed through the area. There is thus a possibility that unrecorded vessels may have been lost in the area.

Identifying the site

Based on a combination of local knowledge, images supplied by the public and an initial site investigation by WA Museum staff, the Green Islands unidentified site has been identified as *Miss Phoenix*.

Of the three potential vessels that align with the size of the Green Islands unidentified site, *Nord-Star* was recorded to have sank in 7 m of water, after striking a reef. The wrecking event of *Nord-Star* does not align with the depth and location of the unidentified site. Comparatively, the presence of burnt timbers aligns with the wrecking events of both *Miss Phoenix* and *North Cape*. Preliminary timber analysis results identifying eucalypt indicates a locally built vessel, thus eliminating both *North*

Cape and *Nord-Star* from being likely contenders for the identity of the unidentified vessel, as both were built outside of Australia (pers. comm. Godfrey). *Miss Phoenix*, being built in Fremantle, burnt to the waterline, gutted and abandoned east of Green Islands, supports the identification. The removal of interior components of *Miss Phoenix* when the vessel was gutted, could explain for the lack of vessel components on the site, such as anchors, machinery, propeller shafts and propellers. Members of the public with local fishing knowledge on the Green Islands area, James Paratore, Marilyn Gazeley and Fred Sharp, have also shared with the authors that they are in agreeance that this site is *Miss Phoenix*.

Upon initial investigation, the authors were not able to explain the reason for the presence of the two, linear features found on either side of the timber wreck site. The features are mostly cylindrical in form with a one flat side, and pointed ends. One theory is that they are lifting pontoons or 'camels' used in an undocumented salvage attempt (R. Anderson, pers. comm., 23/11/23). Although the vessel itself was described as being beyond salvage, valuable parts and machinery would still have economic value and be worth salvaging. The fact that neither of *Miss Phoenix*'s two diesel engines, propellers or anchors are on site support this theory. The above mentioned members of the public were asked about any knowledge on the salvage of the vessel or use of pontoons in the area, however they had no further information to provide, and there are no historical references to any attempts made to salvage the vessel. The origins of these pontoons, whether they may have been part of the original wreckage or not, would likely be determined via further investigation.

Recommendations

1. That the site is added to the WA Museum's database of Maritime Archaeological sites, and Australian Underwater Cultural Heritage Database.
2. That the site is recorded as a maritime cultural heritage site within the Jurien Bay Marine Park.
3. Due to the limited information available related to the linear, pontoon-like features, further investigation is warranted to fully interpret the site. Test trenches on the *Miss Phoenix* wreck site are recommended to further clarify whether the linear features are linked to a failed salvage attempt or provide another explanation. Any objects identified during excavation can be recorded and reburied on site to minimise *ex situ* conservation and storage costs.

References

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