

in Geraldton the following day. The wreck was heavily salvaged at the time and was excavated by the WA Museum. It is an interesting dive.

Ben Ledi

Ben Ledi, bound for Calcutta from Sydney, was 105km south of the Abrolhos on 16 December, 1879. The captain went aloft the mainmast with his telescope and estimated the mainland to be 68 km away. Expecting to clear the Abrolhos, he sailed north-west by west. At 11 pm *Ben Ledi* struck a reef near the south end of Pelsaert Island. The 1107-tonne iron sailing ship could not be refloated and five crew arrived in Geraldton in a rescue boat on 19 December. The captain was not charged as the loss was attributed to the currents circulating around the Abrolhos. It is a good dive.



Ben Ledi

Orpheus

This schooner, owned by the guano merchants Broadhurst, MacNeil and Company, was wrecked on Wooded Island on 5 February, 1897. It dragged its anchors, causing it to be driven onto a reef. Futile efforts were made to get it off the reef.

Windsor

Whilst on a voyage from Fremantle to Hong Kong, this 1853-tonne iron steamer was wrecked on Half Moon Reef near Pelsaert Island during the night of 2 February, 1908. Numerous lives were lost, and the wreck was given very broad coverage in the local press. The vessel was carrying a full cargo of 2600 tonnes of sandalwood and was insured for £25000. A rescue operation was carried out by SS *Venus*;

the government steamer, *Penguin*; and the tug, *Uraidla*. The wreck is a good dive when the seas are flat calm.

Jon Jim

Jon Jim, a 36.6-tonne freezer boat was wrecked on the southern end of Pelsaert Island on 17 July, 1961. The wreck lies between a small islet now named Jon Jim Island and Wreck Point on the main island itself. The skipper had set a course for Wreck Point, expecting to miss it due to bad weather conditions. However, the weather didn't blow the ship off course as much as he had calculated. This led to it running hard aground against the cliff where it now lies.



An aerial view of the Abrolhos

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>

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Diving notes

Wrecks are often hazardous. Access to the wrecks requires a boat. Divers need to be fit and qualified. A diver's flag must be displayed. Never dive alone or leave 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.

WRECKS IN THE ABROLHOS ISLANDS

Introduction

The Houtman Abrolhos is a group of islands and reefs situated about 80 km west off the Western Australian coast. These islands were named after Fredrick de Houtman, who discovered and charted them in 1619. The word Abrolhos is Portuguese for 'keep your eye open' or 'look out'. The Houtman Abrolhos comprises three main island groups: the Pelsaert Group, sometimes known as the Southern Group, the Easter Group, the Wallabi Group and North Island. From 1844 to 1945 the islands were mined for their guano, the result of many years of numerous sea birds living and breeding there. The waters surrounding the islands now support a thriving rock lobster industry.



An artist's impression of *Batavia*

Houtman Abrolhos Wreck Trail

Batavia

This was the flagship of the Dutch United East India Company fleet that left Holland in 1628 en route to the East Indies. On board were 316 people including the President of the Fleet and Commander, Francisco Pelsaert; skipper, Adriaen Jacobsz; supercargo, Jeronimus Cornelisz and a number of passengers. *Batavia* also carried cargo of cloth, lead, cochineal as well as valuable jewellery and 12 chests of silver coins. In 2006 the *Batavia* site was added to the National Heritage List. After leaving the Cape of Good Hope it was separated from

the rest of the fleet by a storm. Cornelisz and some of the other officers had conspired to seize the ship and engage in piracy. Mutiny was close at hand on the night of 4 June, 1629 when *Batavia* crashed into the coral reef surrounding the Wallabi Group of the Houtman Abrolhos. The majority aboard landed on some small, waterless islands. Pelsaert and 46 of his crew sailed to Batavia for help in one of the ship's boats. After their departure, Cornelisz planned to capture the rescue vessel on its return, killing all who disagreed. There was a huge massacre in which 125 people were murdered. Evidence of this massacre was revealed with the discovery of graves found on the islands. When Pelsaert returned, the mutineers, including Cornelisz, were rounded up and some were executed for their crimes.

Currently on display at the WA Museum Shipwreck Galleries in Fremantle and the Geraldton Museum are artefacts from the wreck, including the stern section from the hull of *Batavia* and the stone portico destined for Batavia. Also on display is the skeleton of a victim of *Batavia* massacre, which has chipped skull, most likely caused by a blow from a sword. The wreck site is an excellent dive in the right conditions.

Zeewijk

The retourship *Zeewijk* departed Vlissingen, Holland, on



Zeewijk artefacts

7 November, 1726, bound for Batavia with a crew of 212 men and a rich cargo, including 315836 guilders carried in 10 chests. After successfully reaching the Cape of Good Hope in March 1727, it set off on 21 April for a voyage across the Indian Ocean. At 7 pm on 9 June, *Zeewijk* unexpectedly struck Half Moon Reef on the western side of the Pelsaert

Group. The look-out had seen breakers half an hour earlier, but had thought it was a reflection of the moonlight. The crew blamed the skipper for running too near the coast. He was later prosecuted for his carelessness.

A camp was established on Gun Island and articles were salvaged from the wreck. Eleven of the best seamen, along with the first officer, set sail for Batavia but were never heard of again. Using remnants of *Zeewijk*, the stranded seamen built a small sailing vessel which they called *Sloepie*. In late March 1728, the remaining 82 survivors left for Batavia, arriving at Sunda Straits on 21 April with all the treasure. The wreck is now broken up.

Ocean Queen

On the night of 13 September, 1842, the 268-tonne barque *Ocean Queen* struck the Pelsaert Group of the Abrolhos. The 18 crew members, including the captain, landed on Pelsaert Island where they stayed for 10 days. They then set out for Fremantle in the ship's boats, but due to strong winds, they landed 70 nautical miles north of the Fremantle settlement and walked the remaining distance. All that remains of the wreck is a pile of ballast stones.

Venus

On 10 April, 1851, en route to Fremantle from Batavia and Singapore, this 28-tonne schooner struck one of the reefs surrounding the Pelsaert Group. The crew survived on an island until 15 October when three of the crew rowed to the mainland. The others were rescued a week later by *Evergreen*, but the cook died two weeks after the wrecking. The wreck has not been found.

Preston

The 19-tonne schooner, *Preston*, ran ashore on Pelsaert Island on the morning of 20 September, 1855. Anchors were used to try to drag the vessel off the shore, but this failed. Its cargo was unloaded and the vessel was abandoned on 2 October by the crew. They then left for Port Gregory in the ship's boats. Later that summer, after a few salvage attempts, *Preston* was finally departed and continued trading until it was wrecked in July 1861.

Cochituate

This 347-tonne American barque was bound for Singapore from Melbourne, when it struck a reef at 3 am on 14 June, 1861. The ship struck with such force that the helmsman broke his shoulder bone on the spokes of the wheel. With the

ship beginning to break up, the crew split into two parties, taking to the ship's boats. Sailing south, they abandoned both boats at Arrowsmith River. Some of the crewmen were reported to have eaten dead fish and birds, and a dog which they killed at Moore River. A man was sent ahead of the main group and arrived in Fremantle on 30 June. The others were found by mounted troopers on 2 July in a dreadful state of starvation. The wreck has not been found.



Flying Foam

Flying Foam

Before heading for Champion Bay, this 33-tonne schooner, hit the jetty at Fremantle and had its stern patched with canvas. It then went missing during a gale on 10 March, 1812 and was most likely sank in deep water south of the Abrolhos.

Cleopatra

At 4 am on 20 November, 1874, this three-masted schooner became stranded on the east side of Pelsaert Island. One passenger said that he was awoken by the whistling of birds and went on deck to find an island only 70–90 metres away. At high tide it was warped free. The captain was later censured in court for failing to ensure a satisfactory look-out.

Hadda

Bound for Fremantle from the Lacepedes, the 334-tonne barque *Hadda* struck a reef in the Wallabi group at 10 pm on 30 April, 1877. The 11 crew members saw, and probably explored Beacon Island, but slept on the water-logged ship until 7 May. The crew arrived in two of the ship's boats