

and, with its steering disabled and hull plating damaged, was beached nearby. Passengers (mainly army personnel and Fremantle Jail prisoners on work release to help build roads and airstrips) and most of the crew were moved to the beach for safety and the vessel was then patched and pumped out. Some women and children were rescued by a small Kalumburu mission lugger, while others walked for five days to Kalumburu mission, 200 km south. After two weeks the *Koolama* was patched and refloated, though still disabled without a rudder. Captain Eggleston continued to Wyndham and successfully navigated *Koolama* to its destination using the twin propellers to steer up the dangerous Cambridge Gulf. However less than 24 hours after docking on March 3, a Japanese bombing raid on Wyndham forced all hands to abandon ship, and when the engineers returned it was well down at its stern. Shortly afterwards *Koolama* rolled on to its starboard side and sank where it remains to this day.

SS *Karrakatta* 1901

Karrakatta was a 1251 ton steamship owned by the West Australian Steam Navigation Company, which did regular runs between WA and Singapore via outports. It was carrying a cargo of mails, wool and timber as well as passengers. On March 26, 1901, the ship hit the bottom twice and two of the holds quickly filled with water. As the ship grounded the captain immediately dropped the anchors which resulted in less peril for the ship, due to the huge tidal currents. All aboard were saved and taken ashore. The wreck can not be reached due to its hazardous position and fairly fast decay caused by the tidal currents. Location: near Swan Point at the approach to King Sound.

The Lacepede Islands

This area has some 50 wrecks listed as missing between 1877–1935. Most are pearling luggers and small coastal vessels. Eight were larger vessels of 300 tons or more engaged in the shipment of guano.

SS *Colac* 1910

North of Fremantle lay the profitable route dubbed the “wild and woolly west.” The Adelaide Steamship Company’s best passenger ship was SS *Koombana* built especially for the north-west trade in 1909. *Colac*, which was outdated by this new ship, was still running regularly on the north-west coast at the time, and could stow a maximum of 291 bullocks and 2000 sheep or 376 bullocks. It also had the capacity to

cater for 15 passengers. In 1910, *Colac* was wrecked when it was stranded in King Sound. The Marine Court found the master of *Colac* guilty of poor navigation and suspended his certificate for two months.

Pearling luggers 1863–1967

The pearling industry suffered losses in lives and luggers. Many major losses have occurred in cyclones, due to currents, submerged reefs and rocks of the Kimberley coast. More than 50 boats have been lost at one time. The remains of most of these small vessels have not been found. It was reported in the press in 1887 that the wreck of *Dairy Maid* lies buried on the beach at Roebuck Bay, and the *Osprey* lying in 15.5 metres of water 9.6 km west of the pearling ground off Ninety Mile Beach.



Pearling luggers

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 seaworthy 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.

WRECKS OF THE KIMBERLEY COAST

Introduction

The Kimberley region coastline of north-west WA is rugged and remote. Since the mid-1600s, fishermen from south east Asian islands to the north (now part of Indonesia) have visited the Kimberley coast in search of trepang (sea cucumber), trochus shell, clams and fish. Many European ships passed the coast on their way to the East Indies. Later, guano, was mined and shipped from the offshore islands. Most of the shipwrecks occurred due to the climatic conditions of the Kimberley, a region prone to cyclones, large tides and strong currents.



Ann Millicent

Lively 1810

The wreck of the London south seas whaler *Lively* was found on Mermaid Atoll, Rowley Shoals. Originally French, it was captured as a prize by the British Navy during the Anglo-French wars and subsequently owned by a London whaler and merchant Daniel Bennett. *Lively* is one of the earliest and most significant whaling wrecks in Australia, and while most of the wooden hull has been destroyed anchors, whaling trypots, cannon and other iron fittings remain on the wreck site. Location: 17° 05.381' S 119° 35.490' E.

Ann Millicent 1888

The three-masted, 936-tonne iron barque, *Ann Millicent*, was built in Hull, England in 1865. On January 5, 1888, the barque ran aground on an uncharted reef to the south of Cartier Island. After attempts to refloat it, the crew abandoned it and sailed for Timor. Today the ship's hull is broken up but at low tide the remains are visible. Five anchors can be seen towards the bow and a corroded cast iron cannon lies to the port side of the wreck. The site is accessible from the sea but care is needed when approaching the reef.

Swan 1883

The 27-ton *Swan* was a wooden cutter, built in Fremantle in 1875 for Isaac Doust of Cossack. The vessel sailed from Beagle Bay on September 2, 1883 with a cargo of water for the Lacepede Islands and mail for King Sound. Aboard was the owner with a crew of five Aborigines. The vessel struck unfavourable north westerly winds and was driven out to sea. Doust tried to land at two places along the coast but was driven off by local Aborigines on each occasion. It was October 18 before the crew finally made their way into Darwin. After repairing *Swan*, Doust set sail for Cossack but he and his vessel did not survive the voyage. The cutter struck a reef off Cape Londonderry near Stewart Island. The five crew made their way back to Beagle Bay but Doust was not with them. It was reported at the time that he had been murdered and thrown overboard by one of the crew. In July 1884, four of the men were arrested but the case was never proved and Doust's body was never recovered. A wreck presumed to be *Swan* was reported to the Derby police in February 1885.

Browse Island wrecks 1878–1894

For about 10 years Browse Island was mined internationally for guano. However, due to storms, treacherous tides and unseen reefs, many vessels were lost. Some of the wrecked ships are listed here.

Matterhorn, Carleton, Runnymede 1878

On March 11, 1878 a cyclone passed over Browse Island, wrecking the three-masted, 1327-tonne German ship *Matterhorn* and the 754-tonne British barque *Carleton*. The captain of *Matterhorn* and 16 crew drowned. Four from the German barque *Flora* died attempting to assist the stricken *Matterhorn*. On December 22, 1878 the 650-tonne iron

barque *Runnymede* was wrecked in another cyclone.

Florida 1887

During the night of September 12, 1887, while on a voyage from Port Pirie, South Australia to Normanton, Queensland, the 219-tonne, three-masted schooner *Florida* struck a reef on the southern shore of Browse Island. Within weeks the wooden vessel had completely broken up. Wreckage can be seen at low tide, buried in the sand on a rocky shelf just off-shore.

Yarra 1884

The 490-tonne *Yarra* was an iron barque built in Sunderland, England in 1870. On December 1, 1883 the vessel set sail from Lakes Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria under the command of Captain Lewis Schutt. The vessel was bound for Falmouth, England with a cargo of guano when it struck Scott Reef during a cyclone in January 1884. All aboard had to abandon ship and take to a makeshift raft, as the ship's boats had been washed away during the gale. After 13 days at sea they reached Browse Island some 160 km to the east. The wreck is 70 metres inshore from the edge of Scott Reef and is partly exposed at low tide and clearly visible on low spring tides. The hull is reasonably intact and offers snorkelers and reef walkers a visually attractive site to explore. Location: 14° 02.3' S 121° 46.00' E.



SS Sunbeam

SS Sunbeam 1892

The 49-ton steam yacht, *Sunbeam* was built in Middlesex,

England in 1861. This graceful schooner-rigged vessel was constructed of iron with one deck, three masts and a square stern. The original 20-horsepower vertical engine was removed in 1890 and replaced with an 18-horsepower compound engine. In that same year the vessel was purchased by Lord Gilbert Sackville of Canteloupe, with the intention of making a fortune in pearling in the north-west of Western Australia. After repairs in Colombo, *Sunbeam* arrived at the Kimberley coast. While anchored off Osborne Island a leak was discovered. The leak was poorly patched, and the yacht continued to take water caused by corrosion of the iron hull plates. It sank on a mud bank about 1 km from shore. The wreck was found in 1968. It is clearly visible at low tide when the boiler, deck beams and the upper portion of the iron frames are exposed. Location: 14° 21' S 126° 01.5' E.

Calliance 1864

The 809-tonne ship *Calliance* was commissioned to transport settlers and livestock from Melbourne to Camden Harbour. On December 22, 1864 the ship struck an unmarked reef near Adele Island. To lighten the ship, Capt. Brown jettisoned 128 tonnes of ballast, water and cargo. The damaged ship limped into Camden Harbour on December 25 and was then was moved to a nearby bay to clean the hull. The next day the ship was blown ashore on the high tide and as the tide fell, *Calliance* settled on two large rocks, breaking its hull. With the ship damaged beyond repair, the captain and three crew set sail in the ship's cutter for Kupang in Timor to find a vessel to rescue the survivors from *Calliance*. The men reached Timor in five days and were able to secure the loan of a small Dutch schooner. On February 8, when about 130 km out from Camden Sound, both the cutter and the schooner were overturned by a heavy squall. The crew clung to the capsized hull of the cutter until one sailor dived under the hull to cut away the mast. The men were then able to right the cutter and bail out the water. One crew member swam down and kicked open a cabin, and by pulling Captain Edward by the hair, he rescued him. Little remains of the wreck apart from a pile of ballast stones. Location: 15° 30.5' S 124° 36.7' E.

MV Koolama 1942

On February 4, 1942 the twin screw Western Australian state ship *Koolama* was en route to Wyndham with trucks, military equipment and 180 crew and passengers. It was attacked by Japanese floatplane bombers off Cape Rulheires