



Fraser Island's Shipwrecks

Fraser Island has claimed many ships with twenty-three wrecks were recorded in Fraser Island waters between 1856 and 1935, when the S.S. Maheno beached near The Pinnacles. The Sandy Cape light house was switched on in 1870 but this, and a smaller light on Woody Island, did little to alleviate the number of ships wrecked.

The Maheno - is the most famous of Fraser Island's wrecks and has become a landmark attraction. Built in 1905, the SS Maheno was one of the first turbine-driven steamers. She plied a regular route between Sydney and Auckland until she was commissioned as a hospital ship in Europe during World War One. She also served in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

In 1935, she and her sister ship the *Oonah* were sold to Japan for scrap. The rudders of the boats were removed and they were being towed to Japan. When they reached Queensland Waters, a cyclonic storm snapped the tow chain and the Maheno drifted helplessly onto Fraser Island's ocean beach.

During World War Two the wreck was used for air force target practice and the Z Force Special Unit used her to practice with limpet mines prior to the raid on Singapore Harbour.

The Seabelle was one of the first ships to be recorded as lost off Fraser Island. The 158-ton schooner left Rockhampton on 7 March 1857 and was wrecked the following day on Breaksea Spit, the north-eastern tip of the island.

Rumours abounded about survivors of the Seabelle. A white woman and two white girls were reported to be living with Fraser Island aboriginals. New South Wales authorities commissioned the captain of the *Coquett* to investigate and he bought to Sydney two young girls who were albino. They were never returned to their parents as he had promised and they died in an institution in Sydney at an early age.

The Panama, an American sailing ship, hit Breaksea Spit and was beached at Rooney's Point in 1864. The passengers and some crew camped on the beach, but returned to the ship when Aborigines entered the camp and took their goods. Later the Aborigines tried to get on board but were rebuffed by the sailors' cutlasses. The captain and several of the crew escaped in a lifeboat and were picked up near Woody Island.

The Ottawa was grounded just south of Indian Head on 28 March 1879 providing a boon for the Aborigines who raided the ship's cargo of spirits while the crew was away looking for help.

The Sterling Castle whilst enroute from Sydney to London struck a coral reef north of Fraser Island on 22 May 1836. A longboat containing crew, Captain James Fraser and his wife Eliza landed near Waddy Point.



Half the party walked south and was rescued by hunters from the Moreton Bay settlement. The others subsisted with the Aborigines for seven weeks, during which time Captain Fraser died. A rescue party set out from Brisbane with two former convicts who had lived with the Aborigines. Eliza and three survivors were rescued.

Mrs Fraser became a celebrity and her exaggerated accounts of her ordeal led to wide spread hostility towards the Aborigines.

The Investigator was the ship of explorer Matthew Flinders, who was the first recorded European to land on Fraser Island. In 1802 as he was exploring the Cooloolo Coast. Flinders mapped the Great Sandy Peninsula and landed near Great Sandy Cape so his naturalists could collect botanic samples. There, his party had friendly meetings with the Aborigines, swapping presents of hatchets and fish nets.

The Marloo, a luxury Italian liner, hit the Sandy Cape shoal in calm water on September 27, 1914. The ship was beached and help was sought from Sandy Cape lighthouse. The cargo of green tomatoes and bottles of whisky was strewn over the beach.

The Aramac was another victim of the Breaksea Spit. In 1904 it bumped hard several times on the sand spit but continued on. However, after 24km it was leaking badly. The crew and passengers took to the boats and safely reached Burnett Heads and Baffle Point. The captain and six men remained on board and finally succeeded in anchoring Aramac in the protection of Platypus Bay.

Ships and Shipwrecks

22 May 1836 Stirling Castle
07 Mar 1857 Seabelle
10 Mar 1864 Panama
28 May 1879 Ottawa
13 Mar 1904 Aramac
27 Sep 1914 Marloo
09 Jul 1935 Maheno