

## Shipwrecks in the Marine Reserve<sup>1</sup> (MH)

Over the decades Wellington has had its share of wrecks, in the Harbour especially the entrance, the South Coast and Fitzroy and Palliser Bays. Many ships came to grief on the rocks of Barretts Reef or on the shore at Pencarrow. The changeable winds and tide conditions caught out many ships while sail prevailed, but also many with auxiliary or main engines powered by steam or diesel. There are places of particular hazard; apparently Toms Rock off the Karori Light caught a number of ships and there has been a good toll of lives lost over the time. The worst disaster in local seas was the loss of the 'Penguin' in 1909, wrecked on Tom's Rock near the Karori Stream with the loss of 75 lives.

In the marine reserve area there have been 8<sup>2</sup> vessels lost or stranded since the first in 1874, with the most recent being the Yung Pen in 1982, with two other fishing vessels lost since the 1950's. One does not count the deliberate 2005 sinking of the F69, the erstwhile HMNZS Wellington, off Houghton Bay, as a shipwreck, though in the context of the marine reserve this represents a diving resource of some note. In this article are recorded the eight significant shipwrecks, their location and their availability for diving. It will add to our interest and understanding of the Taputeranga Marine Reserve to know something of the history of marine disaster, loss and in many cases heroism that were attendant on each of the wrecks.

1874

On March 7, 1874, Wellington experienced a severe gale from the north west and two ships were wrecked at Owhiro Bay, almost on top of each other. The *Cyrus* was a three-masted barque built at Prince Edward Island, Canada. In ballast it had worked clear of Wellington Harbour into Cloudy Bay. In the inclement weather the master mistook the Pencarrow light for the Mana light. The ship was too close inshore by that time to haul clear and struck the rocks at Owhiro Bay. The crew numbered 10, with 3 passengers – a woman and her two children. Despite gallant attempts by the crew all the passengers and two of the crew were lost.

The *Wellington* was a full rigged ship which also set sail from Wellington but in the gales of 7 March failed to weather Cape Terawhiti and struck rocks at Owhiro Bay about 40 m from the *Cyrus*. Most of the crew escaped in a lifeboat, but two were lost on the rocky shore. Both ships were broken into small pieces by the ferocity of winds, currents and the sharp rocks at the head of the Bay.

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<sup>1</sup> Principal reference for this article was 'New Zealand Shipwrecks 1795 to 1975' by CWN Ingram, published by Reed, and subsequent revisions.

<sup>2</sup> The full list comprises 1874: *Cyrus* and *Wellington*, 1904 *La Bella (refloated)*, 1931 *Progress*, 1930 *Crescent*, 1954 *Prince Umberto*, 1969 *Provider* and 1982 *Yung Pen*.

## 1904

On October 13 the barquentine *La Bella*<sup>3</sup>, owned by Mr Turnbull, of Timaru, went ashore at Happy Valley, (Owhiro Bay). The vessel left Port Chalmers with a cargo of flour for New Plymouth. She was overtaken by the gale off Cape Campbell, and was soon in difficulties. Great seas swept the decks, and as nearly all the sails were blown away, Captain Mylins hove-to. Mid morning the vessel was off Island Bay, and as she approached the shore three anchors were let go but they failed to hold. The ship went ashore, stern first. Captain Mylins and the crew of nine managed to get, ashore alive. The ship was refloated by 21 October and towed around to Wellington Harbour. It was later a total loss at Warnambool, Australia.



*La Bella* ashore at Owhiro Bay, October 1904

## 1931

On May 1, 1931, the *Progress*, a cargo steamer of 353 tons gross, sailing from Lyttleton to Wellington, lost its propeller about 10 km south west of the Pencarrow light. Despite attempting to raise sails the ship remained without effective steerage way. The master signalled to Beacon Hill Signal Station requesting a tug be sent to assist. Because of misunderstandings effective help did not come. Anchors were set off Lyall Bay but the southerly winds increased, causing heavy seas. By the time the tugs arrived the steamer was beyond assistance. The anchors did not hold and attempts to sail off the shore were not effective. The steamer struck rocks off Owhiro Bay and almost immediately broke in two. Despite heroic attempts by police and fishermen volunteers from the shore four of the crew drowned and all the other 8 crewmen were badly injured on the jagged rocks.

## 1930, 1954 and 1969

In each of these years a fishing launch or vessel was lost from the Wellington or Island Bay fishing fleets. In 1930 the *Crescent* was lost off Island Bay when its motor failed. The steamer *Arahura* was unable to help. Desperate attempts were made using sea anchors to keep off the coast but the launch capsized in heavy seas. Only one of the crew of 4 survived. In 1954, the fishing vessel *Prince Umberto* broke from its moorings in Island Bay and in a strong southerly was smashed to pieces on the rocks, presumably without loss of life. In 1969, the 60 foot fishing vessel *Provider* was presumed lost somewhere between Island and Houghton Bays, along with its three crew. Nothing is known of the cause of this loss. It was

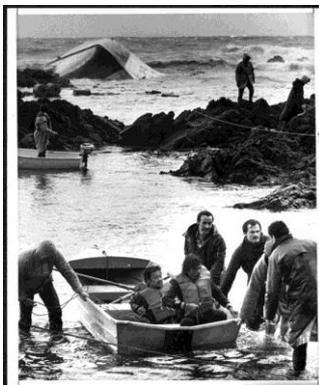
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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~nzlscant/token.htm> Source was a report in the Hawera and Normanby Star.

evidenced only by an abundance of empty fish boxes, broken life buoys and an oil slick off that part of the South Coast.

## 1982

The Taiwanese steel hulled squid fishing vessel *Yung Pen* (which ironically means 'good luck forever') sailing into Wellington Harbour, drifted onto rocks at Owhiro Bay. During the rescue of crew the vessel capsized close inshore on 12 December, almost on top of the three wrecks already sunk on Owhiro Bay's rocks. The crew were saved by local residents and the Westpac helicopter. On 4-5 March 1983 the ship broke in two, with the stern section sinking and the forward parts driven to within 15 m of the shore road. The fore parts of the boat were salvaged by a Lower Hutt company the following year, but the remainder of the hull had effectively overturned and is now covered by at least a metre of water at low tide. The boat was quickly worked over by divers after it sank in 1982. The first target was said to be the captain's liquor cabinet. The wreck was apparently caused by poor navigation and failure to keep proper lookout.



Crew of wrecked Taiwanese fishing boat the *Yung Pen* are brought ashore by residents and police at Owhiro Bay, Wellington - Photograph taken by John Nicholson, [ca 13 December 1982]

Source: [http://mp.natlib.govt.nz/detail/?id=65568&t=items&q=&f=tapu%20groupref\\$PAColl-7327-1&u=0&s=a&l=en&tc=0&recordNum=0&numResults=20&p=0](http://mp.natlib.govt.nz/detail/?id=65568&t=items&q=&f=tapu%20groupref$PAColl-7327-1&u=0&s=a&l=en&tc=0&recordNum=0&numResults=20&p=0)



Westpac Rescue Helicopter rescuing crew of the Taiwanese fishing boat *Yung Pen*, Owhiro Bay, Wellington - Photograph taken by John Nicholson, [ca 13 December 1982]

Source: <http://mp.natlib.govt.nz/detail/?id=65569&l=en>

## Location of Owhiro Bay Wrecks<sup>4</sup>

The bay has a gravel bottom and leads around to the right to a channel heading out to sea. The remains of the *Yung Pen* are in this channel. It has barely a metre of water over it at low tide. 50m to the west is the wreck site of the *Cyrus*, for which there are no obvious remains. A further 50m to the west is the site of the *Wellington* where there is a donkey boiler and two anchors. To the south-east of the *Yung Pen* 50m are the remains of the *Progress*. A

<sup>4</sup> Source: <http://wdg.rexedra.gen.nz/sites/southcst.htm#> Owhiro Bay Shipwrecks From the 'Wellington Dive Guide'

boiler, drive shafts and bottom ribs are visible. There are other bits and pieces, probably from any of these wrecks, in the sheltered bay to the east of the *Yung Pen*.