

THE MAHOGANY SHIP...FACT OR FICTION?

Our region has a long history of shipwrecks and may hold the title of Australia's first shipwreck if the Mahogany Ship does exist. The mythical Mahogany Ship is a local legend however one day if proven to exist it will reshape how we see early exploration and change maritime history books forever. It is said that this mystical wreck was first sighted in the early period of white settlement around Lady Bay and Port Fairy, with people feverently searching for it ever since. Locals, archaeologists and maritime historians alike have tried to discover the remains of this wreck within the south west of Victoria with no discoveries to date.

EVIDENCE OF A BURIED SHIPWRECK

by Rob Simpson The following evidence is extracted from historical literature and is documented and referenced in my booklet. Evidence for a Buried Shipwreck Near Warrnambool, Australia. Alexander Rollo

Well educated 19th century local resident: Claimed that he regularly observed a shipwreck on land almost buried by sand a quarter of a mile (402 metres) east of Gorman's Road, Warrnambool, and 4 chains (88 yards = 80 metres) north from the sea at high tide. The stern was pointing west towards Port Fairy. This position, as can be verified by using Google Earth, is at 38°20'58"S, 142°21'38"E. Rollo also claimed that the shipwreck was opposite Helen Rock. As maps show, Helen Rock is an undersea feature directly to the south.

James Rock (no relation to Helen Rock!) 19th Century Local Resident

Claimed that, before being buried by sand, a shipwreck was to be seen slightly more than halfway between Gorman's Road and Rutledge's Cutting which is 712 metres to the east. This position also is at 38°20'58"S, 142°21'38"E - exactly the same position as the Rollo coordinates. Although Rock gives no north/south coordinate, it is hardly necessary, the strip of land being only 120 metres wide from north to south, with the northern half of the area being discounted by very high, steep hummocks.

Therefore the unrelated Rollo and Rock reports indicate a nearly buried shipwreck in precisely the same place

Mrs Smith (local resident), Mrs Dickie (prosperous, well respected local resident) and Mr Madden (local farmer) All reported a shipwreck in the hummocks between Gorman's Road and Rutledge's Cutting in the 19th century. One of these reports states that the shipwreck was intact and almost buried by sand in 1878 and completely disappeared under still more sand a year or two later. (Theories that a shipwreck in the 11 kilometre wide hummocks area was intentionally destroyed therefore do not apply to this particular shipwreck. You can't destroy something that is lost under a covering of sand.) We now have five unrelated witnesses of an intact, almost buried shipwreck on land in the same small area of the hummocks. Two give an identical precise location within that area.

Using Google Earth to apply the technique of aerial archaeology at 38°20'58"S, 142°21'38"E the imprint of a completely buried shipwreck can be observed. (Please refer to Evidence for a Buried Shipwreck Near Warrnambool, Australia for the optimal method of using Google Earth for this purpose.) The shipwreck is in two sections, one partly overlapping the other. The shapes are strikingly symmetrical and could not have been created by nature. The largest is in the shape of the hull of a ship viewed from above, and the smaller appears to be an upper section broken off when the ship was wrecked. The design of the smaller section is to be found on the decks of some sea going vessels. The hull is about 150 feet long. This is unusually large, but some sailing ships were even larger.

Aerial archaeology is a technique of finding buried structures that has been used globally since the invention of flight. It helps archaeologists determine where to dig, because buried buildings - or parts of them such as the remaining foundations - can be identified much more readily from the air than at ground level. When seen from above, irregularities in the earth, sand and vegetation commonly betray the symmetrical shapes of objects constructed by humans that have become buried with the passing of time. Typically, these irregularities cannot be distinguished at ground level because they are so close to the viewer. The technique is described in many web sites and is constantly used on Time Team

Alexander Rollo

Above a diagram of the shipwreck showing that it was in two sections. (These, of course, would be the two sections to be seen as imprints on Google Earth.) The diagram shows that there were two rows of hummocks parallel to the beach and that the north hummock was much higher than the south hummock. The diagram also shows that one section of the shipwreck was on the north side of the south hummock, and that the other section was slightly further to the north, closer to the valley between the low and high hummocks.

Rollo also claimed that the shipwreck could not be seen from the beach because it lay on the north side of the south hummock. Visiting 38°20'58"S, 142°21'38"E shows that all of this is strikingly true in every particular. Of the two shapes that can be seen on Google Earth, one is on the north side of the south hummock and the other is further north closer to the valley. It is not possible to see the site from the beach because the row of south hummocks blocks the view.

Visual Impression at the Site At the site itself, the part of the shipwreck that would be the hull visually resembles the shape of the inside of the hull of a large ship slightly tilted on its side and filled with grass covered sand. If the stern is pointing to Port Fairy as Rollo stated then the buried ship is listed to port! This is exactly what would be expected - a stranded vessel does not sit level but lists to one side. It is a most striking sight. Photos and movie clips do not do it justice. Magnetometer Survey On December 8th, 2009, Professor James Macnae, Professor of Geophysics at RMIT University, Melbourne did a magnetometer survey that established the presence of iron objects buried under the sand at the site. While this does not constitute absolute proof, an absence of iron objects would have a tendency to disprove the claim.