

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 17/08/24

SS CAMPBELL

Location

Campbell Rock, Port Phillip Bay

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S102

Date lost

13/06/1914

Construction material

Steel

Hull

single deck, six compartments, water ballast

Propulsion

Steam - Screw

Engine specification

triple expansion, 11.5 x 18.5 x 31.0 inch cylinders and 22 inch stroke, 63 nominal HP (370 IHP)

Engine builder

Nylands Voerkstad

Length/Breadth/Depth

98.30 Feet / 19.10 Feet / 11.40

Builder

Nylands Vaerksted of Christiania

Year of construction

1911

Built port

Christiania (renamed Oslo in 1925)

Built country

Norway

Registration Port

Norway

Date lost

13/06/1914

Departure

Sydney

Destination

Fremantle

Cargo

Whaler

Owner

Aktieselsk, Fremantle, Australia; then Kristian, Nielsen

Master

Captain Ole Olsen

Weather conditions

Moderate (UID: 26, 9)

Cause of loss

Engine trouble, headed to Melbourne for repairs. Entered the heads without a pilot, current threw off course and was grounded on Corsair Rock, becoming a total wreck (UID 52, 114)

Number of crew

9

Statement of significance

<p>The wreck of the Campbell represents the extension of 20th century Norwegian whaling industry into the Southern Oceans of Australia, New Zealand, South America, South Africa and Antarctica, after the northern fisheries of Iceland and the Arctic had become fished out and uneconomic. Significant capital was required to establish shore stations and build steam powered factory ships and whale chasers to supply world demand for oil, fertiliser and especially - during World War One - glycerine for explosives.</p>

VHR history

The Campbell was a steel screw steam-powered whaling vessel, 135 tons gross with the dimensions 98.3 x 19.1 x 11.4 feet (30 x 5.8 x 3.5 metres). Built in 1911 by Nylands Voerkstad of Christiania, Norway, it had a single deck, six compartments and used water ballast . The three cylinders of its triple-expansion steam-engine, also made by Nylands Voerkstad, had the measurements of 11.5, 18.5 and 31 inches with a 22-inch stroke, producing 63 nominal horsepower (indicated horsepower 370). It was owned by Kristian, Nielsen & Co. of Laurvig, managed by agents C. Monsen & Co. and was registered to the port of Tonsberg, Norway. The Campbell had visited Melbourne two years previously while on a whaling voyage to New Zealand.

 On this voyage, commanded by its master Olle Olsen, and with eight crew, the Campbell had left Sydney for Albany with its sister ship the Sorrel. At night, in moderate weather but with a heavy sea, they were still in convoy when engine trouble 15 miles off the Heads made Captain Olsen decide to make for Melbourne for repairs. With no pilot, though in the correct channel, the Campbell was steaming through the Heads at eight knots when the current in the Rip set the vessel off course. It was headed for Point Nepean and, seeing white water, Captain Olsen immediately ordered full speed astern when a large wave swept the vessel on to the reef. With large waves crashing over the decks, the crew at first attempted to launch the ship's lifeboat, but this proved impossible. Launching a small dinghy known as a pram by Norwegians, five crew had embarked when a large wave crushed it against the side of the hull of the whaler, staving it in. The crew on deck watched helplessly as their shipmates were swept into the darkness by a current. The remaining four crew then attempted again to launch the lifeboat, and this time a wave assisted their efforts by washing the boat off the deck. They began searching for their crewmates, believing they were in the water after the pram had been wrecked. After three hours of searching they were unsuccessful and, at daybreak, were eventually picked up by the pilot steamer Alvina and landed at Queenscliff.

 Meanwhile, the crew in the pram had taken off most of their articles of clothing to plug up the holes in the boat and had returned to the wreck to pick up their crewmates, when they saw the lifeboat swept off the deck. They tried to come in on the back beach down the coast but were unable to get ashore due to the large surf, eventually making it to the Queenscliff pier in an exhausted state. Captain Olsen was to say later that it was amazing that no one had drowned; the only death was that of his beloved terrier. He also criticised the officer at the Queenscliff fort who would not let his scantily dressed and shivering sailors in, believing as they could not speak English they were foreigners endeavouring to enter the fort surreptitiously.