

# Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 27/09/24

## S.S. GULF OF CARPENTARIA



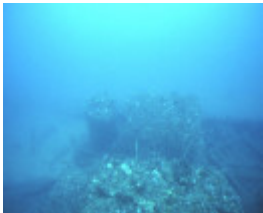
S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory Artefact



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory Stern



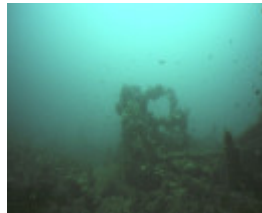
S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory Boilers



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
BoilersFromAbove



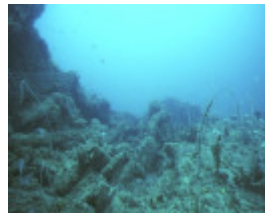
S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
BoilersSideView



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory Bow



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory Engine



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
EngineSideView



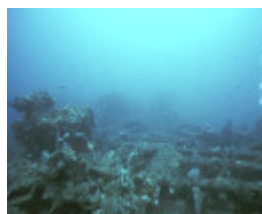
S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
HullAndBoiler



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
HullAndEngines



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
HullLookingTowardsStern



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
HullWreckage



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
MastPortSide



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory PortSide



S299 GulfOfCarpentaria  
WilsonsPromontory  
PortSideForward

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## Location

Between Cleft and Anser Islands, Wilsons Promontory

## Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S299

## Date lost

15/09/1885

## Official number

81823

## Construction material

Iron

## Hull

80 lb boiler, 1 iron deck, 3 tiers of beams, cemented, 6 bulkheads, anchors and chains proved, LMC 1881.  
7Water Ballast - cellular double bottom 236' (358 tons)FPT 13 tons. APT 14 tons, deck machinery, sister ship to the SS Gulf of St Vincent

## Propulsion

Steam - Screw

## Engine specification

2 cylinder inverted compound steam engine 38" x 71" x 45" stroke, 300 horsepower

## Length/Breadth/Depth

289.70 Feet / 38.10 Feet / 17.70 Feet

## Builder

W. Grey & Co

**Year of construction**

1881

**Built port**

West Hartlepool

**Built country**

England

**Registration Port**

Greenock

**Date lost**

15/09/1885

**Departure**

Sydney

**Destination**

London via Adelaide and Port Augusta

**Cargo**

Wool (1227 bales from Newcastle & 1142 from Sydney), 1605 tons coal for Adelaide, six cases of pearl shell, 22 bales basils for London

**Owner**

Greenock Steamship Company

**Master**

Captain Robert Thompson

**Weather conditions**

Moderate wind, clear

**Cause of loss**

Natural hazard: Struck an uncharted rock in the shipping lane

**Passenger comments**

T. Anderson, who was visiting friend in Adelaide before going to New Zealand. He lost a considerable sum of money, together with a quantity of clothing and other possessions.

## Statement of significance

The Gulf of Carpentaria is historically significant as the wreck of an international cargo and passenger vessel, and for its role as a link between Britain and her colonies. It is archaeologically significant as it was wrecked without having been salvaged.

## VHR history

The iron screw steamer Gulf of Carpentaria sank after striking an uncharted rock off Wilsons Promontory. It was a fairly new ship that had made a number of previous voyages from Britain to Australia and India. Her penultimate voyage was Plymouth to Brisbane with immigrants and cargo. From Brisbane she went to Newcastle and Sydney to pick up a cargo of wool for London. Departing Sydney for London, via Adelaide and Port Augusta, the Gulf of Carpentaria steamed east through the yet, incompletely charted and rock strewn waters of Bass Strait. While sailing ships and steamers had travelled through the same narrow passage between Wilsons Promontory and Anser Island intensively for the last thirty years, somehow all of them had managed to avoid the pinnacle of rock that lay in the middle of the main west-bound shipping channel, until this day when the Gulf of Carpentaria was to become its unwitting discoverer. The chief officer's version of events was that: "We left Sydney at six a.m. on the 13th inst. The weather in the early morning of Tuesday last was rather thick, but it cleared up as the day advanced, and the wind was moderate. At a quarter to four a.m. we sighted the Clifty Island light bearing W by S (magnetic set course W.S.W.) The light, distant about five miles was passed at half past five a.m., when the light of Wilsons Promontory became visible a quarter point on the starboard bow. About half past seven a.m. the lighthouse at the Promontory was on our beam, at a distance of about three quarters of a mile, and our signal was answered from the lighthouse. The ship was at this time steering by the master's orders, and we entered the passage between the Anser Islands shortly after 8 a.m., passing through about mid-channel. Captain Thomson, the second mate and myself were on deck, and the visibility was clear, we were steaming up the channel at full speed. When nearing the western entrance about twenty-five minutes past eight a.m., we experienced a severe shock just as we were shaping a course for Cape Otway, and we became aware that we had struck against a sunken reef. The crew were cool and behaved well, keeping bravely to their posts. The vessel cleared the rock for a moment, but struck once more amidships and a third time aft, in the last case carrying away the rudder posts and some plates under the stern. At this juncture the captain ordered the ship to be sounded fore and aft and the boats to be placed in readiness for lowering - orders which were carried out with great promptitude. Instructions were also given at once to stop the engines, and the ship's head was at that time leaning in the direction of Clifty Island, when the helm was ordered hard a port, when the discovery was made that it had been carried away, and the vessel then struck for the third time. The engines were put full speed astern until the headway had been counteracted, and the carpenter was sent to make soundings fore and aft. The result was that the officer reported from 4 1/2 to 5 feet of water in the No. 2 hold, and 17 feet in No. 4 hold. Deeming that affairs were growing hopeless, and that the ship was to all appearance settling down rapidly, Captain Thomson ordered the boats to be lowered as speedily as possible. From the moment she struck until the water had risen 17 feet in the hold, only seven minutes elapsed. At twenty minutes to nine a.m. four boats were lowered and in five minutes afterwards all hands had left the vessel in safety, although not a soul had time to save a single article of his belongings. The captain and five men were in No. 1 boat, the mate and eleven men in No. 5 boat, the second mate and nine men in No. 6 boat, and the third mate and two men in No. 2 boat. We were scarcely clear when she commenced to roll very heavily, the water washing across her deck. We stood by, expecting to see her founder every minute, but she held on until ten minutes to twelve a.m., when she went down head first, lurching to port, bursting her decks, and throwing the coal dust up in the air. We then took the men out of No. 2 boat and put them in No. 6 boat, and pulled to Wilsons Promontory where we landed at half-past two p.m." The site was found by Fred Billington on 20 February 1984 and surveyed by Brillington and Mick Bridle. Today, it has largely collapsed and is buried in sand, though the stern is intact along with deck railings and a boat davit. The bent rudder post damaged as a result of the collision with the reef is evident, as are mast parts, large sections of collapsed plating, the engine and boilers (Caldow).