

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 18/09/24

LA BELLA



S401 LaBella SitePlan
diveinfosheet 1992



S401 LaBella Warrnambool
DiverOnWreck



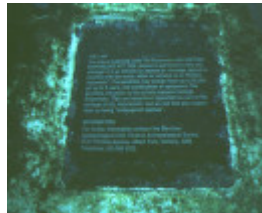
S401 LaBella Warrnambool
HistoricSideView



S401 LaBella Warrnambool
Wreck



S401 LaBella Warrnambool
WreckHistoricView



S401 LaBella Warrnambool
Plaque



S401 LaBella Warrnambool
HistoricFrontView

Location

Lady Bay, Warrnambool

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S401

Date lost

10/11/1905

Official number

76077

Construction material

Composite

Hull

Iron and steel

Propulsion

Sail

Number of masts

3

Length/Breadth/Depth

144.00 Feet / 27.30 Feet / 12.50 Feet

Builder

Johan Smith Jernskibsbyggeri (iron ship builders)

Year of construction

1893

Built port

Tvedestrand

Built country

Norway

Registration Number

3 of 1901

Registration Port

Lyttleton

Date lost

10/11/1905

Departure

Kaipara, New Zealand

Destination

Warrnambool

Cargo

Timber

Owner

David C. Turnbull

Master

Captain George Mylius

Cause of loss

Wrecked after hitting rocks south of the Warrnambool breakwater (now known as La Bella Reef) in heavy seas).

Number of crew

12

Statement of significance

<p>The La Bella is typical of the type of medium sized iron/ steel sailing vessels sailing in an age where sail was being rapidly superseded by steam ie: representative of a type. The brave rescue of five crew by local fisherman William Ferrier made him a national hero and upon its declaration as an Historic Shipwreck in 1992 the La Bella was declared a 'monument to bravery'.</p>

VHR history

The sinking of the La Bella triggered one of the most heroic rescues in Victoria's shipwreck history.

 The La Bella was at the end of a rough and tedious 37 day voyage, bringing timber from Kaipara, New Zealand to Warrnambool.
 La Bella was typical of the medium sized sailing vessels which operated in the Pacific trade when steam driven vessels were superseding those operating on wind power. Built mainly of steel in Norway, this barquentine sailed in 1905 from New Zealand for Warrnambool laden with timber. An evening mist obscured Lady Bay as the ship was forced off course by heavy seas so that she ran aground on what is now known as La Bella Reef.

 An attempt was made by the crew to lower the lifeboats but they were dashed to pieces against the side of the vessel, and the crew took to the rigging for shelter. The two main anchors of 1.5 tonnes each were washed overboard.
 By sunrise only seven members of the crew of twelve still clung to the port bow as the wreck threatened to slip into deep water. Most of the lifeboat crew were away at Port MacDonnell, but the volunteer crew was organised to take the lifeboat out to the wreck. For more than an hour they attempted to rescue the crew lashed to the rail of La Bella, but they eventually had to return to the pier after repeated failings. They mounted the rocket gear on the lifeboat, however, several attempts to fire a rocket aboard failed, and the ship began to slip into deeper water. In the last moments, a local fisherman, William Ferrier, rowed his small dinghy through heavy seas twice to rescue the captain and another member of the crew (Loney 1979:50
 & Foster 1996:20), whilst the lifeboat crew rescued 3 people. La Bella broke in half and disappeared. Only one body was recovered.
 At the inquiry the master's certificate was suspended for 12 months predominantly for entering Lady Bay without a pilot.

 Two of the crew had just escaped from another shipwreck off Tasmania but luck was not with them on this occasion.
 Other history of the vessel: La Bella went aground at least 3 times when owned by DC Turnbull & Co. In October 1903, beached for repairs at Ohiro Bay, Wellington. On 13 October 1904 stranded on Dog Island at entrance to Bluff Harbour, NZ. On 25th July 1905 stranded again at the same place (stone 2006:505).