

Victorian Heritage Database Report

Report generated on - 04/07/24

SS BALCLUTHA

Location

Bass Strait, off Gabo Island

Victorian Heritage Register (VHR) Number

S66

Date lost

21/10/1881

Official number

28230

Construction material

Iron

Hull

Two decks and break, barque rigged, square stern, clincher built, demi-woman figurehead.

Propulsion

Steam - Screw

Number of masts

3

Length/Breadth/Depth

202.10 Feet / 23.30 Feet / 13.50 Feet

Builder

Laird & Co.

Year of construction

1860

Built port

Greenock

Built country

Scotland

Registration Number

22 of 1860

Registration Port

Melbourne

Date lost

21/10/1881

Departure

Sydney

Destination

Melbourne

Cargo

Bluestone

Owner

C.M. Poole of Sydney

Master

Captain Poole

Weather conditions

The weather conditions at the time were variously reported as being hurricane force from the SW round to the SE. Both SS Barrabool and lightkeepers reported severe change when Balcutha would have been passing Gabo. Seas increased to such a size that the spray reached 200ft into the air (top of Gabo light). (UID 93)

Cause of loss

Foundered at sea. A theory has been advanced that it may have been caused by the shifting cargo of Bluestone.
 Sightings from other ships and lighthouses - Left evening of 19th October from Melbourne, reported off Wilsons Prom at 1.00am 20th October. 24 hours later at 1am off Cape Everard, by the Barrabool. Sighted by lighthouse at Gabo at 10.30 am. Last reported sighting 12 noon off Green Cape by City of Adelaide on 21st October

Statement of significance

The vessel is historically significant for international trade and transportation during the 1870s when the Balclutha made several trips to San Francisco. As the location of the vessel has not been determined it is difficult to assess any archaeological significance of the site.

VHR history

Disappeared off Gabo Island under unknown circumstances. The vessel left Melbourne for Sydney on 18 October 1881 and was last seen by the SS City of Adelaide three days off later steaming through heavy seas off Gabo Island, running before the wind with close reefed topsails, a foresail and also under steam. When the Balclutha became overdue, officials were not unduly alarmed, but later searches revealed no trace. Capt Poole and 16 seamen aboard (Parsons in Coastal Passenger Ships states 22 seamen were lost) the Balclutha disappeared without trace. It was feared that the blue-stone cargo (300 tons of bluestone pitchers for the Homebush cattleyards) had shifted in heavy seas causing it to founder. Originally built as a replacement for the SS Admella lost in 1859. The Balclutha was bought by the Australasian Steam Navigation Company in 1861 after a rate war between the ASN and the Balclutha's previous owners, and in the early 1870s the vessel ran several trips to San Francisco USA. In 1881 C.M Poole of Sydney bought the vessel and Captain Poole was her master when the vessel disappeared. A report in the SMH 29/10/1881 says that "with the late winds and currents" the Balclutha should be looked for 200 miles ESE of Gabo Is.