

Guide to the Historic Shipwreck Trail on Victoria's West Coast

There are approximately 638 known shipwrecks along Victoria's coast, although only around 240 of them have been discovered. The Historic Shipwreck Trail along the Shipwreck Coast and the Discovery Coast shows some of the sites where gales, human error and, in some cases, foul play caused these vessels to be wrecked.

As you tour along this rugged coastline, look for the road signs that lead to information plaques overlooking the cliffs and sandy beaches.

Each site reveals more about our maritime history in the days of sail and steam, when Bass Strait was the route to the riches of the goldfields and Portland was the gateway to a new life in Victoria.

The small coastal traders and large ships carrying vital cargo and immigrants between Europe, America and the new colonies of Australia often battled severe storms, not only in the treacherous waters of Bass Strait, but also at anchor in the precarious safety of Portland Bay.

The first stage of the trail, the **Shipwreck Coast from Port Fairy to Moonlight Head**, was established in 1990 to highlight the importance of shipping and navigation in the development of Victoria. The second stage, the **Discovery Coast between Port Fairy and the South Australian border**, was opened in 1993.

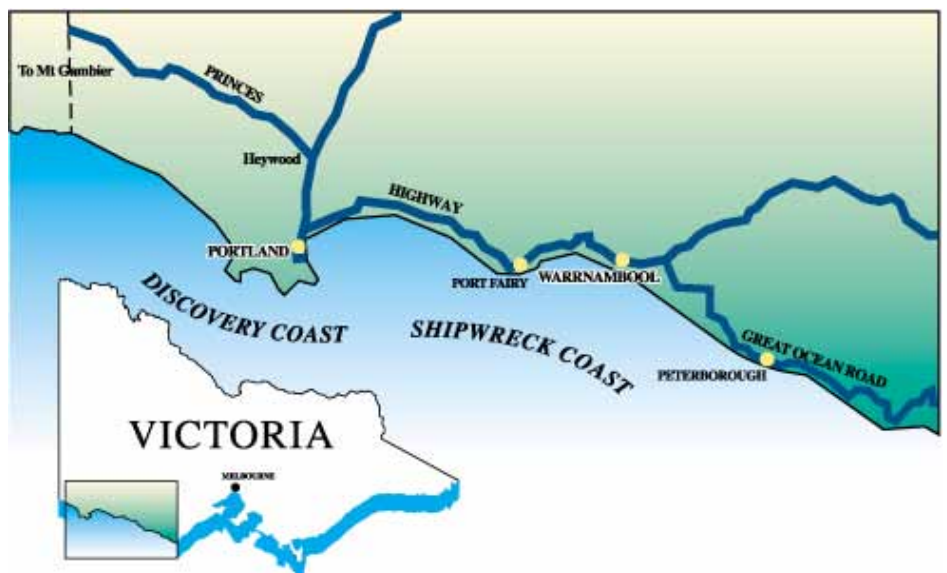


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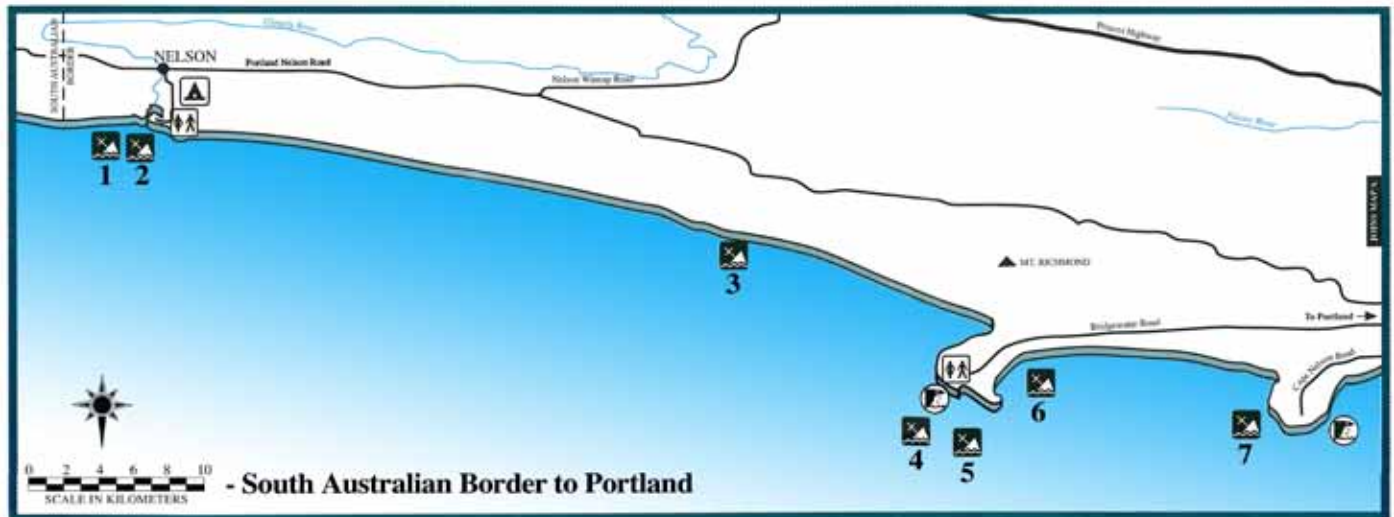


Victoria Department of Planning
and Community Development

www.heritage.vic.gov.au



DISCOVERY COAST



NELSON

At the mouth of the Glenelg River, 5 km from the South Australian border, lies the picturesque village of Nelson. Established in the 1840s the settlement was known simply as 'The Punt', although four town blocks were gazetted in 1852 as Nelson. Since the 1830s strong southerly winds have driven many ships onto the shores of the Discovery Coast near here.

CAPE NELSON LIGHTHOUSE

Because of the number of tragic shipwrecks, the Victorian Government had a lighthouse constructed at Cape Nelson in 1883. Information regarding tours of the lighthouse can be obtained from Parks Victoria

1 **S.S. Perseverance 1890 - 1898** (not found)

The S.S. *Perseverance* was wrecked on the sandbar at the mouth of the Glenelg River whilst attempting a voyage from Nelson to the river Murray in South Australia.

2 **The Triumph 1840 - 1863** (not found)

The Western Australian-built schooner *The Triumph* disappeared whilst on a voyage from Port MacDonnell to Port Adelaide. The remains of the vessel were later found cast ashore at Discovery Bay. There were no survivors.

3 **John Ormerod 1826 - 1861** (not found)

The English-built schooner *John Ormerod* came ashore east of the Glenelg River mouth, after having been blown over on to its side whilst off Cape Bridgewater. Only three of the crew survived.

4 **Marie 1851** (not found)

The barque *Marie*, on a voyage from Antwerp to Sydney via Adelaide, was wrecked off Cape Bridgewater in September 1851. All on board, including the Belgian Consul, were drowned.

5 **Jane 1863** (not found)

Poor visibility caused the schooner *Jane* to be wrecked at Cape Bridgewater in June 1863. A local resident, Waldy Hedditch, was drowned during the rescue attempt.

6 **S.S. Barwon 1863-1871**

The steamship S.S. *Barwon* sank in Bridgewater Bay after striking a reef off Cape Bridgewater during foggy weather. The remains of the vessel can still be seen from the cliffs overlooking the bay.

7 **Isabella 1826 - 1837**

When Captain Hart of the *Isabella* mistook Lady Julie Percy Island for Cape Nelson in 1837 he plotted a course that took the barque into the cliffs of the Cape. All on board were saved.



8 Captain Cook 1847 - 1850 (not found)

The Australian-built schooner *Captain Cook* was wrecked at the top of Cape Nelson Bay during a sudden south-easterly gale.

9 Emily S 1991

The *Emily S*, a 30 metre long steel trawler, was sunk in 1991 off Lawrence Rocks by Professional Diving Services Dive Club Inc., to provide a safe and convenient wreck dive for sports divers.



10 - 26 PORTLAND

Portland is one of the few natural deep water ports in Australia. Bass Strait sealers are thought to have used it as a base well before the 1820s when it became an established whaling station.

Since then, with the growth of a prosperous hinterland and fishing industries, the arrival of goldseekers, immigration and, more recently, manufacturing developments, Portland has become a thriving city.

Before the construction of the breakwaters and deep-water moorings, Portland Bay was a trap for vessels at anchor. Strong south-easterly gales often caught them unprepared and drove them ashore.

There are 19 shipwrecks in Portland Bay. These vessels carried immigrants and all manner of cargoes, including timber, whaling products, potatoes, clothing, alcohol and pianos. Most have never been located.

10- Henry 1827 - 1834 (not found)

The small schooner *Henry* became the first recorded shipwreck in Portland Bay when it was forced ashore while loading whale oil in August 1834.

11 - New Zealander 1852 - 1853

The immigrant ship *New Zealander* had discharged its 465 passengers and was undergoing repairs when it caught fire. The remains of the wreck can still be seen in the water below the Lighthouse Reserve.

12- Lady Robilliard 1845 - 1867 (not found)

The *Lady Robilliard* was on a voyage from Port Adelaide to Portland when a south-easterly gale drove it ashore near Whalers Bluff.

13- Argo 1867 - 1883 (not found)

The 17-ton wooden cutter *Argo*, built in Port Fairy, was wrecked on Portland beach during a south-easterly gale on 31 December 1883.

14- Margaret and Agnes 1850 - 1852 (not found)

The Victorian-built schooner *Margaret and Agnes* had just arrived at Portland Bay from Port Fairy with a cargo of potatoes, flour and bran, when it was blown ashore.

15- Mary Jane 1846 - 1852 (not found)

Following the wreck of the Canadian-built brigantine, *Mary Jane* and the stranding of the schooner *Brothers* in May 1852, the *Portland Guardian* criticized the vessels' captains for anchoring too close to shore, and called on the Colonial Government to appoint a harbour master at Portland.

WRECKS AROUND PORTLAND (cont)

16 *Tui 1868 – 1883* (not found)

The 18-ton cutter *Tui*, built at Port Fairy in 1868, was reported wrecked at Portland following a south-easterly gale in 1883.

17 *Nestor 1840-1854* (not found)

The immigrant ship *Nestor* was lost due to foul play. After the wreck, divers discovered three holes bored in the hull. The master was later arrested and charged with scuttling his ship, but charges were dropped due to lack of evidence.

18 *Australasia 1847 – 1855* (not found)

Australasia and *Constant* were both driven ashore during a severe gale in March 1855. The *Australasia* was sold to the Henty brothers, who made a small fortune by salvaging the cargo of wool.

19 *Constant 1843 – 1855* (not found)

The *Constant* had just discharged its 229 immigrants before being blown ashore during a storm, possibly because of poor anchors.

20 *Regia 1835 – 1860*

The remains of the Indian-built barque *Regia*, grounded during a severe gale, can still be seen lying in two metres of water next to the reclaimed land on the Portland foreshore.

21 *Tamora 1853-1860* (not found)

The wooden barque *Temora* blew ashore in a gale while unloading cargo. Portland police charged some people with theft from the vessel, including the master of the schooner *Eva*, which was wrecked in the same gale.

22 *Elizabeth 1837 – 1844* (not found)

The Tasmanian-built schooner *Elizabeth* and another schooner, *Sally Ann*, were driven ashore during a south-easterly gale in Portland Bay in mid-November 1844.

23 *Elizabeth 1838 – 1846* (not found)

The Canadian-built brig *Elizabeth* was totally wrecked on the beach directly below the Portland town site during a south-easterly gale in November 1846.

24 *Henry 1853* (not found)

According to some sources, the two-masted schooner *Henry*, built specifically to trade between Melbourne and Portland, went ashore during a gale at Portland in September 1853 and became a total wreck.

25 *Sally Ann 1826 – 1844* (not found)

The Bermudan-built schooner *Sally Ann*, owned by Stephen Henty, was a regular visitor to Portland. She was driven ashore in a south-easterly gale in mid-November 1844, along with the schooner *Elizabeth*.

26 *Merope's boat 1839* (not found)

One of the earliest recorded wrecks in Portland Bay was that of a small boat from the barque *Merope*. It struck a reef while the crew was hunting whales off Lawrence Rocks in May 1839.

27 *Julia 1840 – 1863*

When the brig *Julia* was grounded near the mouth of the Fitzroy River in 1863, all members of the crew were saved, but six whalers assisting the rescue were drowned.

28 *Merope 1818 – 1853* (not found)

The Indian-built sailing ship *Merope* survived a stranding in Western Australia before coming to grief after striking a reef east of the Fitzroy River mouth in 1853.



Above: The Lighthouse at Portland. Image Rob Blackburn

GREAT SOUTH-WEST WALK

The 250 km long Great South-West Walk along the coast between Portland and Nelson provides an excellent introduction to the fascinating variety of scenery and wildlife in south-western Victoria.

Information about this walk is available from the Department of Sustainability and Environment, 8 Julia St, Portland, 3305, telephone (03) 5522 3440.

LEGEND

	Wreck Site		Toilets
	Information		Cemetery
	Parking		Rocket Shed
	Wreck Plaque		Falling Cliffs
	Rocks/Reef		

The shipwrecks in this trail are protected by the Commonwealth *Historic Shipwrecks Act 1976* and the Victorian *Heritage Act 1995*. Damaging, disturbing or interfering with wreck remains is prohibited and carries heavy penalties.

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SHIPWRECK COAST



PORT FAIRY WRECKS



29 *Socrates* 1821 - 1843

The British built whaler was wrecked with its cargo of cattle, sheep and oil from Tasmania when its cable parted during an easterly gale.

30 *Lydia* 1825 - 1843

The Liverpool-built South American trader was sailing from Sydney to London in ballast when lost after running ashore..

31 *Thistle* 1825 - 2837

The Indian-built schooner owned by the Hentys was wrecked when its crew was collecting wattle bark during the off-season from whaling.

32 *Essington* 1826 - 1852

Government-built in Sydney as a troop and convict transport, it was privately owned when wrecked in a gale while carrying general cargo from Sydney.

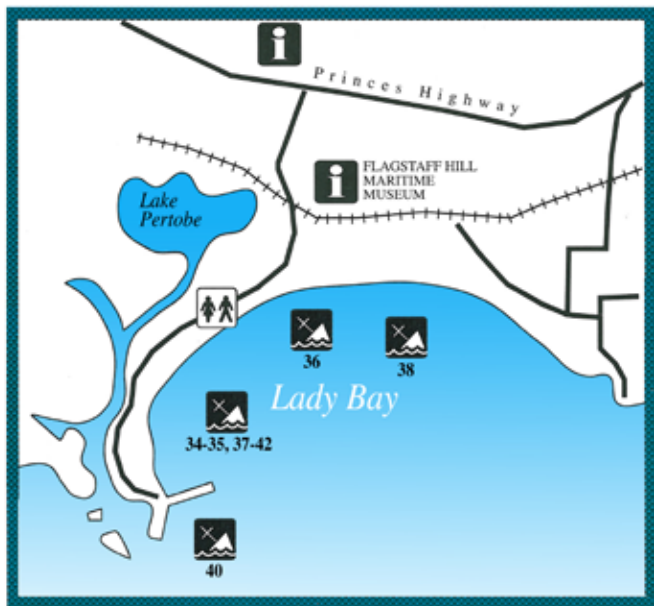
33 *Mahogany Ship* - 1836 (not found)

In the early nineteenth century there were several sightings of an 'ancient wreck' in dunes between Port Fairy and Warrnambool. Hypotheses about its identity vary from 'sixteenth century Portuguese caravel' to 'early American sealing vessel'. This mysterious wreck has not been found despite extensive searches and the offer of a government reward of \$250,000 in 1992-93. The Mahogany Walking Track goes from Port Fairy to Warrnambool.

29 - 32 PORT FAIRY

Port Fairy at the mouth of the Moyne River, one of Victoria's earliest settlements, began as a whaling station. Twenty ships were lost at Port Fairy when driven ashore by southerly gales between 1836 and 1876. During this period, Port Fairy grew from a sealing and whaling base to a thriving rural port.

WARRNAMBOOL WRECKS



34 – 42 Warrnambool (not found)

There are 15 shipwrecks in Lady Bay dating from 1850 – 1905. Their cargoes of potatoes, wheat, coal and timber reveal Warrnambool's expansion as a centre of rural trade.

34 Enterprise 1847 - 1850 (not found)

The New Zealand-built schooner *Enterprise* had sailed from Melbourne and was anchored in Lady Bay, Warrnambool when a south easterly gale swept in on 14 September 1850. The vessel began to drag its anchor, grounded, then went broadside onto the beach. A local Aborigine, Buckawall, struggled through the rough sea from the shore and secured a line to the *Enterprise*, allowing the crew to land safely. The vessel became a total wreck.

35 Golden Spring 1848 - 1863 (not found)

Built in Maine, USA in 1848, the brig *Golden Spring* was registered in Sydney from 1858. The vessel was anchored in Lady Bay when a gale blew up, causing it to drag anchor and strike the wreck of the *Maid of Julpha*, located some 150 metres off shore in the bay. The *Golden Spring* soon broke in two. The gale was noted as the worst that had been recorded in Warrnambool at this time. The sloop *Peveril* was wrecked in the same gale.

36 Free Trader 1850 - 1894

The Tasmanian-built barque *Free Trader* parted from both its main anchors during a sudden gale at Warrnambool in July 1884; it was in ballast at the time, pending a voyage to Newcastle. The remaining anchor dragged, and the vessel drifted towards the beach, going broadside onto the piling at the swimming baths. The piling soon battered a hole through the hull, and the vessel filled with water. The crew escaped by climbing onto the piling, but the 44 year old *Free Trader* became a total wreck. The site is probably deeply buried under the sand in the intertidal zone south west of the Surf Life Saving Club.

37 Alexandra 1863 – 1882 (not found)

The *Alexandra* was an English built brig which plied the inter-colonial waters around Australia during the nineteenth century. In 1882, while waiting in Warrnambool to load potatoes bound for Sydney, the *Alexandra* was struck by a south-westerly gale. The parting of an anchor cable resulted in the ship drifting, and striking stern-first on the beach in Lady Bay. No lives were lost but the ship was a total wreck and eventually broke up in rough weather.

38 Edinburgh Castle 1863 – 1888

The Scottish barque *Edinburgh Castle* wrecked in 1888 near the mouth of the Hopkins River in Lady Bay. The ship was carrying an important cargo of cement from London for construction of the Warrnambool breakwater. Pilot error caused the ship to run aground despite the calm weather and it settled in sand, foiling efforts to refloat it. The remains of the ship were scattered in the surf and the site is now buried, but occasionally becomes exposed during rough weather.

39 Whaleboat unknown – 1836 (not found)

In the winter of 1836 a whaleboat swamped and sank while entering the Hopkins River. One of the three whaleboat crew drowned in the incident. Further tragedy struck when another boat, captained by John Mills, overturned while trying to recover the whaleboat. The site has yet to be found or identified.

40 La Bella 1893-1905

The Norwegian-built barquentine *La Bella* was approaching Warrnambool with a cargo of timber from Kaipara, New Zealand, in heavy seas and evening mist when it ran aground on what is now known as La Bella Reef. By sunrise only seven of the 12 crew still clung to the wreck. A local fisherman, William Ferrier, rowed his small punt through heavy seas to rescue two of the crew, including the captain, whilst the volunteer lifeboat crew rescued a further three before *La Bella* broke in half and sank. William Ferrier was 25 years old at the time, and was awarded the Silver Medal of the Royal Humane Society for his daring rescue. The wreck now lies in 13m of water and is home to an abundance of marine life.

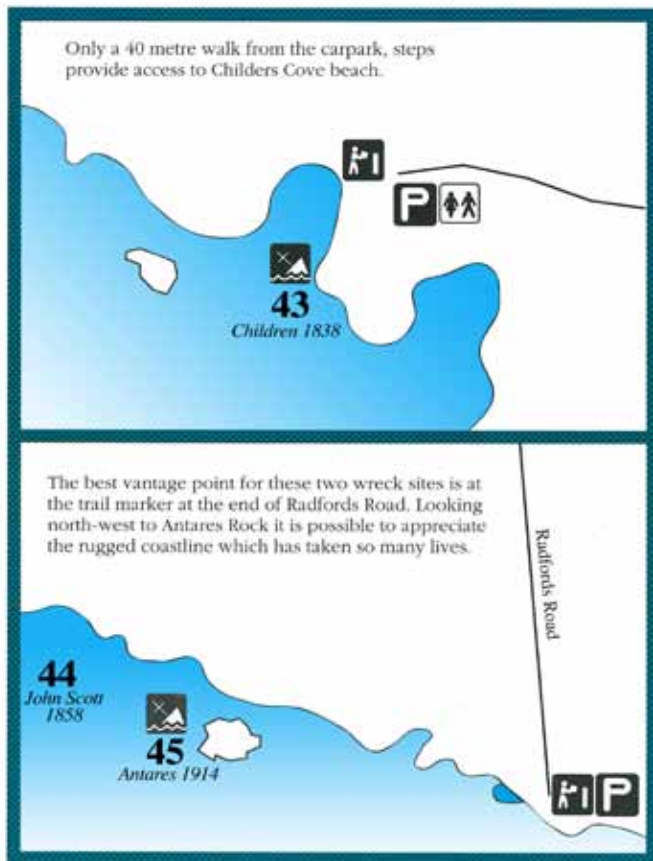
41 Freedom 1841 – 1853 (not found)

The *Freedom* was a two-masted schooner built in Jersey, England. It was carrying a cargo of wheat, barley and flour bound for Sydney when it was driven ashore at Warrnambool by a south easterly gale. Although refloated, another gale drove the vessel ashore again on 11 October 1853. This time the anchors parted and the ship was blown ashore near the jetty where it became a total wreck. The site has not been located.

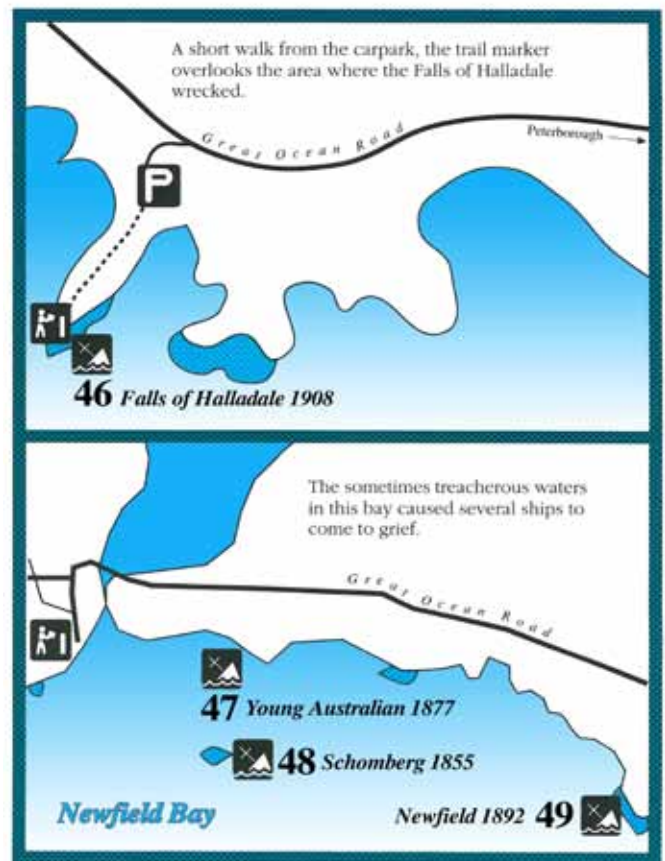
42 Yarra 1850 – 1882 (not found)

The *Yarra* was built in Hobart, Tasmania as a two-masted brigantine. It was waiting to unload a cargo of coal from Newcastle when the anchors parted in heavy swell and the ship drifted out of control across Lady Bay. The *Yarra* first collided with the *SS Dawn*, before grounding east of the jetties, where it broke up the following day. The site was later dynamited as it was a navigation hazard, and the remains of the site have not been located.

Children, Antares and John Scott



PETERBOROUGH WRECKS



43 Children 1825 - 1839

The *Children* was a coastal trader owned by the Henty family of Portland. On a voyage from Launceston in January 1839, it was blown off course and struck a reef at the mouth of Childers cove. Sixteen people were drowned.

44 John Scott 1848 - 1858

The *John Scott* was on a voyage from Adelaide to Melbourne with a cargo of flour and wheat when heavy seas and fog caused the vessel to come ashore at Bold Projection. The crew and passengers were all saved.

45 Antares 1888 - 1914

The *Antares* was the last sailing ship wrecked along the Shipwreck Coast. On a voyage from Marseilles to Melbourne during World War I, the vessel sank with the loss of all hands.



46 Falls of Halladale 1886-1908

The *Falls of Halladale* was on the final leg of its voyage from New York to Melbourne when its captain became unsure of his location due to the presence of sea mist. The vessel, with all its sails set, struck a reef and became a total loss.

47 Young Australian 1864 - 1877 (not found)

The *Young Australian* was on a voyage from Queensland to Adelaide with a cargo of sugar and rum when severe storms damaged the ship's rigging and forced it ashore.

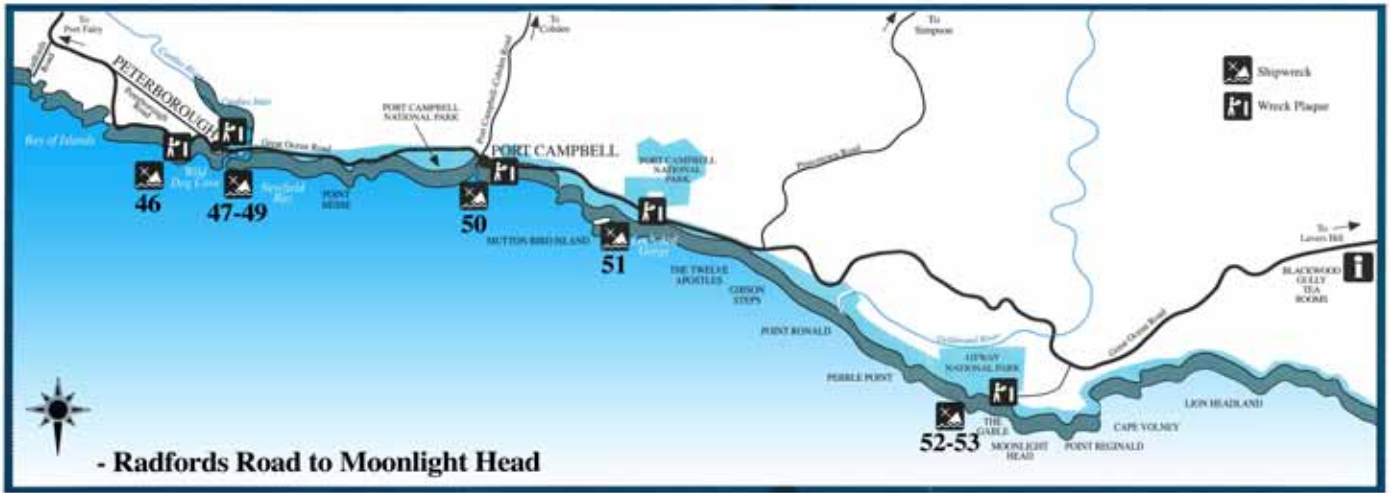
48 Schomberg 1855 - 1855

The *Schomberg* was one of the most magnificent sailing ships ever built. Captain 'Bully' Forbes was below deck entertaining female passengers when the vessel was blown ashore at Curdies Inlet. Both the ship and the Captain's career were wrecked.

49 Newfield 1889 - 1892

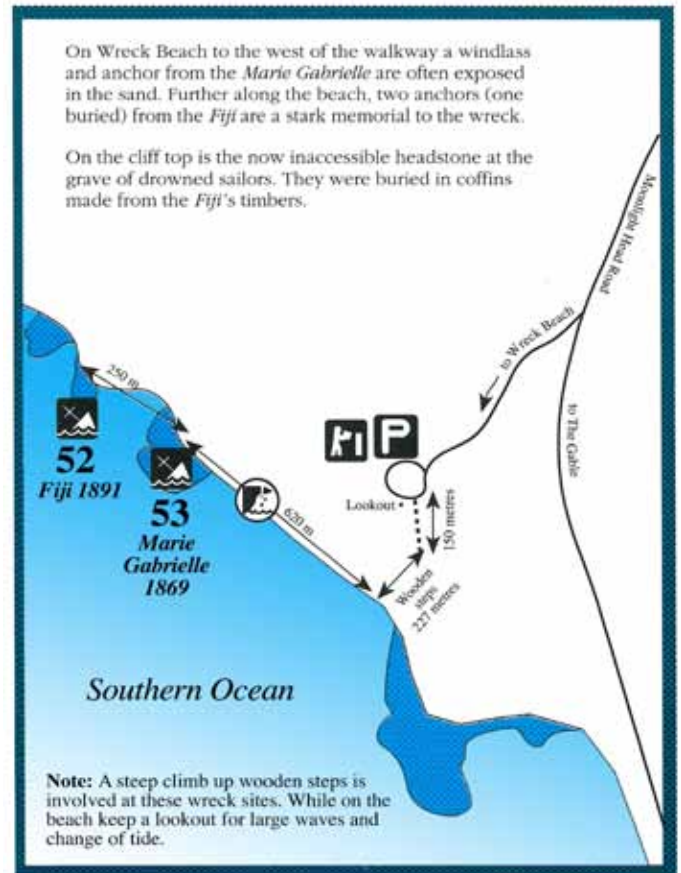
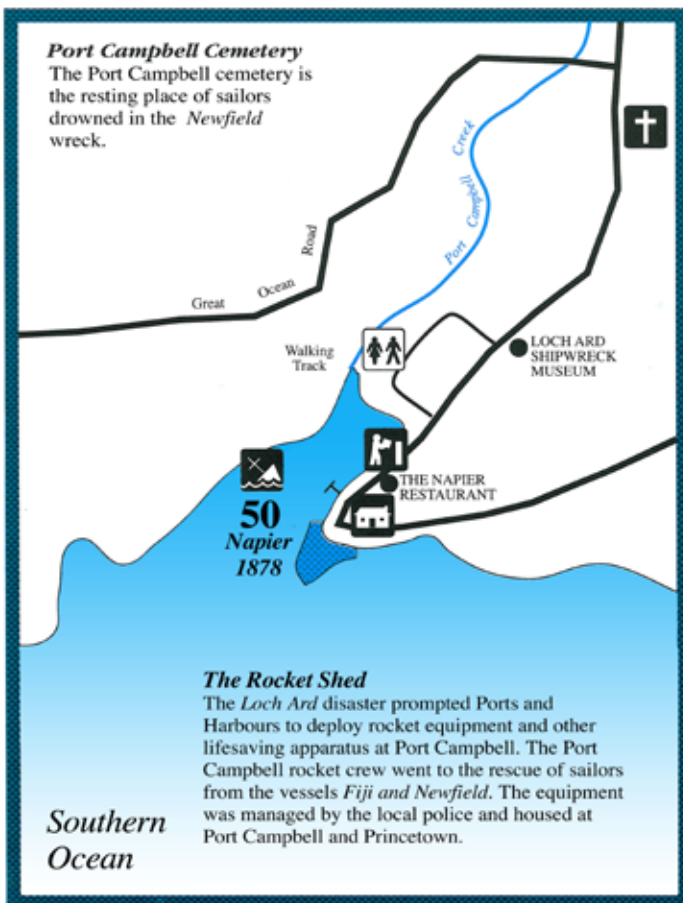
Poor weather conditions and faulty navigation caused the loss of the barque *Newfield* while on a voyage from Scotland to Brisbane. The ship was blown ashore at Peterborough with the loss of nine lives.

Left: Loch Ard Gorge on the Great Ocean Road.



Napier

Fiji and Marie Gabrielle



50 Napier 1874 - 1878

The steamship *Napier* was engaged to salvage the wreck of the *Loch Ard*, but came to grief while entering Port Campbell inlet.

51 Loch Ard 1873 - 1878

The *Loch Ard* was on the final stage of its voyage from Gravesend to Melbourne when sea mist obscured the land causing the vessel to run into Mutton Bird Island near Port Campbell. Of the 54 people on board the ship, only two managed to get ashore.

52 Fiji 1875 - 1891

The wreck of the barque *Fiji* was caused by poor weather and faulty navigational equipment. The ship was wrecked at Wreck Beach near Moonlight Head during a voyage from Hamburg to Melbourne.

Lifesaving gear was sent from Port Campbell in two buggies, the first containing the tripod and four rockets, and a lifeboat, the second the heavy rope and (bosun's) chair. It is strongly suspected that a local photographer took the heavy rope out and put his camera gear in. When they got down to the wreck they found that half the rocket apparatus was missing. It was needed to fire the heavy rope on to the wreck so that the people could get off, hand over hand, to the shore. Without this rope, 12 of the crew of 27 died.

53 Marie Gabrielle 1864 - 1869

While carrying tea from China to Melbourne, the barque *Marie Gabrielle* was blown off course and driven ashore at Wreck Beach near Moonlight Head. Despite the south-westerly gale, all hands were saved.