

Searching for shipwrecks in the Swan and Canning rivers using open multi-beam sonar data

An avocational study

- Most of the maritime archaeological work in the rivers has been avocational.
- In 1980, Colin Scrimshaw published 'Swan and Canning River wrecks', compiling information for 21 sites of historical interest
- In recent years, David Jackson has been discovering more wrecks, and keeping them up-to-date on his website (and popular Facebook page) 'Diving Western Australia's Shipwrecks'.
- There are now more than 30 known shipwrecks in the rivers, representing a history of industry, military and leisure.

...with new data to explore

- In 2023, the WA Department of Transport published a huge collection of existing seabed and riverbed data on the 'WA Bathymetry Portal'.
- Of particular interest is the 2010 multi-beam survey for the Swan and Canning Rivers (SC20100413).
- At 1 m resolution, you can clearly resolve the known wreck sites, and many more structures of interest.

bit.ly/swanriversurvey



Open desktop assessment

- Targets have been catalogued in QGIS and prioritised according to their shape, structure, length, evidence for scour, and association with known wrecks.
- An online map is available through the QR code above.

Fieldwork has begun

- In August 2023, we started to visit these targets, with side-scan sonar followed by scuba diving.
- All structures visited so far are clearly still in-place.
- We have confirmed the elongated mound off Point Walter is a 20 m-long shipwreck. It is filled with rock, and was possibly deliberately sunk. The WA Museum has been notified, and we are working to identify it.

Managing river sites

- The WA Maritime Archaeology Act 1973 is the relevant legislation for rivers, and is currently under review. If updated from a pre-1900 to a rolling 75-year threshold, many more river wrecks may be protected.
- MAAWA reports avocational findings to the WA Museum, to inform regulation and management.
- The open availability of existing government data can be hugely beneficial to maritime archaeology. Existing multi-beam surveys are more than sufficient for desktop assessment of metropolitan riverbeds.

References

Jackson, D. 2019. Swan River - Diving Western Australia's Shipwrecks. Retrieved 26 August 2023 from <<https://www.divingwawrecks.com/swan-river/>>.
Scrimshaw, C. 1980. Swan and Canning River wrecks. Maritime Archaeological Association of Western Australia, Fremantle.
WA Department of Transport. 2010. SC20100413_Multi Multibeam Survey. Retrieved through WA Bathymetry Portal: <<https://www.transport.wa.gov.au/1marine/marine-geographic-data.asp>>

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Ian McCann inspects the stern post of the Point Walter shipwreck. Patrick Morrison, August 2023.

