



## fact file

# Fraser Island's Shipwrecks

QUEENSLAND: Twenty-three wrecks were recorded in Fraser Island waters between 1856 and 1935 (when The S.S. Maheno beached near The Pinnacles on the island's eastern beach). The Sandy Cape light house was switched on in 1870 but this, and a smaller light on Woody Island, did little to alleviate the number of ships wrecked.

Inspired by the maritime theme, the architects of Kingfisher Bay Resort have incorporated the images of the ships rigging, masts and sails in the design and the resort has named its restaurants and conference rooms after some of the famous ships which were wrecked on Fraser Island.

**The SS Maheno** - is the most famous of Fraser Island's wrecks and has become a landmark attraction. Built in 1905, the SS Maheno was one of the first turbine-driven steamers. She plied a regular route between Sydney and Auckland until she was commissioned as a hospital ship in Europe during World War One. She also served in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

In 1935, she and her sister ship the *Oonah* were sold to Japan for scrap. The rudders of the boats were removed and they were being towed to Japan. When they reached Queensland waters, a cyclone snapped the tow chain and the Maheno drifted helplessly onto Fraser Island's ocean beach.

During World War Two, the wreck was used for air force target practice and the Z-Force Special Unit used her to practice with limpet mines prior to the raid on Singapore Harbour. These days, the rusting remains are one of the most popular photo attractions on island.

**The Seabelle** was one of the first ships to be recorded as lost off Fraser Island. The 158-ton schooner left Rockhampton on 7 March 1857 and was wrecked the following day on Breaksea Spit at the north-eastern tip of the island.

Rumours circulated about potential survivors from the wreck. A white woman and two white girls were reported to be living with Fraser Island Aborigines. New South Wales authorities commissioned the captain of the *Coquett* to investigate and he bought two young girls - who, as it turns out, were albino Aborigines - to Sydney. They were never returned to their parents as he had promised, were institutionalised and both died at an early age.

**The Panama**, an American sailing ship, hit Breaksea Spit and was beached at Rooney's Point in 1864.



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Passengers and some crew camped on the beach, but returned to the ship when Aborigines entered the camp and took their goods.

Later, the Aborigines tried to get on board the boat but were driven off by the sailors' cutlasses. The captain and several of the crew escaped in a lifeboat and were picked up near Woody Island (on Fraser Island's sheltered western side).

**The Ottawa** was wrecked just south of Indian Head on 28 March 1879. The accident proved fortuitous for the local Butchulla, who raided the ship's cargo of spirits while the crew was away looking for help.

**The Stirling Castle** struck a coral reef north of Fraser Island on 22 May 1836 whilst enroute from Sydney to London. A longboat containing crew, Captain James Fraser and his wife Eliza landed near Waddy Point (on Fraser's eastern beach).

Half the party walked south and was rescued by hunters from the Moreton Bay settlement. The others subsisted with the Aborigines for seven weeks, during which time Captain Fraser died. A rescue party - with two former convicts who had lived with the Aborigines - set out from Brisbane. Eliza and three other survivors were rescued. Mrs Fraser became a celebrity and her exaggerated accounts of her ordeal lead to wide spread hostility towards the Aborigines in Australia and the UK.

**The Investigator** carried explorer Matthew Flinders - the first-recorded European to land on Fraser Island - aboard. In 1802, as he was exploring the Cooloola Coast, Flinders mapped the Great Sandy Peninsula and landed near Great Sandy Cape so his naturalists could collect botanical samples. There, his party had friendly meetings with the Aborigines, swapping presents of hatchets and fish nets.

**The Marloo**, a luxury Italian liner, hit the Sandy Cape shoal in calm water on September 27, 1914 and beached - strewing the cargo of green tomatoes and bottles of whisky all over the beach. Help was sought from the nearby Sandy Cape lighthouse keeper.

**The Aramac** was another victim of the Breaksea Spit. In 1904 it bumped hard several times on the sand spit but continued on. After 24km, she was leaking badly and the crew and passengers took to the boats and safely reached the safety of nearby Burnett Heads and Baffle Point. The captain and six men remained on board and finally succeeded in anchoring Aramac in the protection of Platypus Bay (on the island's western side).



Kingfisher Bay Resort  
*Fraser Island*

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### **Ships and Shipwrecks**

22 May 1836	Stirling Castle
07 Mar 1857	Seabelle
10 Mar 1864	Panama
28 May 1879	Ottowa
13 Mar 1904	Aramac
27 Sep 1914	Marloo
09 Jul 1935	Maheno

Ends.