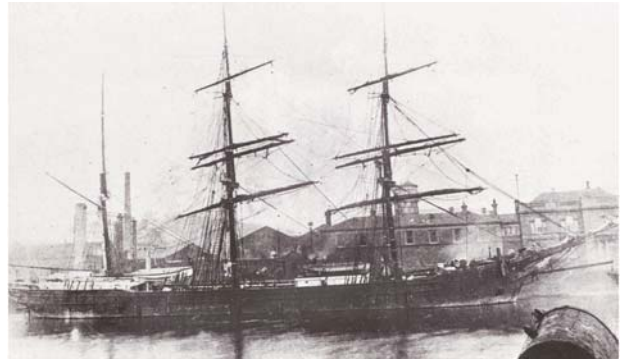


Gudrun Shipwreck

The Gudrun was a three-masted wooden barque of 992 tonnes, built in Quebec, Canada, in 1880. She was sold to a Norwegian in 1890 and arrived in Western Australia in 1901 to load jarrah (Western Australian native timber) under the command of a Captain Griff. She was one of the largest wooden vessels to ever visit the Western Australian coast.

How did the shipwreck occur?

On August 4th 1901 the Gudrun left Bunbury for Falmouth, England, with her cargo of 3000 tons of timber. Shortly into her journey she started leaking badly and was forced to go ashore at Fremantle for repairs. For reasons known only to himself, the ship's 22-year-old Norwegian carpenter had drilled a hole through her hull! Following an investigation, the carpenter, Azel Rawd, admitted to drilling the hole and was arrested and charged with attempting to scuttle the ship.



*The Gudrun at port in southern Norway
(Image courtesy Norsk Sjøfartsmuseum)*

After repairs the Gudrun set out again with her cargo – and with her carpenter in leg irons. But within days the ship was again taking on water. Forced north by strong winds, Griff decided to head for the nearest safe haven, Shark Bay. By the time she reached the bay, the Gudrun had more than a metre of water in her hold.

Griff deliberately beached the ship on the shallow, sandy flats off Cape Peron on the 23rd of October in the hope that she could be repaired and refloated at a later date. He then sailed a small whaler 45 nautical miles to Carnarvon to see if the police would hold his prisoner in the local lockup while the repairs were being undertaken. After checking with authorities in Perth, the police refused his request. No further mention is made of the ship's carpenter and it is not known if he was responsible for her eventual demise.

During the night of November 14th, a gale swept through Shark Bay smashing the Gudrun's rudder. Attempts were made to refloat the ship over ensuing weeks but eventually she was abandoned on the 20th of December 1901.

When was the wreck discovered?

The mystery surrounding the location of the Gudrun was solved 88 years after her sinking when Paul Anderson, a Canadian studying dugongs in Shark bay, found her in 1989 on the sand flats north of Cape Peron. Professor Anderson's find of the largest intact and undisturbed wooden wreck on the Western Australian coast, has led to a sanctuary zone being declared to preserve the wreck, the marine life it attracts and the surrounding waters.

Today, the wreck lies in about six metres of water 5.3 nautical miles north of Cape Peron. The wreck attracts an abundance of fish and marine life, ranging from turtles, giant groper, stingrays, spotted cod, many species of trevally and sweetlips. The wreck's superstructure has been flattened by the constant current and the occasional cyclone, and while her hull is buried largely intact in the soft sands, iron frames and fittings rising above the seabed protect and provide habitat for fish.

The Gudrun's figurehead

In 1967, Eric Berry of Carnarvon gave an attractive figurehead in the shape of a woman dressed in flowing robes to the Western Australian Museum. It came into his possession when he bought the home of Carnarvon's first resident magistrate who had purchased the figurehead from Captain Griff for one shilling. The magistrate had it installed in his garden until he donated it to the Fremantle Museum where it is on display today. A replica of the figurehead is also on display in the Shark Bay World Heritage Discovery Centre.

For more fact sheets visit www.sharkbay.org.