

TARANAKI HERALD WEEKENDER

The night the Wanaka ran aground

Eyes strained to penetrate the haze. A glimpse of white water as if over rocks. "Hard aport!"

Too late! The stern struck and the steamer Wanaka swung her head towards the Sugarloaves as the gentle swell lifted her further on to the reef.

It was 3.30 a.m. on the night of April 2, 1891. It was less than 12 hours since Captain James Meades had guided his ship out over the Manakau bar en route to New Plymouth where he expected to arrive at 4 a.m.

He was proud of his vessel which he had skipped for three years, a year on the Lyttelton to Manakau run and a further two on the Wellington - Nelson - Manakau round trip frequently calling at New Plymouth.

On this trip the moon had gone down at 2.15 a.m. leaving the Wanaka steaming south into a heavy haze from bushfires on shore.

Suspecting he might be closer to land than usual Captain Meades ordered the course changed to take the ship seawards.

The Waitara light was not seen because of the smoke but it was thought they had already passed it so a watch was kept for the New Plymouth lights.

Visibility was down to less than the length of the steamer ahead but the sea was calm.

Moments later she struck the reef which runs out from the point just west of Bell Block Beach; only a few hundred metres from the remains of the Rangitira, wrecked in almost identical circumstances in 1880.

At the inquiry which later sat in New Plymouth much was made of the apparent attraction this particular part of the coast

seemed to have for shipping.

Captain MacArthur of the Gairloch was called to assure the court that steamers were indeed drawn in towards the coast in the area during fine weather but not in rough weather. He cited both the Rangitira and the Hawea which had been temporarily stranded at Waitara.

The court, comprising Mr C. C. Kettle, Resident Magistrate, and a nautical assessor from Wellington, Captain Adams, were not convinced and thought that as Captain Meades was aware of the previous casualties he should have taken soundings instead of relying upon the log to judge his position.

He was allowed to retain his certificate but was ordered to pay costs. Even so the court recommended to the Marine Dept. that vessels be supplied with a newer type of log, stronger lights be placed at Waitara and the breakwater and mention also made of a supposed iron sand attraction on the coast.

Full astern

No sooner had the Wanaka slid on to the bed of boulders than the engines were run full astern but with no effect.

A kedge was taken out but this too failed to haul her off.

The tide was already two hours past full and there

was little likelihood of getting her off until at least the next tide.

At 6 a.m. after burning lights and rockets without attracting attention from the shore, a ship's boat was sent to the breakwater with some of the passengers to get assistance.

The harbourmaster, Capt. Holford and Mr W. L. Newman, the company agent, immediately arranged for the steamer Mohaka to return to the wreck towing the ship's boat and a harbour surfboat.

All the time steam was kept up in the Wanaka's boiler and she was not making water. There was every possibility that she might yet be saved.

News of the stranding spread rapidly and in the morning there were hundreds of townspeople on the beach to see her.

Her cargo was transferred to the Mohaka by boat and for several weeks attempts were made to tow her off but she was there to stay.

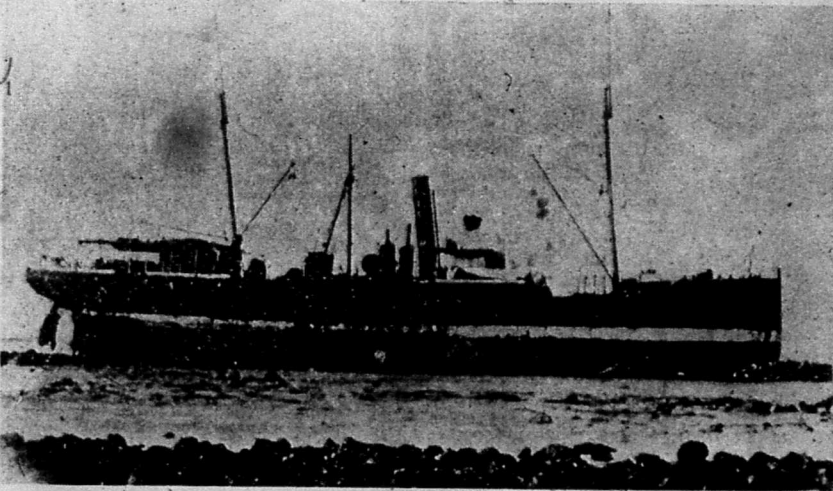
It was during these operations that the only casualty occurred; when the engineer was struck by a lump of coal being unloaded and suffered a scalp wound.

All that remains of the 493 ton vessel today is the boiler standing high and dry on the reef at low tide surrounded by fragmented hull plating visited only by occasional surfcasters and paua hunters.

By
Barry
Hartley



NOWADAYS, visited only by paua hunters, the boiler and hull plating of the Wanaka lie exposed on the reef at low tides.



SEEMINGLY undamaged the Wanaka stands erect on a bed of boulders. Her propeller has been removed and the steam winches powered by the two donkey boilers seen just aft of the funnel are probably being used to work out her cargo. (Photo: Alexander Turnbull Library, Dickie Coll.)

Starscope

MONDAY, January 31

Jan 21-Feb 19 Aquarius

(July 23-Aug 21) Leo

An extra firm effort in one direction could bring astonishing results. A slight disappointment over money is indicated, but don't worry about it.

(Feb 20-March 20) Pisces

(Aug 22-Sept 22) Virgo

This is an ideal time for you to get going on new enterprises. There'll be some tension, but firmness will help you to overcome it. Romance is favoured this evening.

(March 21-April 19) Aries

(Sept 23-Oct 22) Libra

A humdrum but happy day lies ahead. Complete routine jobs, and try to plan some special

Worth a v

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Queen St; Monday closed. Tuesday to Thursday 10.30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Friday 10.30 a.m. to 9 p.m., Saturday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday Jan. 9 closed but usually open 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Taranaki Museum, Ariki St. Monday closed. Tuesday to Friday 10.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., Saturday and Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Hurworth, Carrington Rd; Friday to Tuesday 10

Fletcher
Steel
has it...