

**The monthly Newsletter
of the
Marine Life Society
of South Australia Inc.**



“understanding, enjoying & caring for our oceans”

June 2014, No. 412

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It was MLSSA that persuaded our State Government to protect all seadragons & seahorses in

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Leatherjacket Louse

**Monthly Mailout - May 2014
Welcome from the new Committee**

Repeated below is our Monthly Mailout to MLSSA members, just in case you missed seeing it at the time: -

“Hi everyone,
Steve here, your new president following our April AGM. We also now have a new committee and a torrent of fresh ideas. We are planning a busy year of rejuvenation for our Society. Priorities include the attraction of new members, engagement with local conservation issues and the stimulation of year-round activities. These begin with a stall at the coming Whale Season Launch at the SA Museum (May 27), and our very own Whyalla Underwater Shootout (June 7-9). We are seeking your help with these events- find out more at the bottom on this email.

NEW WEBSITE

We are currently in transition to a new website at www.mlssa.org.au . The site is growing fast, and has been designed to allow members to easily write and publish articles. We are also progressively republishing past articles to the new site. Please email info@mlssa.org.au us if you wish to contribute to the website, so we can set up your access account.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If your membership lapsed prior to the AGM, we encourage you to [rejoin us](#) as a financial member. You can now make your payment via Paypal (including VISA and Mastercard payment options).

NOW ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We are also now embracing social media, with new presences on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Youtube](#). We invite you to connect with us across these platforms, but also wish to remind you that this email list will remain active, with a monthly summary email and occasional extra announcements as issues and opportunities arise.

NEXT GENERAL MEETING

As reported in our May newsletter, meetings will resume on a regular basis once that the new committee is bedded in with new systems and clarity of vision. At this stage, we have not yet scheduled a General Meeting.

MORE SOON

So hopefully, I've said enough to whet your appetite for involvement in this new era for our Society. The rest is up to you. If you haven't already, please renew your membership and put your hand up to get involved with coming events. There is fun to be had and much to achieve in the year ahead.

With warmth and optimism,

Steve Reynolds

MLSSA President

(On behalf of the new committee)”

Whyalla Underwater Shootout June 7-9

We are seeking both participants and volunteers for our Whyalla Underwater Shootout over the June holiday long weekend.

This event will also include a special World Ocean Day celebration, the evening of June 8th. The night will include a dinner, short presentations and plenty of revelry and social time.

Details for the event can be found [on our website](#) and on [Facebook](#).

MLSSA & the Tangaroa Blue Foundation

Heidi Taylor, Managing Director at Tangaroa Blue Foundation, wrote to us recently, saying “We would be very keen to have the support of MLSSA. The Australian Marine Debris Initiative is a network of volunteers, communities, industry and government all working on the marine debris issue. We link in with organisations like MLSSA to provide a framework that the organisation can participate and contribute to not only the removal of marine debris from underwater and shoreline sites, but also the collection of data and assistance in creation of Source Reduction Plans which prevent marine debris occurring in the first place. Can you let me know if this sounds of interest and we can discuss further details on possible

projects?”

Heidi followed this up later, saying “It would be great to have the support from MLSSA. We are continuing to grow both our beach and underwater clean-up networks and this is where I see the potential to partner together. The main objectives of the Australian Marine Debris Initiative are:

- removal of marine debris
- collection of data on what is removed
- tracking back to the source where possible
- working with relevant stakeholders to find ways that stop marine debris before it enters the environment.

Do you see any of these actions that MLSSA could link in with?”

A later message from Heidi read, “The first steps would be to gauge the interest of the group in the program as a whole, then to set up a small project to start with. This could start with an underwater or beach clean-up including data collection. I would start with a small area so everyone can become familiar with the methodology.

This data could be then inputted directly into our database online or emailed back to us for inclusion in the Australian Marine Debris Database.

The group could then work out a more long term project by identifying a monitoring site and how often they would like to do it. For monitoring a smaller section done more regularly and really well is better than trying to set up a big section and not being able to do it fully or regularly.

Once there is some data in the database from your site/s we can then start looking at sources and Source Reduction Plans, but a 6 – 12 month data set is really needed to get a gauge of seasonal differences.

Thanks and kind regards,

Heidi Taylor, Australian Marine Debris Initiative, Tangaroa Blue Foundation

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www.tangaroablue.org”

Whale Season Launch at SA Museum

Our Society participated in the Whale Season Launch held for young school children at the SA Museum in May. Dan & Emma Monceaux, Ruth Trigg and David Muirhead all helped out with a Society display. Some of our marine life calendars were on display. A slide show of photographs was also shown. The school children were able to play an arcade game called “Cuttle Scuttle” (see

<https://www.facebook.com/CuttleScuttle>). The noise, at times, was deafening. The kids enjoyed playing “Cuttle Scuttle” so much that some had to be dragged away by their teachers.

Photographs such as these were posted on our Facebook page:





Loss Led To Leaf Litter

Former SAM Director, Tim Flannery fought hard against the choice of Plane tree species in North Terrace, and lost. The result of that loss were evident on the day of the Whale Season Launch in May:



Comments on Draft Marine Parks Permit Regulations

Below are some details taken from a recent email to the SDFSA: -

“Invitation to comment on the draft Marine Parks Permit Regulations

You may be aware that South Australia has created 19 multiple-use marine parks, to help protect and conserve our important marine life into the future.

Activities in marine parks are subject to regulations that came into effect in March 2013. These regulations prohibit certain

activities in marine park zones. A permit is now required to undertake these prohibited activities.

You are invited to comment on new regulations which have been drafted to facilitate the permits process and provide more flexibility for permit holders.

Please find attached a letter which provides more details on this process. Also attached is a copy of the draft regulations for your information and comment.

Regards, The Marine Parks team.”

Comments on the draft permit regulations close on 4th July.

The Wreck of the Willyama

by Steve Reynolds

As described in my article titled “Three Days at Marion Bay” in our May newsletter, “A highlight of our trip was our visit to the site of the wreck of the *Willyama* near Marion Bay.”

The 2704-ton (or 2705t) SS *Willyama* sank in Marion Bay, near Rhino Head, on 13th April 1907. She had been built, just 10 years earlier, in 1897 (for the Adelaide Steamship Co.). Her cargo was 4000 tons of coal from Newcastle. This coal, which was bound for Port Pirie, is said to have “provided many (of Yorke) peninsula’s residents with a private coal supply, at no charge, for many years” (“Yorke Peninsula Shipping” by Ronald Parsons).

(The SS *Marion* ran ashore about 1½ miles east of Cape Spencer in July 1862. She is said to have been wrecked in the bay already named Marion Bay after an earlier shipwreck. The 919-ton, three-masted, wooden (teak) migrant ship *Marion* was wrecked on a reef near the Troubridge Shoal, almost 11 years earlier, in July 1851. Both Marion Reef and Marion Bay were named after this earlier shipwreck when some of the survivors (360+ passengers & crew?) from it landed at Marion Bay. Another group of survivors landed at Cape Jervis. A one-masted wooden cutter called *Marion* was broken

up at Louth in South Australia around 1912.)



**An anchor from the SS *Marion*
Located at the Marion Bay Historical
Centre**

(Taken by Steve Reynolds)

I've long yearned to dive on the wreck of the *Willyama* ever since Geoff Mower, our Society's Public Officer and longest serving member, wrote an article about the wreck almost 34 years ago, for our November 1980 newsletter.

I was hoping to turn my dream into reality when I was going to visit Marion Bay just after Easter this year. More on that later, but here is Geoff's 1980 article again first:-

"Willyama by Geoff Mower

Willyama Bay, lying between Stenhouse Bay and Marion Bay at the southernmost tip of the Yorke Peninsula, is a delightfully secluded cove of soft, clean sand backed by a fringe of scrub-covered dunes. Behind the dunes is an extensive area where camping is permitted at no charge. The fact that there are no facilities, and the state of the entrance road, means that relatively few tourists consider stopping here, but that just makes it all the more attractive for those of us for whom the hard gravel, septic tanks, and crowds of the established caravan parks hold no magic. And as if this were not enough to recommend it, *Willyama* Bay possesses another distinction – its very own shipwreck!

The steel-hulled steamship *Willyama* was one of the dozens of small freighters that plied their way back and forth between Adelaide and the Spencer Gulf ports, around the turn of the century. Many of these vessels were to find their final resting places against the rugged cliffs of the southern Yorke Peninsula. The *Willyama's* nemesis came in 1907 in the shape of Rhino Head, the double-contoured rocky cape that forms the eastern boundary of Stenhouse Bay. She was luckier than some. After she struck the reef the prevailing south-westerly wind pushed her around into the small bay that now bears her name. She eventually grounded stern first in about twenty feet of water, and the crew were able to scramble safely ashore.

The wreck remained there, relatively intact, for ten years before the superstructure finally succumbed to the elements, and she broke up. Today, all that is visible above the water is part of the steering gear and, at low tide, one of the boilers.

Because she is in such shallow water, diving on the *Willyama* depends heavily upon the weather. The bay is open to the south, and a southerly wind usually means the sea is too rough for diving. A few days of gentle northerly breezes, however, will create diving conditions as good as you could expect anywhere in the state.

Lying two to three hundred yards offshore, the wreck is a long way to snorkel with a scuba on ones' back. If you elect to swim out underwater it is as well to plan your dive carefully so that you have enough air to enjoy the dive and get back safely. Snorkelling out and scuba-ing back seemed like a good compromise to my buddy and me, last time we were there.

We arrived first at the stern, lying as it does, closest to shore. Here the rudder post points skyward some eight feet above the surface, and we were able to rest here for a few moments. The rudder and hull at the stern are relatively intact and magpie

perch, parrotfish, and sweep abound around the rusting metal walls.

The deck is all but gone, the interior of the ship consisting of a mesh of criss-crossing iron rods and plates. Everything is covered with masses of gently waving kelp, but here and there under secluded ledges are isolated stalks of gorgonian coral, adding a splash of colour to the rusty reds and browns.

A little further forward the huge masses of the twin boilers reach upward to just below the surface. This area can be dangerous if the sea rises, since a diver is flung about by the surge, risking impalement upon any one of a dozen protruding bits of metal.

On the port side is a long tunnel running the length of the after part of the ship, and containing one of the propeller shafts. With a little bit of contortion one can squeeze into this tunnel and swim along it, leaving a glittering curtain of silver bubbles climbing surfacewards from its roof.

On reaching the end though, you will find that you cannot get out, and you will have to swim back along the shaft and wriggle out through the entry hole.

The forward part of the ship has broken up almost completely, and it is impossible to tell where the rusty metal of the hull gives way to the kelp-covered boulders that comprise the sea bed on which the wreck lies.

Much of the underwater topography of the bay consists of rocks in low relief, with a dense growth of kelp, and other brown algae, so that the wreck has become an important artificial reef. Whilst numbers of fish, or the size of the individuals, is not large, reef fish such as squarebacks, magpie perch, parrotfish and old wife, are conspicuous.

Strewn over the wreck and surrounding sea bed we discovered numerous lumps of black rock, quite unlike the natural limestone of the area. We collected samples of this, and subsequent experiments involving that evening's campfire proved these to be coal. This

undoubtedly originated from the wreck, either as cargo, or as its fuel store. I would recommend to anyone wanting a campfire with a difference to collect some of this coal, which burns well despite its long immersion.

Having decided to swim back to shore underwater, we left the wreck with some air still in our tanks and navigated by compass across the beds of tapeweed that lie inshore of the wreck. Occasional multi-coloured ascidian-encrusted boulders broke the monotony of the seagrass. We inspected each of these closely, but didn't expect to find anything out of the ordinary. We were almost back at the shore, and feeling that we should have used our air at the wreck and snorkelled back, when we ran across something that made us change our minds. Lying parallel to the shore, and almost on the "blue line", there is a low reef, about five feet high, and in about ten feet of water. On the seaward side it is unremarkable simply being covered with ascidians and kelp. On the landward side, however, the rocks have been hollowed out underneath, presumably by erosion by water currents and sand, to form a shallow overhang.

These small caves are packed to capacity with gorgonian fans of every imaginable colour. This concentrated splash of brilliance among the drab seagrass and kelp intrigued us considerably, since it is unusual to find gorgonians growing in such profusion in ten feet of water in a shallow bay open to southerly storms.

Still wondering at this we swam the last short distance to shore, staggered through the soft sand, and paused a moment on the beach to rest and discuss the dive, before lugging our gear back over the sand hills.

Many factors combine to make the wreck of the *Willyama* an exceptional dive. As well as the occurrence of the gorgonians in shallow water that I have already described, the site of the wreck itself is remarkable. Not only is a boat not necessary, but an excellent dive may be had simply by snorkelling. This

accessibility, plus the location in the middle of some of Australia's prime diving territory, make(s) it curious that this wreck is relatively little known.

Perhaps the purists and the heroic divers scorn to dive such wrecks, preferring the blue depths of the *Clan Ranald*, or the offshore isolation of the *Marion*, but for me the *Willyama* will always be one of the most fascinating of dives."

Geoff's article was accompanied by this sketch of the wreck site: -



Until I was able to take some photos of my own, Geoff's sketch of the site was all that I had to go by. I think that Geoff did a pretty good job of sketching the wreck site. His article was first published in our November 1980 newsletter (No.43). I think that I was able to republish the article in a later issue when I was made Editor a little later on. I was able to read the article several times over the years and dream about diving on the wreck one day.

Although I have since visited Marion Bay on the odd occasion, I never did get to see or dive on the wreck. I hoped to change all that, however, when I prepared to travel to Marion Bay just after Easter this year. I planned to take my scuba gear with me, although I knew that I would have to dive alone whilst I was at Marion Bay. I hadn't taken the time to re-study Geoff's details about the wreck, but imagined that it was close to shore and accessible with relative ease. I wasn't even sure just where the site was exactly, but assumed that it would become obvious to me once that I got down to Marion Bay. I could easily just ask around.

Anyway, my plans all went awry when I visited my GP the evening before Good Friday and was told that I had a middle-ear infection and my sore ankle needed to be X-rayed and ultra-sounded. I wouldn't be

able to make such appointments until after Easter. I was justifiably devastated, having planned to do several dives over Easter and the following week which I was taking off of work.

It may have been just as well, however, since diving alone on the *Willyama* during less than ideal conditions would have been dangerous. At least I was able to see and photograph the wreck from the shore (just over 107 years to the day that she hit a reef on 13th April 1907).

She was actually abandoned during a salvage attempt on 25th April 1907 (Anzac Day) when she became damaged during rough weather. I was, coincidentally, symbolically visiting the site on Anzac Day 2014, 107 years after the abandonment in 1907.

I want to share some of those photos with you, using Geoff's article a little.



The wreck of the *Willyama* can be seen from this viewing platform at Willyama Beach
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)



This sign pointing to the wreck site is in the area where Geoff and his buddy probably camped prior to Nov 1980
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)



This interpretive sign is now located close to the wreck site
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)



A close-up shot of the sign
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)

I tried getting a good shot of the wreck site from several locations along Willyama Beach. This appears to be the best shot that I managed to get of the site: -



The steering gear of the Willyama protrudes above the surface of the water even at high tide
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)

The location of the boiler was almost discernible just beyond the steering gear. I also tried to get a shot of Rhino Head in the distance from several locations along Willyama Beach and at Stenhouse Bay. This appears to be the best shot that I managed to get of it: -



Rhino Head in the distance
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)

It seems that a housing estate is now located in the area where Geoff camped prior to November 1980: -



A housing estate is now located in the area where Geoff camped prior to November 1980
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)

There are now some steps leading down to the beach at the wreck site: -



**Steps leading down to the beach
at the wreck site**
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)

An anchor from the *Willyama* is located at the Marion Bay Historical Centre, along with an anchor from the *SS Marion* (of 1862). The Historical Centre was opened in October 1997.

Unfortunately, the anchor from the *SS Willyama* is starting to disappear under a nearby shrub.



**Marion Bay Historical Centre
with anchors from the *Willyama* (left)
& the *Marion* (rear)**
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)

Here is a close-up shot of the anchor from the *Willyama*: -



**An anchor from the *SS Willyama*
Located at the Marion Bay
Historical Centre**
(Taken by Steve Reynolds)

Society member, Brian Brock's recently sent me two of his poems which make reference to the wreck of the *Willyama* and Marion Bay. The poems are quite long, but here is an extract from each of them: -

“The *Willyama*'s mast you'll see
In *Willyama Bay*
Bronze whalers also there may be
Or so our students say”

“The Bottom End” from “May-Day!”
(Pioneer Books 1985)

“Not the same without you, mate.
'Course the waves still wash *Willyama*'s
beach
And throw up her coal during storms
As the cross swings low over the coastal
dunes.”

“Stan Slow” from “Catharsis” (Pioneer
Books 1981)

Our 38th Anniversary

The first meeting of what is now the Marine Life Society of SA was held 38 years ago on 16th June 1976. The South Australian Branch of the Marine Aquarium

Research Institute of Australia - MARIA(SA) held its inaugural meeting in Room 029 of the School Of Biological Sciences at Flinders University at Bedford Park. Meetings continued to be held at the University on the third Wednesday of each month until August 1979. (We had started using Room 028 by March 1979.) Our September 1979 meeting was held at Westminster School. We then started holding our monthly meetings at Marion High School in October 1979.

British Marine Life Study Society

Our British cousins, the British Marine Life Study Society was formed in 1990 to exchange information about marine life in British seas and seashore. BMLSS moved on to an Internet service in 1997 and the regular journal subscription-based publications of *Glaucus* and the newsletter *Shorewatch* were out in abeyance at the turn of the millenium. The Society's main publication is now the free monthly marine news bulletin *Torpedo*. This is published on the web page <http://www.glaucus.org.uk/>.

Portuguese Man O' War by David Muirhead

I was walking the dog on Brighton Beach one evening, heading home, into the sun. When I first saw it some metres down the beach, backlit by late sun, I was certain it must be some sort of particularly 'fluoro' brightly coloured man-made trash e.g. a condom or plastic bag. But, on closer inspection, I was amazed to see it was a freshly stranded, dying 'jellyfish', which was slowly writhing, weakly extending and retracting its (mostly) tightly retracted stinging tentacles.

It's a young Portuguese Man O' War, a medusa or ocean-going surface-living wind-blown Cnidarian.

Of course, jellyfish cannot crawl on land at all, so it had no way of re-entering the water and the tide was outgoing.

The long smooth 'erect' tubular part is actually its flotation device and the 'wrinkly, like a bright fluoro scrotum' bit is actually its sail i.e. the part that would normally be visible above the ocean surface and which the species uses to facilitate being blown long distances out in the open ocean, far from any landmasses, but which of course is occasionally its undoing, as was the case here.

So really, in this image, the critter is 'upside down and sideways', thus very hard to recognise. Even for Genius Dave.

All I could do was take a few pics and leave it to die.



Portuguese Man O' War

(Taken by David Muirhead)

The sail is hidden behind the float.

South Australian Sources for History and Social Science

The late Brian Condon created several Databases on the World Wide Web. (Brian passed away on 25th November 2005.) Details of his databases can be found at <http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/condon/index.htm> .

The first item there is SASS (South Australian Sources for History and Social Science) – see

<http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/condon/sass/> .

The research data bases on the World Wide Web which represent his life's work will be supported by LBY-EASS-DivLibrarians@unisa.edu.au.

The following two items are listed in the SASS data base: -

[N5295](#) Maria journal: the official publication of the South Australian Branch of the Marine Aquarium Research Institute of Australia

[P0690](#) Marine Life Society of South Australia Incorporated journal

<http://www.library.unisa.edu.au/condon/sass/sass.asp?SASSRecord=P0690>

It was MLSSA that persuaded our State Government to protect all seadragons & seahorses in SA waters & make the Leafy seadragon our State's marine emblem

The Sunday Mail of 25th May published a letter from our Society. Our Letter to the Editor was sent in response to one from Nancy Fahey the week before (18/5/14).

The headline or title for Nancy's letter was "Marine life threat". Her letter had been sent in response to "Victim of the Paparazzi" in the 11th May issue of the Sunday Mail. The headline or title for our letter was "Leafy emblem". Our letter read:

"Many thanks go to Nancy Fahey for her recent letter re our marine life and the Federal Government's financial cutbacks.

I must point out, however, that the Leafy seadragon (rather than 'sea dragon') is actually our State's marine emblem, not our State's 'national emblem'.

It's great that Nancy acknowledged the good work being done by the nation-wide group Save Our Marine Life, but it was the Marine Life Society of South Australia that persuaded our State Government to protect all seadragons & seahorses in SA waters and make the Leafy seadragon our State's marine emblem.

Much more work, however, is still needed to protect our under-threat marine life and we invite people to join us in the battle.

Steve Reynolds

President

Marine Life Society of SA

Largs North"

Leatherjacket Louse

This is a photo of a large pregnant "Leatherjacket Louse" in Formalin. Peter Horne cut the louse out of a little leatherjacket that he had speared back around 1968.



A large pregnant "Leatherjacket Louse" in Formalin
(Taken by Peter Horne?)