

The Wreck of the “Aarhus” – Club Dive 9 Jul 06

John Kelley

A fine, sunny, warm, winters day, no breeze, a calm sea and visibility of over 20m. It couldn't be better and we spotted the wreck as we cruised over it on our GPS mark. This old three-masted barque built in 1875 in Hamburg, Germany hit Smiths Rock and sank very quickly on 24 Feb 1894. All the cargo of kerosene from New York was lost. Fancy going all that way, thousands of kilometres, blown along by the wind, only to drop all your cargo just before the finish line on the sand at Smiths Rock. As the boat landed on her keel there is speculation that she would have stood almost upright for some time her masts and sails flagging in the wind some 30m above the waterline. What a sight. All hands were saved but the Danish authorities were not impressed with the Australian Maritime Board who took the Master's licence from Captain Christian Gram of the Aarhus. He argued that it was their fault as he signalled for a pilot but none turned up. He was turning to anchor offshore to wait for a pilot when he hit the rock. The Danes gave the Captain another Master's licence – now what biases are running there.



Starboard bow



Anemone fish

Our Club had a bit to do with finding the wreck and this was noted in a previous newsletter article. In brief Linton Holroyd talked the US Navy into locating all the wrecks with their sophisticated sonar gear hanging off a helicopter and he passed that information to the Maritime Archaeological Society who gave it to Ben Cropp who had some sophisticated gear which located the wreck in the sand in 1979.



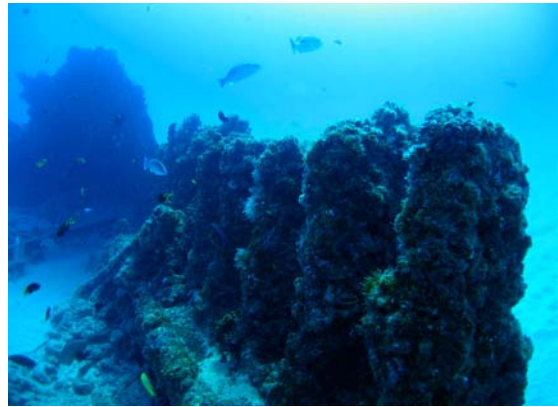
Starboard bow



Admiralty anchor and bowsprit



Collapsed deck plating



Starboard bow

There is not much left of the wreck but enough to recognise it as such. A large starboard bow section still sits upright and the bowsprit pushes out into the endless sand held down by a couple of Admiralty-pattern anchors. These anchors always add that historic touch and remain too heavy for the odd petty marine thief to lift. Yes it is an historic wreck and protected. A permit (free) is required before diving on her. Further aft is a mass of cross-hatched metal ribbing the remains of the deck plating. A bollard sits upright and many other bits and pieces lie about. It has been pounded by seas for over 100 years in its sandy grave so it's remarkable what remains.



Bollards



Yellowtail Scad



A passing Ray

Octopus in colour change

Apart from the history the wreck is an oasis in a sandy desert for fish life. There are schools of pelagic fish such as kingfish and amberjack and schools of smaller bait fish although few were present in the slack tide. Anemone fish dart about in the few anemones that have managed to find a space on the heavily algal-covered remains. On this dive a large school of stingrays had buried themselves in the sand nearby and raised a cloud of "dust" as we descended and they hurried off. A large turtle had his head wedged in a corner oblivious to the passing divers. Other divers spotted, and photographed, a numbfish and a fish-hooked cod.