



## SS AVON - Pumicestone Passage

The wreck of the SS Avon is indicated with a marker in Pumicestone Passage, off shore from Banksia Beach, Bribie Island. Tour launch's passing by point out the wreck. It is a little more difficult to find any information about the wreck, than it is to locate it.

An encyclopedia of Australian shipwrecks says that the SS Avon was abandoned on Blackboy Reef near Ningi Creek, Bribie Passage in 1914, but that the vessel details are unknown.

[Ferryman Cruises](#), Bribie Island, provided some local knowledge. Scott, who does the commentary on the boat, said he did find some information on the internet and from Trevor Johns, the previous owner of Ferryman Cruises.

Scott found photos of the vessel being used for accommodation, on the internet, but cannot again find this site. He added ....

"The boat is a condemned coal carrier that was brought out from England to transport the Kanakers (South Sea Islanders) down to the Cane fields in North Queensland from their island homes.

James Clark, an original local oyster farmer, acquired the vessel and scuttled it at it's present site in 1915 to protect an alluvial oyster bank on the leeward side of the vessel where the wreck is now located.

It was also used for accommodation around 1915 for his workers and to grow oysters on the hull. These oysters, at times, were up to 2 foot thick."



## The wreck of the SS Avon

The paddlesteamer PS Avon was built in Glasgow, Scotland, by T. Wingate and Company, shipped in sections to Melbourne, and assembled by HJ McGee in 1867. The vessel was a two masted schooner of 111 gross registered tonnage, length 100.3 feet, beam 18.2 and drew 6.8 feet. Unlike broad, flat bottomed river paddlesteamers, sea going paddlesteamers were sleek and graceful, greyhounds of the sea.

She was a regular operator between Melbourne and the Gippsland Lakes. Her owners were:

1867 Gippsland Steam Nav. Co, Melbourne  
1876 S Tulloch & G M Jackson  
1885 J F Tully  
1885 J R Miller  
1887 C Petersen  
1887 Bairnsdale Steam Nav. Co  
1888 John See, Sydney

In a storm 2nd or 3rd June 1891 she went ashore on the sand at the mouth of the Bellinger River, NSW. Her deck started, and her engine shifted. She was auctioned, as is, where is, for 100 pounds. Some sources have her as cut up for scrap. Others say she was repaired by Foster & Minty, shipbuilders, of Peacock Point, Balmain, and converted to a lighter or barge.

Her owners were then:

1896 Adelaide Steam Ship Co, Adelaide  
1908 Cleghorn, Hopkins & Co, Brisbane

In days gone by, the Marine Board of Queensland held an inquiry into any accident involving ships in Queensland waters. This was to protect human lives, and commercial interests, as the competence of ships officers may be involved. The officers could be censured, suspended or struck off the books, meaning they were no longer ticketed to serve as ships officers. An inquiry was held for a ship's loss, damage, and such accidents as grounding, however temporary.

When the "dumb" (no engine) lighter Avon collided with the Kangaroo Point ferry while being towed by a tug, on 17 October 1911, there was a Queensland Marine Board Inquiry, and the masters of both the tug and the ferry were severely censured.

There was no inquiry in 1914, or any other date, into the wreck or grounding of the SS Avon in Pumicestone Passage, and the reason for that is that she was run up on a reef and abandoned, similarly to numerous other boats at places like Bishop Island at the mouth of the Brisbane River (now part of Fisherman's island).



## The wreck of the SS Avon

The vessel in Pumicestone Passage is similar to the length of the PS Avon, 100 feet, according to an estimate paced out in the mud. The lighter Avon was being used to transport bulk cargo such as coral, sand or coal at the time of its Brisbane River collision with the Kangaroo Point ferry.

The PS Avon may have worked a Pacific Island run for some previous owner, before she went ashore in 1891.

In the photograph, below, a boiler is visible. I prefer to think the PS Avon, and SS Avon of Bribie are one and the same. The wreck is completely exposed at low tide and lies less than a kilometre offshore from the boat ramp, Solander Esplanade, Banksia Beach.



*photo below: looking forrard, wreck of SS Avon*

*photo above: wreck of SS Avon, looking aft*

