

CHAPTER NINE:

THE MANILA FLOTILLA

A short version of what happened next is at the end of the the DMR Oral History Summary:

“The three Stockton/Newcastle vehicular ferries were sold for \$12000, and early in 1972, together with a former showboat, the Sydney Queen, the towed vessels started their journey bound for resale in the Philippines. Sadly, none of the vessels made their destination, with the Kooroongaba sinking in heavy seas of Crowdy Head NSW, and the other three running aground on the beach at South West Rocks, NSW. They were not salvaged.” However, behind that terse report of events is a heap of detail, which we will now have a look at.

The three punts were sold by public tender in November 1971. They were bought by Stuart Allen White of Goldfields Metal Traders. He also bought the Sydney Queen which was mouldering in Sydney (see chapter 6) and had it towed up to Newcastle to join the other three punts.

There is a bit of disagreement as to what he intended to do with them. *Main Roads* (Sept 72) says that he was going to tow all four vessels 4,000 miles to Manila in the Philippines, where they would be converted to timber barges. Several other truncated accounts say they were to be taken to the Philippines to be sold there for scrap, but it seems a long way to take them just to recover the price of the scrap that they represented. Stuart White paid a total of around \$16,000 for all four, and said he expected to make a profit of \$20,00 to \$30,000 after he sold them in the Philippines. Taking into account the cost of towage to be added to the initial outlay, and the extra costs associated with making them seaworthy for the voyage, it's not easy to see how he did his sums.



Glenys Payne Pic

The four ferries tied up and waiting to take off on the Big Tow

The Big Tow - Getting out of Newcastle Harbour

When it came time to begin the tow of the four vessels there was a big turnout to wave them goodbye. Their departure was on New Year's Day 1972.

Jack Carpenter: *It seemed like everyone in Newcastle came to Stockton to see the punts go. It was like a bloody big party. And there were some sad faces, I can tell you.*

Keith Player's wife cried when they were taken off. She'd grown sentimentally attached to them.

Joan Ireland: *We went over and sat on the sand hills and watched them go. Some people said that the punts themselves didn't want to go, and when they heard later of the wrecking, they explained that the same way. It was quite emotional really.*

And there was plenty for the farewelling multitudes to see, as it turned out. Things began to go awry pretty much from Square One. This is how George Risdon, Librarian at the Newcastle Maritime Museum, described their less-than-elegant departure:

The tug that towed the three vehicular ferries plus the Sydney showboat was an American wartime standard built tug... she was registered in Manila, and was crewed by a master and crew from the Philipinnes. There was quite a circus apparently just getting them out of Newcastle Harbour, caused mainly by poor equipment and a complete lack of understanding of English on the part of the tug's Master.

Two Newcastle based tugs, the Farm Cove and the Camp Cove were assigned the task of assisting them. Mr Jack Carpenter was on board the Farm Cove that day which was skippered by the late Capt Alan Turton. (The flotilla was) lying at the Dyke wharf just below the Port Waratah coal berth. As they attempted to move them away from the wharf a major problem raised its head -- because they were old and worn, some of the (towing) lines that they used tethering the four together parted as they took up the strain.

After securing them again and eventually getting under way, they again ran into more trouble -- off the Dockyard point the Koorangaba's line again parted and she struck the rocks of the point, gashing a hole in her hull. They eventually got under way again, and with the two harbour tugs sticking close they cleared the breakwaters. I gather that none of those involved that day was surprised that they did not make it very far.

Jack Carpenter provides a more detailed account of the departure: *I was there when they took off on their last journey -- being towed north. I was on a tug that was guiding them out. The Polaris towed them out. They had no bloody gear with them. All their lines were rooted. The Polaris brought the showboat up from Sydney, and they put them all at what we called the timber wharf -- that's going up towards the channel where the coal loaders are now. I used to go over there of an afternoon to have a look at them working. But they brought the Sydney Queen up from Sydney with its anchor chains wrapped around its king posts. When the strain comes on under tow something's got to give, and when they got here the king posts were all bent. I asked them where their springs were, but they'd never heard of springs. When they were ready to go they got a brand spanking new piece of line, but instead of putting it on the bloody forward tug they put it on the aft tug -- where it wasn't worth a bumper.*

We were booked for two o'clock to pull them off the wharf. We got there at two o'clock

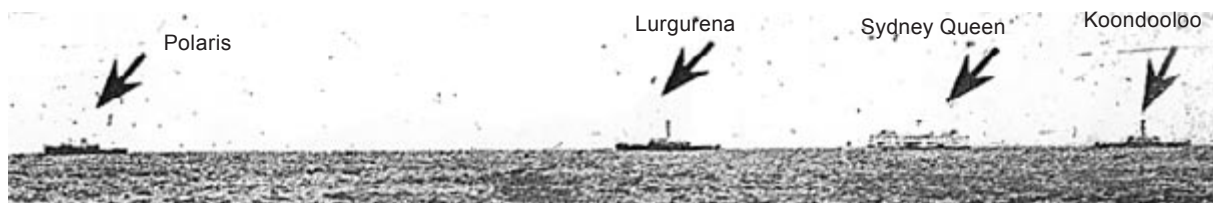
and the pilot, old Jock Sinclair said that we'd never get 'em off with the gear they've got. But we went down and we got in between them and we pulled them off. We thought we'd be going back to our station then, but he said to go down with them as far as the dockyard, because he'd decided that the Polaris skipper was useless. We finished up at bloody sea, still towing them! We left them go about three mile out. We'd expected a half-hour job and it ended up about three hours.

The first one that got into trouble on the way out was the Kooroongaba. For some reason the two Philippino crew that were on her – there were two on each punt - let the bloody line go and she was left drifting. With a sou' easter blowing she was drifting over onto the rocks. One of the line boats run in underneath him and pushed her off the rocks, and that's where the Kooroongaba sprung the plate that ended up sinking it off Crowdy Head. They were sailing a sou-sou-east course and going nor-east.

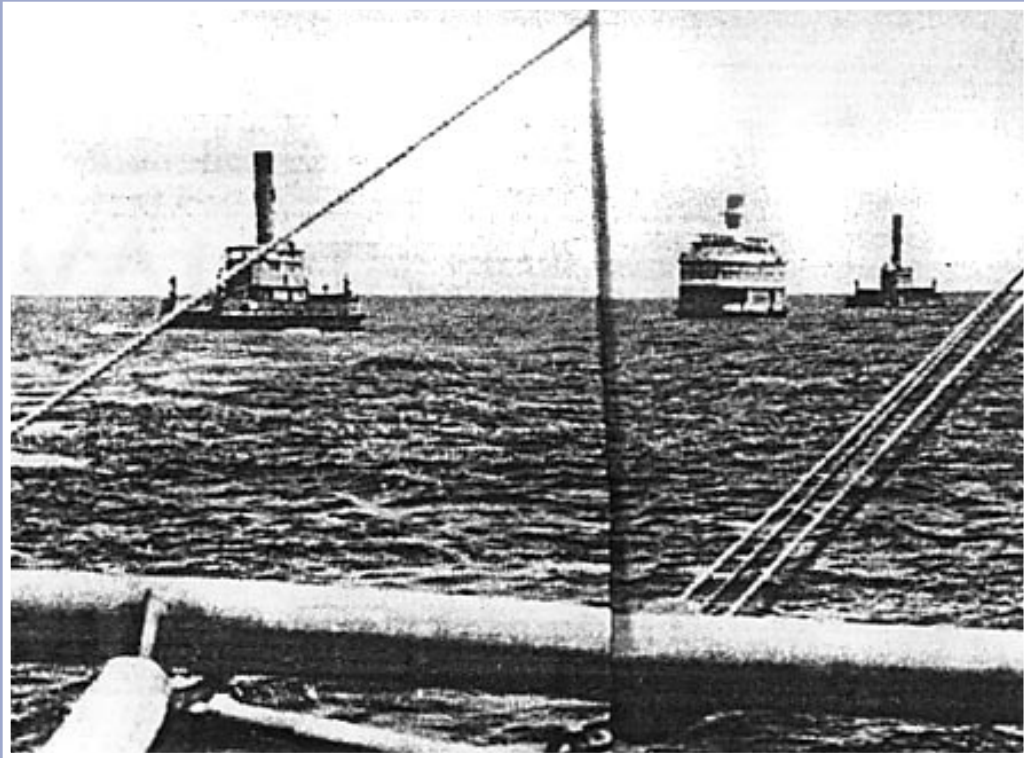
We were taking bets on the tug. We thought they might get as far as Morna Point, (just short of Nelson Bay). Not that the weather was all that bad at that stage – just a lovely little southeast blow. But they had bloody nothing. The Polaris was an ex-navy boat, and she was buggered. The guts was completely knocked out of her. They were going to take them to the Philippines to be used as timber barges – take all the engines and everything off 'em. The bloody steering wheels were pinched out of 'em before they even left Stockton, but I think that's all that went before they left. They still had coal down in the bloody boiler room.

The run up the coast – losing the 'Gaba

The vessel that was last on the long towing queue was the smallest – the Kooroongaba, which was the one that was thought to have sprung a plate on the way out of the Harbour. It must have been taking water all the time as they battled their way north because, as they drew abreast of Crowdy Head in the early hours of the morning of January 3 1972, she rather abruptly sank in deep water (reported variously as 65 fathoms, 56 fathoms and 45 fathoms) some 10 miles offshore, and less than 90 miles north of Newcastle. If, as Jack Carpenter maintains, there were two Philippino crewmen on each vessel being towed there is no mention anywhere that I could find as to how the men on the 'Gaba got on – or got off, for that matter. We can only presume that they were alright as there were no reports of any fatalities.



The Port Macquarie News covered the loss of the Kooroongaba the next day. The photos were pretty rough but they do convey some feeling for the situation. The caption to the first photo was: *This is how the tug Polaris with its ill-fated flotilla looked as they made their way through the Pacific Ocean near Port Macquarie on Tuesday. The arrows show the tug in the foreground, and the three historic ferries which are being towed to the Philippines. One of the ferries was lost at sea in a drama in the early hours of Tuesday morning. The flotilla was yesterday reported to be in trouble once again with one more ferry shipping water. Repairmen and a ship's pilot were being rushed to Trial Bay to effect repairs and unleash rope which had become entangled with the tug's propellor and rudder.*



The caption to this second picture in the Port Macquarie News was: *Part of a disaster-hit flotilla as it sails 17 miles out to sea from Port Macquarie's coastline. The photo shows three of the remaining sea-going craft which are being towed from Newcastle to Manila by the tug Polaris. As the ships were passing Diamond Head earlier this week, a fourth ferry boat sank in 56 fathoms of water. This exclusive photograph was taken by a News photographer from Mr Merv Radley's trawler which was chartered in Port Macquarie to assist the struggling tug make its way up the coast to Trial Bay where repairs are to be undertaken.*

There were several rumours circulating about why the 'Gaba sank. One was that she somehow ran into the back of one of the other punts and sank very quickly. Another was that the Polaris hove to for some reason, and when it did so the weight of the towing chain when the vessels lost way pulled the last two together as the chain sank, causing a collision. But the towline only had a chain bridle and was not all chain - it would not have sunk, and there was no damage to the punt that the 'Gaba was attached to. Other people said that it shouldn't have sunk because it was built to float even with some of its compartments full of water, since the compartments were constructed so as to be watertight. As a result of these questionmarks it wasn't long before there were further rumours that the 'Gaba might have been deliberately scuttled, despite the fact that there was no obvious motive for doing so. But gossips usually don't let rationality get in the way of a good conspiracy theory.

The tow continued north, but a decision was made to put into Trial Bay because, according to some reports all of the remaining vessels being towed were now also taking in water. As it turned out, they weren't, and according to the Polaris' skipper they were just after better towlines.

The wreck of the Kooroongaba?

On the last day of 2006 a party of scuba divers came across two unidentified wrecks off Crowdy Head. Local professional fishermen had given them the co-ordinates of “a secret spot” where they suspected that two wrecked vessels were showing up on their depth sounders. They were about 1.5kms apart, and about 5kms off the coast. One wreck showed a lot of ribbing and a boiler and the other had the remains of a hull and “a distinctive funnel”. One of the wrecks, in about 50 metres of water, is around 50 metres long, and appears to have broken in two. It is made of steel and standing about four metres proud of the bottom. The other is about 40 metres long, also of steel, and its bow, complete with winching gear, is clearly visible.

There was immediate speculation that one of the wrecks could be the Kooroongaba, but no definite identification of either wreck has so far been made. When I came across the official co-ordinates for the place that the Kooroongaba went down, in a document written by the Polaris’ captain Benito Cirera, (see next chapter) I contacted the dive shop at North Haven who had found the wrecks and passed the co-ordinates on to them. They emailed back that the area where the two wrecks lie is a good fifteen kms away from the co-ordinates given by Captain Cirera, so it seems unlikely that one of them is the Kooroongaba.

If you’d like to see for yourself what these wrecks look like you can go to <http://www.scubahaven.com.au/crwecks.htm> and see some rather indistinct video footage taken by the divers when they found them. Unfortunately, shoals of small fish seem to be most prolific near the wrecks themselves, making it difficult to make out the wrecks in very much detail.

Triple stranding at Trial Bay

I found that the Macleay Argus (January 18, 1972) had the most concise and comprehensive account of the events that befell the flotilla once it made it into Trial Bay, so I'll quote extensively from it:

THREE SHIPS GO AGROUND

Oil pollution price as bureaucrats squabble over wrecks

Two car ferries and former showboat the Sydney Queen are aground on Trial Bay beach, and attempts to refloat them have been abandoned. The tug Polaris, which was towing the three stranded vessels and one other that sank off Crowdy Head, left for Manila – the tug's home port – yesterday about midday.

The departure of the Polaris has forced the owner of the three vessels (Mr Stuart White) to reconsider his position in relation to the salvage of the vessels. He said yesterday his plans to tow them to Manila had gone with the Polaris and he would now strip the ferries and sell the hulks as barges. However, he has already been refused permission by the Maritime Services Board to tow the ferries into the Macleay River and has been told to take them to a hulking yard.

Meanwhile, the three ferries are now breaking up on the beach and pollution is increasing. The Sydney Queen is shedding oil and a black film is spreading along surf and sand. The sand itself is littered with timber, nails, glass and wire indicating the battering the vessels have received from the surf...

The corporate owner of the vessels is Mr White's firm, Gold Field Metal Traders. ... (After losing the Koorongaba off Crowdy head), he was told on January 3 by the Polaris' captain, Benito Cirara, that the other three ferries were shipping water and arrangements should be made to have them inspected for seaworthiness.

On January 7, Polaris came into Trial Bay and moored the ferries to buoys used by oil tankers. At the time, fishermen at South West Rocks said the hawsers used in the moorings were not strong enough to hold the vessels in the event of a blow. The weather changed on Sunday, January 9, and some time in the night the Koondooloo snapped her moorings and came ashore. She defied all attempts to move her and became well-embedded in sand.

At 12:30pm on January 12 the Sydney Queen broke her moorings (including two hawsers 8 inches in diameter) and went aground only 100 yards from the Koondooloo, after a buffeting from a 20-knot north-east wind. On January 15, the Lurgurena joined the other two on the beach. She was pulled off but has since been washed up a second time. The owner then began stripping the vessels to beat vandals.*

Mr White is now in the centre of a deep controversy with the Maritime Services Board, while the Board is in a tussle with the Commonwealth Department of Shipping and Transport over who is responsible for getting the wrecks off the beach.

Late in June, Mr White set fire to the remaining woodwork of the Sydney Queen. A few weeks later he was fined and ordered to pay more than \$450 claimed for non-payment of meals and accommodation at South West Rocks.

After a quite a lot of sleuthing to try to track down Stuart White I was forced to abandon the search. If he is still around, I imagine he wouldn't be all that keen

**I think this should probably be "two 8 inch hawsers" – under the old system of sizing ropes by their circumference. An 8 inch diameter hawser would indeed be an imposing line.*

on revisiting the debacle anyway. Several sources say that there was a “protracted court battle” fought over what to do with the wrecks, but my reading of the voluminous RTA correspondence about the wrecks and what to do about them doesn’t support this – it was more a long correspondence about who was to be held responsible for the removal of the wrecks.

Stuart White *did* have his time in court, though, but the matter before the court wasn’t directly connected with the wrecks, although the outcome of the case did have implications for what might be done about them. White must have felt all his bad luck chickens were coming home to roost at once, because the *Lloyd’s List Daily Commercial News* of January 17th 1972 -- that is, only days after all the dramatic goings-on of the beachings -- carried the following story (which might help explain why Mr White later did a runner from South West Rocks without paying his outstanding food and accommodation costs):

Bankruptcy claim for Stuart White

A petition for bankruptcy has been filed in the NSW Federal Court of Bankruptcy against Mr Stuart Alan White. The petition names ex parte Storey and Keers Pty Ltd as creditor. Mr White is currently in the news as the owner of the ill-fated ferries which were being towed to the Philippines by the ocean-going tug, Polaris.

The petition, number 28-72, described Mr White’s occupation as a scrap metal dealer. The petition says the debtor is justly and truly indebted to the company in the sum of \$1129.54 for work done and materials provided and the costs of judgement for which sum judgement was obtained in the District Court of the Metropolitan District, holden at Sydney on January 14, 1971. Mr White’s address is given as Parkdale, Finch Avenue, Concord.*

The petition says the debtor committed the following act of bankruptcy, namely: That he failed either to comply on or before December 16, 1971 with the requirements of a bankruptcy notice duly served on him on Thursday December 2, 1971, or to satisfy the court that he had a counter claim, set-off, or cross-demand equal to or exceeding the sum specified. The petition is dated January 11, 1972. A hearing has been set for 10am March 7, 1972 at the Temple Court, Elizabeth Street, Sydney. Alfred Thomas Morgan and Partners are acting as solicitors for Storey and Keers Pty Ltd.

The article goes on to give its version of what was happening on the beach at Trial Bay at the time: *On Friday, efforts to refloat Mr White’s ferries grounded at Trial Bay continued. The tug Polaris was reported to have pulled the car ferry Lurgurena from the beach at South West Rocks at high tide. The previous night the tug had pulled the ferry 60 yards without her lifting clear of the bottom. On Friday the Lurgurena was moored with a double rope to an oil tanker buoy near the centre of the bay. The tug then continued on its attempts to refloat the Koondooloo. The other stranded ferry, the Sydney Queen, was expected to stay aground for two days to await a very high tide before new efforts were made to refloat her. The Sydney Queen is looked on as the most valuable of the three ferries remaining.”*

As things turned out, all attempts to salvage the three vessels were to no avail. A protracted tussle ensued between various bureaucracies to try to offload any responsibility for removing the wrecks (see next chapter), and the wrecks became a tourist attraction. In June of 1972 Stuart White set fire to what was left of the Sydney Queen to deter any further pilfering of souvenirs from it by the rubbernecking public, after which he removed the engine and boilers and sold them

**It’s not clear from this account what the money owing was for, but it is probable that it was for work done on the Sydney Queen to make her seaworthy for the tow.*

for scrap. He also tried to make a few bob by selling various bits and pieces of the punts to tourists as souvenirs. (I find something wryly futile in Mr White setting fire to the Sydney Queen to deter vandals. It's a bit like cutting off your nose to spite your face.)

Main Roads of Sept 1972 had this to say: “ *This “saga of the sea” threw the old ferries into the sudden spotlight of publicity in press, radio and TV news...(and) these grounded vessels developed a sudden and remarkably magnetic fascination for tourists. Crowds, estimated sometimes to have been more than 3,000 people, gathered at the beach and surrounding vantage points to just sit and watch. Joy flights have even been available from Port Macquarie to give visitors an aerial view of the scene at South West Rocks. At one stage, some former crewmen of the vehicular ferries offered to fire up the boilers and attempt to sail the vessels off the sand under their own steam. Auxiliary pumping and other attempts to tow them off the beach have been abandoned and the three vessels are now slowly breaking up.*”

Trial Bay is no stranger to unexpected shipping disasters. In the latter part of the nineteenth century a ketch called the *Woolloomooloo* anchored in Trial Bay in a storm, but her anchors dragged and she ended up being washed ashore. Her master and two of the crew were drowned. Not long after the *Julia* went ashore about a quarter of a mile from the *Woolloomooloo*, but in this instance all hands survived. Next came the *Gazelle*, a schooner that was also washed ashore, but again, all hands were saved. All three vessels were total wrecks, and they were all blown onto the beach by bad weather. Significantly, their remains had completely disappeared by the turn of the century.



N. Matterson Pic

All three vessels soon after being washed ashore

How Trial Bay got its name

On September 12 1816 thirteen convicts seized the timber brig the Trial, together with its passengers and crew, off Sow and Pigs reef in Sydney Harbour. The Trial was owned by Mr Simeon Lord and captained by a man named Burnett. The convicts forced it to sail north in an attempt to gain their freedom. They didn't get far up the coast when they were wrecked in 'a deep bay', and, showing considerable ingenuity, they cobbled together another vessel from what was left of the wrecked Trial and set sail again. Local Aborigines recounted how the makeshift craft capsized at sea and its occupants were drowned. There were between six and eight non-convicts and the ship's original captain who were left behind. They decided to walk back to Newcastle, but apparently got lost in the bush, as they were never heard from again. The bay was later named Trial Bay after the first wrecking.

Some eyewitness accounts

My partner Lorraine Banks and I visited South West Rocks in late 2007 and had a talk with Syd Warrington, Secretary of the South West Rocks branch of the Macleay River Historical Society and Max Orme, a mate of Syd's who was also around at the time the flotilla was washed ashore. We spoke to them in the Society's premises which has a room devoted to photos and memorabilia of the punts' stranding.

Syd: It was Jan 9 1972. (Gives a brief run-down of ferries and how they came to be being towed). The weather turned foul and off Crowdy they lost the first ferry. Then they continued on to Trial Bay where they tied up to the buoy used by the tankers. The weather worsened further to almost cyclonic standard, and the first one broke away. At that stage I was worried about the wind, and when I went outside from my caravan in the early hours of the morning to tighten up the ropes on the annexe I actually saw one drifting in. The other two came in over the next couple of days. As a result of that, as the word got out that the ferries were aground, thousands of people came here. It was quite an experience. Of course, from then on, people came to South West Rocks just to see the grounded ferries.

You could climb onto 'em at low tide. Several attempts were made to get 'em off but they were soon too embedded in the sand. And so they just rotted away. The Sydney Queen, the old showboat, was a wooden boat, (the others were steel) and they ended up burning her. They stripped it, took the propeller shaft and the propellers off it, and burnt her. Torched it. They cut all the steelwork down to the level of the sand. They couldn't burn it below the sand, of course.*

It was two in the morning when I went out and saw the first one being blown in. I would think that I was the only one who saw it, at that time of the morning. I yelled out to my wife to come and have a look at it, but you can imagine what kind of an answer I got! It didn't have any lights on it or anything, but it was quite clear to see. It was the wind, though... I had a tinny on top of the shed and it was being blown up and down...

**The hull of the Sydney Queen was steel. Only the superstructure was of wood.*

Max: It was about a week later when I first saw it. We'd come up on holidays. They were still quite solid. They didn't start to break up for a long time. But a lot of people were going onto them and trying to get stuff off them – you know souveniring...

About twelve months ago we had some bad weather here, and remains of the burnt Sydney Queen became visible again. It was really only a mound of rusted rubble. Then it got covered up again. The beach changes every day. You can walk along the beach and up under the vegetation there are remains still there. In the early times afterwards, in different years when we'd come up for holidays, the wife and I and the in-laws used to fish in the one whose remains are covered now by undergrowth. I tell people this now and they say I'm having myself on. But it gives you an idea of how much the beach can change.

Syd: And the punts brought people here. They came to see the wrecks, and even today the story of them still brings people here.

Max: People come and visit the museum here, and they're full of questions about the wrecks as soon as they start to look at the photos in the other room...I took some photos of them when they first ran aground, and again when I came up six months later, and you could see the difference over 6 months when you compare the two.

Bill: Is it possible that if we had some really bad weather again that we could see their remains exposed again?

Syd: Apart from the steel posts still on the beach, I would say that there's nothing left under the sand by now. You know, the action on the steel of the wet, and the salt...

Bill: Was there much aggro amongst the locals that the wrecks had also buggered up the beach?

Syd: The only aggro I heard was about the Sydney Queen. It had come ashore at the main surfing part of Front Beach. They kicked up a bit of a fuss about it at the time, but there was no real hassle about it.

Bill: There were crew on the Philippino tug, but was there anyone on the car ferries?

Syd: No. They were just being towed.

Bill: And the Polaris took off very soon afterwards did it – almost in something of a hurry?

Syd: It certainly did. It did a runner and couldn't get out of here quick enough. It was only here for a few days. I don't think it was even here on the day the last one came ashore. You see it took about three days for them all to end up on the beach. They didn't all go in at once. My son and I saw one of the tow ropes. In those days they used to measure ropes by the circumference, and it was about that big (makes circle of thumb and forefinger), and I dunno how they could have towed anything.

Lorraine: I heard that they had a chain between the last two of them, and whenever the Polaris lost a bit of way the weight of the chain sinking pulled the punts together...

Max: There was a stink of incompetence about the whole thing. People said, especially the fishermen and that, he'd be jokin' if he thought he was going to get the punts to the Philippines with those towlines.

Syd: The local fishermen who used to drink at the pub when we did, they couldn't believe that they'd attempt to tow those vessels with those towlines. And to try to do it with no insurance is even more inconceivable.

Max: They reckoned they were lucky to even get this far.

Lorraine: *I heard that people at Stockton were making bets on how far up the coast they'd get, and most of them didn't see them getting much past Port Stephens.*

Max: *We got up here for holidays about four days after they beached, and the first thing we were told was to go down and see the ferries. I was told that when they first tied up to the bouy they were just tied up line astern.*

Syd: *The Polaris was tied to the buoy and the others were tied to the back of it. Once the ferries were on the beach and the Polaris had gone, as far as we were concerned it was all over for us. That was it. End of story.*

Bill: *So, on balance, you'd say that this accident has been good for the town?*

Both: *Oh yes.*

Syd: *It's still good. South West Rocks has always been a very popular tourist resort... but the wrecks brought a lot of people though.*

Jack Carpenter's version suggests that the propellers had been taken off before the flotilla left Newcastle: *But those punts were doomed right from the bloody start. They had no hope. Nobody was surprised when they didn't make it. One of the rumours around when they ran ashore was that they were going to take the propellers up there and put them back on so they could get 'em off that way, but that never eventuated. White never had the gear to do it all properly. I only knew him from going over there of an afternoon when they were still in Newcastle and seeing him laying the chains out and all that. You really needed more tugs. If one tug towed each punt they'd have done a lot bloody better... Soon after they foundered every window on 'em was broken. The weather might have done some of it, but a lot of it was bloody bricks. The last time I was up there I went down below decks to the engine room. It was full of sand, but it still felt like it was moving. When they got washed up onto the beach the Polaris just pissed off and left them. He'd had it by then. They had local trawlers doing all the bloody work 'cos the Polaris had left.*

One of these local boats was a trawler owned by Merv Radley. It was called Tradewinds, and was built in 1966 at Hibberd, by Messrs Barbour and Bull. It had shepherded the flotilla into Trial Bay after the Kooroongaba was lost, and it took gear out to the punts in an effort to help them stay moored to the big bouys. (Tradewinds subsequently sank off Crowdy Head in 2006, with the loss of its skipper).

Glenys Payne: *"Tom and I went up a few times after they were beached. It was just like going down memory lane for him, you know."* (Tom Payne had been a skipper on the punts).

Ross Craig says that when the news got out of the wrecked ferries some of the ex-skippers got together and offered to go up and help salvage them. And they were quite upset that the ferries should have been sold off to the Philippines. There was talk of using them at Soldiers Point to go across to the other side of Port Stephens, which would have saved a long journey round.

If you would like to see some video footage of waves washing over the Koondooloo not long after she was wrecked, go to: http://maritime.heritage.nsw.gov.au/public/videoShow_large.cfm?siteID=1101&files_id=1161

If you also click on “More Info” on that page you can see video footage of the wrecked Sydney Queen as well. And if you go to: http://maritime.heritage.nsw.gov.au/public/videoShow_small.cfm?siteID=1027&files_id=1186 you can see the Lurgurena being pounded by waves too. Click on “More info” for yet another view. (Ain’t the Net a wonderful resource?)

In the following pages of photographs of the wrecked vessels I have tried to keep them roughly in chronological order, in order to make clear their deterioration over time.



SWRocks Maritime Museum Pic



N. Matterson Pic



SWRocks Maritime Museum Pic



G. Payne Pic



N. Matterson Pic



N. Matterson Pic



G. Payne Pic



G. Payne Pic



N. Matterson Pic



G. Payne Pic



N. Matterson Pic

N. Matterson Pic



RTA Pic



N. Matterson Pic



RTA Pic



RTA Pic



G. Andrews Pic

The car punts of Newcastle were a source of inspiration to a dwindling group of model-makers in the Hunter region. Jack Carpenter was one of them, and when I went to talk him about his memories of the punts he told me that the group had numbered as many as sixteen in the past, but these days there were only "five of us old blokes who are still going -- they've all died off". They've made beautiful scale models of all sorts of harbour craft, and Jack's house sported several lovingly mounted examples of his handiwork, dotted around the place.



The models are radio-controlled, and Jack and his model-making mates still take them for a run regularly on the lake at Blackbutt Reserve most Saturday mornings. His model of the Koondooloo in its Newcastle punt form took him twelve months to build. He built it from cedar planks, and it was scaled down from plans that he was able to winkle out of the DMR. It is almost 1.3 metres long, and is controlled by a four channel radio that operates both engine and rudders. A 6v gel cell battery allows him to run it continuously for up to six hours. He decided to build it when the punt service was discontinued at the end of 1971.

Jack had travelled often on the Koondooloo when she was in service - he even worked on her as a volunteer stoker from time to time - and he got to know her really well. He has eight other models that he has made in his collection, and he made them all from scratch. All of his models share one thing in common – they all worked on Newcastle harbour .