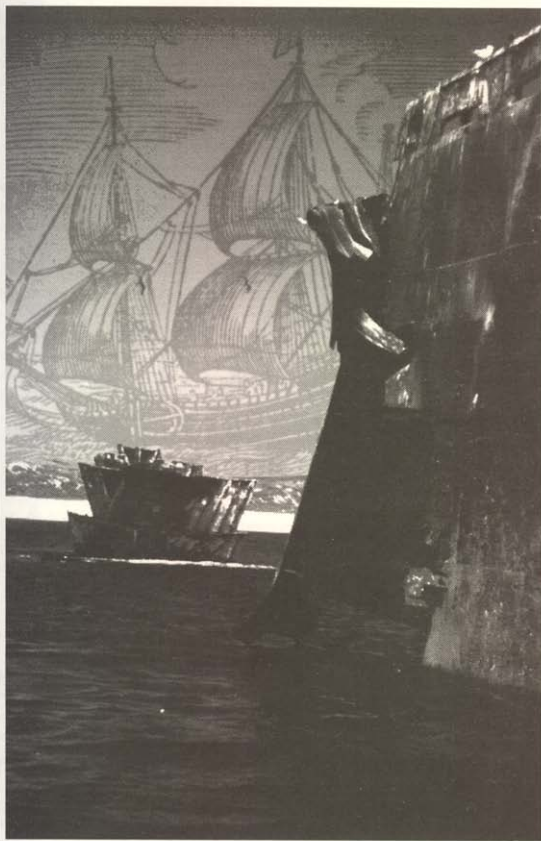


Access to Maritime Sites for People with Disabilities



By Paul Chapman & Larissa Wilkie
Assisted by Sinisa Strbac
Rocky Bay Inc.
Work Experience, WA Maritime Museum
1994

Introduction

Many people with disabilities, especially those in wheelchairs, have not seen or felt the atmosphere of the many maritime sites situated around the Western Australian coast. With the right facilities and information, people in wheelchairs or those walking with disabilities will be able to access museums, historic structures such as jetties and lighthouses and, in some cases, shipwrecks themselves.

The main aim of this pamphlet is to alert people with disabilities to the possibilities that exist, this includes wreck sites and sites that can be accessed by boat. It is also aimed to indicate areas that one day could be further developed, thus alerting planners to the possibilities. This pamphlet then is not intended to be the definitive document on each site, rather it is intended to appeal to the imagination and to set the scene for further work to enable greater access. Nor is the pamphlet concerned with the many wonderful natural features such as the 'Blowholes' at Carnarvon, the 'Gap' and the 'Natural Bridge' in Albany, or 'Underwater World' here in Perth. Its focus lies purely in maritime structures, ruins or sights that are visible and can be approached across relatively smooth terrain, or in the case of shipwrecks, those lying in usually calm and sheltered waters.

The Types of Sites

There are six types of sites considered within our domain: museums, lighthouses, jetties, ruins, above water wrecks and submerged wrecks. It is important to differentiate between these sites considering that some of them (e.g. museums and wharves) are already easily accessible, while others represent an exciting challenge for those wishing to gain access to them.



One of the plinths on the Rottnest Wreck Trail

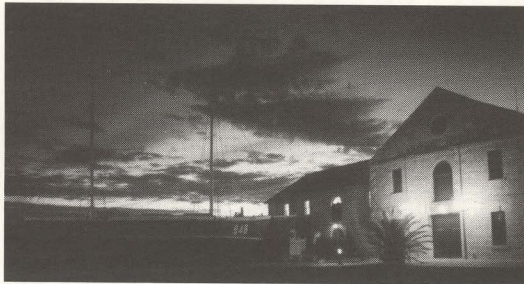
Diving, Boating and Disabilities

Another objective of this pamphlet is to introduce the concept of boating and diving to people with disabilities, rather than provide specific recommendations on how the problem should be tackled. Hopefully, in time, a register of operators able to cater for the disabled will become available. Already some operators are aware of the problems that we face and many are willing to try and cater for our needs.

The Metropolitan Area

Fremantle

As one would expect there are many places of maritime interest in Fremantle, which since 1829 has been a focus for shipping. Pamphlets and tours abound, there are museums, wharves, outdoor exhibits and a vast array of heritage sites too many to enumerate here.



The Maritime Museum in the early evening

The Maritime Museum is a good starting point with ACROD parking and easy access through and around exhibits, which include the exciting *Batavia* display. There is also a lift for access to the upstairs galleries. The 'Anchor Walk' outside takes us past an array of historical anchors and out onto the working 'heritage' in the form of the fishing boat harbour with its restaurants and water-front. Joan Campbell's Pottery shed within a historic building faces onto historic Bathers Bay and is well worth the visit. In Bathers Bay lie the remains of the 'Long Jetty', which in calm clear conditions can be a very interesting dive. The 'Whalers Tunnel' further on has exhibits inside and a smooth path right through to the beach at Bathers Bay. From there the water is only a short distance away. Back through the tunnel under the 'Round House', access is available onto the Fremantle wharf with many attractions such as A-Shed which has shops and a cafe with an art gallery, and B-shed which has a small boat museum. Between these sheds is the *STS Leeuwin*, which even alongside is always a remarkable sight with plenty to see. While on the wharf, cargo boats and naval vessels can be seen at various times throughout the year.

There is much more to see, however, and it would fill a pamphlet just on access to the maritime heritage sites in the Fremantle area itself. Making a day trip there would be a great adventure!



The spacious galleries at the Maritime Museum

Marinas

There are numerous new marinas in the Perth Metropolitan Area, such as Sorrento Quay with its countless shops and 'Underwater World'. Two Rocks and Mindarie Keys, situated further north, also offer easy access to the interesting small boat harbours.

SS *Alkimos*... a wreck above water

SS *Alkimos*, a former 'Liberty Ship', and the last steamer wrecked on this coast, is a historic wreck off Two Rocks, north of Perth. In calm conditions it is a comfortable, short boat trip from Mindarie Keys or Two Rocks. The wreck, which dwarfs the charter boats, is a spectacular ruin and is a very emotive reminder of those earlier days. Rumours abound that the SS *Alkimos* is haunted.



The SS *Alkimos*, an above water wreck north of Perth

Mandurah Anchor Walk

This 'anchor walk' is situated at Robert Point in the Mandurah area. It consists of an array of historical anchors not unlike the Anchor Walk in Fremantle. Additionally, there are plinths with information about the wrecks in the area. The anchors and plinth overlook the beach and there is the drive along the estuary, making a trip down to Mandurah a combined historic and recreational visit. Houseboats are also available for those with a longer stay in mind.

The Rockingham Foreshore

Rockingham, in its heyday, was a great timber port. Modelled, in its current use, on a traditional English promenade, the Rockingham Foreshore provides paths and cycleways which assist the access for people with disabilities to the sights in the area. From its promenade there is a great view to Garden Island and Cockburn sound. Cargo ships, yachts, launches and naval vessels can often be seen going about their business. The wreck of the SS *Kwinana* lies on the foreshore at Kwinana Beach, north of Rockingham. It is now filled in with concrete and is easy to access. From the wreck there are fine views across the water.

The River.

The Swan and Canning Rivers were an historical link between Fremantle, Perth and other areas in the days before road transport. Nowadays the river provides some spectacular sights, especially when it is crowded with sail. For those who enjoy watching these things, Saturdays and Sundays on the riverside can be a real treat. For those who love nature itself there are a number of cycle paths around the river winding their way through native vegetation, past water-bird sanctuaries and the like. These are ideal for wheelchair access.

Abemama & Alacrity... submerged wrecks

When conditions are calm and clear, these are the two most easily accessible wrecks in the Metropolitan Area. The wrecks, one steel, the other wooden lie together in Jervis Bay not far from a boat ramp and only about 50 metres offshore. *Alacrity* was used during World War 1 as an unarmed patrol vessel in the Indian Ocean, and as a tug in Fremantle harbour. In early 1931 she broke her mooring and drifted ashore where it eventually broke up.

The wooden schooner *Abemama* was registered in Liverpool, Nova Scotia in 1919. It worked eastern and the North-West coast trade routes until 1923 by which time she had deteriorated badly. In 1927 it was moved to an anchorage in Jervis Bay, near the *Alacrity*. In June that year the *Abemama* was wrecked during a severe storm. It was later reported that vandals set fire to the wreck and completely destroyed the upper part of the ship. The wreck lies alongside the *Alacrity*.

Rottnest Wreck Trail.

Rottnest, with its winding paths and roads, has many historical wrecks and buildings along with a wreck trail around the island. Rottnest also has daily ferries that take people to the island and back every day and most of the tour boats can cater for people with disabilities. They also have ramps so people in wheelchairs can get on and off with relative ease, though they may need some assistance.

There are semi-submersible glass bottom boat tours which take visitors to the reefs of Thomson Bay visiting the wrecks of the iron vessels *Macedon* and *Denton Holme*. The tour takes in the full splendour of the Rottnest aquatic life, but access can be difficult as there are ladders and narrow hatchways to negotiate.

The *Macedon* was a British built iron screw steamer of 562 tons which was wrecked in March 1883. The wreck, which lies nearby the *Denton Holme*, is in 3-6 metres of water. It is one of the most frequently visited wrecks in the State.

The *Denton Holme*: a 998-ton iron barque (sailing ship), was wrecked in September 1890 on a voyage from Glasgow to Fremantle. Carrying a cargo of pipes, cement and other materials the vessel struck a reef adjacent to the *Macedon* around midnight. Though not badly damaged, a storm set in and the ship soon became a total wreck.

One of the great treats on the wreck trail is the *Lady Elizabeth*. The wreck of this iron-framed, wooden-hulled sailing vessel lies partly on a sand bottom in 5 m of normally calm, clear water. Boats can moor right alongside the wreck, which can be seen clearly from the surface on a good day. Once in the water on snorkel or scuba it is a great sight and if access is good to and from the boat, it can be a great dive.



The *Lady Elizabeth*, one of the best dives for disabled people

The Country

Esperance

Esperance has a number of jetties and wharves that have reasonable access for the disabled, allowing them to take full advantage of a magnificent seascape and perhaps a bit of fishing. The museum in Esperance has a ramp at the entrance and the displays are easy to get around and look at.

Albany

The Museum in Albany has reasonable access in and around the displays. There are also a number of jetties, the Whaling Station, the 'Forts' which protected the port, and many other sights to see, all with reasonable access. As one of Western Australia's major ports, and the site of an early military settlement, Albany has much to offer. There are lots of nearby shallow wrecks for divers served by a charter boat. The wreck of the former whaler *Cheyne's III* in 20 m of water off Breaksea Island is a stunning wreck for the advanced diver. It can be rough at the wreck, however, and the tour would have to be carefully planned with your dive instructor and the charter operator. Even if it is too rough at the wreck, there are lots of other sites that can be used as an alternative.

The Cape Lighthouses

The lighthouses in the South-West, especially the Leeuwin Lighthouse, are situated in a rugged, inspiring, often wind-blown location that is well worth a visit as part of any tour of the South-West. Lighthouses are an important part of our maritime heritage, for we rely heavily on sea-transport and lights marking navigational hazards are an important part of our history.

Geraldton.

The museum here features displays on the Dutch wrecks in the area, it has good access and is well worth the visit. The wharves and fishing boat harbour at Geraldton are always an interesting sight. The Abrolhos Islands, site of the loss of *Batavia*, are like many other areas in the North-West, yet to be totally opened up to tourism and the disabled.

Shark Bay, Ningaloo Reef, Hamelin Bay

These three sites have been selected as examples of Maritime Heritage Areas with many possibilities, even though access at the moment is limited. Like the Abrolhos Islands off Geraldton, there are ruins, wrecks and many features of interest in each of these areas. It is hoped that planners will help make provision for disabled access in the future. Consideration should be given to the adaptation of 4WD for disabled access in these instances.

Carnarvon

Carnarvon boasts the longest jetty in the State, and though it is now noted for its fishing and recreational value, it was once a major stop-over for the State Shipping Service. A small museum with easy access is situated at the shore end of the jetty. Further north, past the Blowholes, at Cape Cuvier, the wreck of oil tanker *Korean Star* is an interesting sight, though roads and access are not easy and the cliffs are high. Recently there has been a lot of interest in viewing the feeding habits of sharks and other marine life from the cliffs of the area.

Broome.

Situated in the far north, Broome offers a number of attractive maritime sites. For instance it boasts a working jetty with excellent fishing opportunities where wheelchair access is reasonable. There are the cemeteries that may be of interest. They contain the buried pearl divers that used to be based in Broome. The access to these is excellent. Broome also boasts a well preserved China Town with relatively good access but with some challenges. The Museum of Broome is also situated in the town. Access to the museum is good but because it is small, is not recommended for large groups

'Wheeling Around' on Boats

Boats always pose a problem as far as wheelchair access is concerned. Moving around in rough seas, ladders, narrow gangways, watertight doors and hatches clearly present difficulties to us. Space is always a problem on boats. Marine toilet facilities especially are rarely able to cope with the needs of those without disabilities let alone those of us with limited movement or those in wheelchairs. Some tour operators have started to address this problem, but they need more encouragement in order to continue and develop their facilities. The STS *Leeuwin* for example has a five day tour for people with partial disabilities and is able to take people with greater disabilities on one day tours by prior arrangement.

The Undersea

Traditionally all types of diving, especially scuba diving, have been considered 'off limits' for people with disabilities. However, this stereotype has long been proven incorrect and there are scuba diving courses that cater for people with disabilities already in existence. This is very encouraging. Since water is a 'gravitation free' medium it requires minimal muscle strength, in comparison to the land.



The Chignus III in Albany. This wreck is an advanced dive

It is only in the last forty years that fins have become the norm. Before that time there was considerable experimentation with 'hand fins' and it is this area that those managing with lower body disabilities should consider. Those teaching diving to people with these disabilities are already experimenting with this idea.

Though it requires considerable application for those wanting to take the plunge, there are a lot of advantages to getting around underwater. The underwater environment is extremely conducive to a range of activities that would be impossible for us on land. Additionally the therapeutic value of such an activity can be immense.

The Australian Underwater Federation has produced a booklet entitled *Diving for those with Disabilities* and for further information contact local diving shops for leads to the available diving courses.



The anchor walk near the Fishing Boat Harbour in Fremantle

People with disabilities interested in shipwrecks, maritime heritage sites, maritime archaeology, or historic boats and ships can obtain more information on the sites mentioned in this pamphlet from various institutions such as the Western Australian Maritime Museum. Books and other pamphlets are available through local libraries or through specialist bookshops such as that at the Museum.

It is hoped that this pamphlet will give people with disabilities an insight as to what is available in the maritime world now, and what could be accessed in the future.



R O C K Y B A Y I N C.

