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## PRESERVING SHIPWRECKS

A shipwreck is a special kind of archaeological site as it is a time capsule representing the particular moment in history when the ship was lost. There are over 2,500 shipwrecks in New Zealand's marine and fresh waters, but of these only about 200 have been accurately located.

Many wrecks hold important archaeological information about the circumstances surrounding the wreck, the lives of the people on board, the cargo and the construction and technology of the vessel. The relationship between different parts of the wreck and their contexts are very important. It is not just the artefacts and materials that provide information but also their relative positions to each other. Wrecks are therefore highly vulnerable to damage through disturbance.

Natural processes such as tides and currents can contribute to the decay and dispersal of the wreck over time. Diving on wrecks also has the potential to cause damage. Many shipwrecks in New Zealand have suffered irreparable harm caused by salvage activities and souvenir hunters removing items from the wrecks. Some artefacts require special conservation treatment to preserve them once they are removed from the water. Without the appropriate treatment they may disintegrate and be lost forever.

### MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SHIPWRECKS AND UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGY:

For enquiries about archaeological sites and applications to modify or destroy sites contact the Regional Archaeologist in your nearest Heritage New Zealand office:

Australian National Shipwrecks Database  
(includes New Zealand shipwreck data)  
[www.environment.gov.au](http://www.environment.gov.au) and search for 'shipwreck database'

Maritime Archaeological Association of New Zealand  
[www.maanz.org.nz](http://www.maanz.org.nz)

Australasian Institute for Maritime Archaeology  
[www.aima-underwater.org.au](http://www.aima-underwater.org.au)

### PROTECTING ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Shipwrecks and underwater archaeological sites are irreplaceable parts of our heritage. They are protected by the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. If you wish to do any work that may affect an archaeological site you must obtain an authority from Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga before you begin. It is an offence to modify or destroy an archaeological site without the written authority of Heritage New Zealand.

### INFORMATION ABOUT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

For information about archaeological sites, applying for an archaeological authority or the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 contact:

Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga  
PO Box 2629, Wellington 6140  
Toll free: 0800 HERITAGE (0800 437 482)  
Email: [archaeologist@heritage.org.nz](mailto:archaeologist@heritage.org.nz)  
[www.archaeology.nz](http://www.archaeology.nz)

New Zealand Archaeological Association  
[www.nzarchaeology.org](http://www.nzarchaeology.org)

# SHIPWRECKS AND UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES



HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND  
POUHERE TAONGA



## UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeological studies can provide valuable information that helps us to understand the past. The primary information studied by archaeologists is the surviving physical evidence of human activity. This evidence may be on or below the ground surface or, in some cases, underwater.

Underwater archaeology is just that – archaeological studies of sites that are underwater. Sites can be in marine or fresh water and include shipwrecks, sunken waka (Māori canoes), Māori fish traps, the submerged remains of wharves and other structures or terrestrial sites that have since been covered by water.

## ARE SHIPWRECKS PROTECTED BY LAW?

The sites of shipwrecks that occurred before 1900 are protected by the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. The permission of Heritage New Zealand must be obtained for any activity that could disturb the wreck or the surrounding site. Types of activity that may require permission include tourist operations, filming and salvage. The Act contains penalties for unauthorised disturbance. There is other legislation that may apply to maritime sites, such as the Marine Reserves Act and regional and district plans. If you are unsure about your legal obligations contact Heritage New Zealand for advice.

## DIVING ON WRECKS

Diving on wrecks can be a fascinating experience. Care should be taken when diving not to disturb or damage the wreck by breaking off pieces or kicking surfaces with fins. Reporting the position of newly found wrecks to Heritage New Zealand can help to protect them and contribute important information about New Zealand's maritime history. Leaving the wreck site as you found it not only helps preserve New Zealand's heritage but also enables other divers to enjoy the experience.

## NEW ZEALAND'S OLDEST EUROPEAN SHIPWRECK

New Zealand's oldest European shipwreck is the *Endeavour*. Not to be confused with Captain James Cook's ship, this *Endeavour* sank in 1795 in Dusky Sound, Fiordland. The *Endeavour* sailed from Port Jackson (Sydney, Australia) to provision a sealing gang based in Dusky Sound. Unfortunately it was found not to be seaworthy for the return trip and was abandoned there after being stripped of much of its fittings and timbers. In 1984 Kelly Tarlton recovered two of the cannons from the sea floor where they had been lost off a raft during the initial stripping of the ship.

## OTHER UNDERWATER SITES

Many of New Zealand's coastal archaeological sites have an underwater component where the sites have been eroded by wave action and the remnants can only be seen at low tide, if at all. These sites include the remains of Māori shell middens and oven sites on beaches and harbour margins. Remnants of old jetties and wharves can also sometimes be preserved in this way. These sites are evidence of former transport networks no longer in use. Other underwater sites can be more spectacular, such as the remains of part of the town of Cromwell, submerged by the creation of Lake Dunstan for hydro-electricity generation. <sup>11</sup>

### IMAGES:

**Cover:** Remains of the *Darra*, Quail Island, Banks Peninsula, Built 1865 (IMAGE: PHIL BRAITHWAITE FLICKR.COM)

- 1 The *Edwin Fox* at Picton. Built 1853 (IMAGE: HERITAGE NEW ZEALAND POUHERE TAONGA);
- 2 Crowd at a Mahanga Bay military camp open day, 1907 (IMAGE: ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY 1/1 020238)
- 3 Remains of Māori fish trap at Quail Island, Banks Peninsula (IMAGE: MICHAEL TROTTER AND BEVERLEY MCGULLOCH)
- 4 Archaeological survey of Mahanga Bay wharf, Wellington. Built 1885–86 (IMAGE: MARY O'KEEFFE)
- 5 SS *Wairarapa* shipwrecked at Great Barrier Island in 1894 (IMAGE: W. E. SORRELL, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY PA1-O-287-01)

