

# **New Zealand Society of Genealogists**



## **FAR-FLUNG RESTING PLACES: THE SHIPWRECK CEMETERIES**

**New Zealand Society of Genealogists Inc.**

**FAMILY HISTORY - PRESERVING OUR PAST FOR THE FUTURE**



# SS Tararua and 'The Tararua acre'



- The Tararua Acre Cemetery is where many of the victims of the shipwreck of the SS Tararua in April 1881 are buried.



# The Shipwreck



- The ship struck rocks on the Waipapa reef near Waipapa Point
- This is the site of New Zealand's worst civilian shipwreck



# S.S. Tararua



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# S.S. Tararua



- *SS Tararua* was an intercolonial passenger steamer of 828 tons.
- Sailing from Port Chalmers, Dunedin at 5 pm on 28 April 1881, the *Tararua* was en route to Melbourne via Bluff and Hobart.
- The Captain thought they had cleared the southernmost point and at 5am in the morning he struck the Otara reef off Waipapa point.



# Unsuccessful Rescue



- A lifeboat carried a volunteer close enough in to swim to shore and raise the alarm. A farmhand rode 35 miles (56 km) to Wyndam to telegraph the news. However it was not marked urgent.
- The boat took some 20 hours to sink.
- Attempts were made to get passengers and crew ashore by lifeboats, but they encountered difficulties because of the rising sea.





MARITIME DISASTER.

THE S.S. TARARUA ASHORE AT  
WAIPAPA.

# Casualties



- 151 died – 104 passengers and 27 crew.
- 78 men, 12 women, and 14 children lost their lives
- Only 20 were saved.
- The last cries of the victims were heard at 2:35 am.
- Only one man managed to swim safely from the ship to shore.
- For days after the ship was wrecked, bodies were swept ashore and identification became impossible.

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# Court of Enquiry Findings



- The disaster was primarily caused by the ship's captain failing to establish his correct position at 4am.
- An able-bodied seaman was also blamed for not keeping a proper lookout.
- The court recommended that steamers should carry enough lifebelts for all their passengers (there were only twelve on the *Tararua*) and that a lighthouse should be built at Waipapa Point.







# The Lighthouse



- The lighthouse, built after the catastrophe in 1884, is a poignant reminder of the tragedy.
- Foot access to "Tararua Acre", where many of the shipwreck victims were buried, is signposted from the Waipapa Point lighthouse road.





# The Walk



- There is a walk listed in NZ walking routes > Southland > Tararua Acre Cemetery (takes 15 minutes)
- Location
- Waipapa Lighthouse Road, Waipapa Point
- Access to the cemetery is across private property which is closed during lambing (1 September to 1 November). NZ sea lions are often found among the dunes and coastal tussock grasses. Please keep at least 15 metres away from them.
- Inaccessible to wheelchairs



# The Tararua Acre



The Tararua Acre which is almost opposite the site of the wreck, was made into a cemetery for 55 of the dead. Some others are buried at the Fortrose Cemetery on the Tokanui-Gorge Road Highway about 10km to the north west.



# The Tararua Acre in Pictures



- Three gravestones and a memorial plinth remain there today

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# Memorial Plaque



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