

S.S. Essex

a wreck on Fraser Island

The steamship Essex, 79 tons, plied the coastal waters of South East Queensland. She was built in Brisbane in 1880. Her small draught and barge hull suited her for shallow water work, and she spent much of her early life carrying cargo on the Bremer River between Brisbane and Ipswich. In the 1920's she was still at work on the Bremer carrying general cargo, then working as a coal barge, according to William Torrance in the book "Steamers on the River".

At some later time the Essex was sold to Vic Mathison, and transported logs from Fraser island to the timber mills in Maryborough. The year 1940 saw more than one timber barge or punt run ashore and abandoned on Fraser. "Stories of Puntmen" a book by John and Sue Erbacher, says that with the worsening situation in the Pacific it was believed that the Australian Navy was going to requisition vessels for naval use, and barge owners would rather scuttle their boats than see that happen. At any rate, it was very likely that about that time, the Essex was run up on the shore of Fraser Island on a very high tide, and abandoned.

Today she sits there still, on the south side of Urang creek near the mouth, behind the line of mangroves that fringe the shoreline. Mangroves grow through the hull, the bow is missing, and the sides, less than a metre high, emerge from the yellow sand.

Urang is a shallow small creek, that completely dries at low tide. The grey sand in the creek bed has the consistency of mud, and is not friendly to walkers. The log dump, a wharf ramp of logs laid in the white sand, lies eighty metres away from the ship hulk, on the north bank of the creek. The Essex worked this creek carrying logs. Now she is here to stay. Twenty more years and no sign will remain of a Queensland pioneer.

Visiting hours are best at high tide. The wreck is on the southern bank, eighty metres downstream of the log dump on the opposite bank, and can be pinpointed by the yellow sand surround.



Essex unloading cargo, Bremer River - Image courtesy of and copyright to R. Buchanan

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Essex pushing through Hyacinth water weed infestation, Bremer River- Image courtesy of and copyright to R. Buchanan

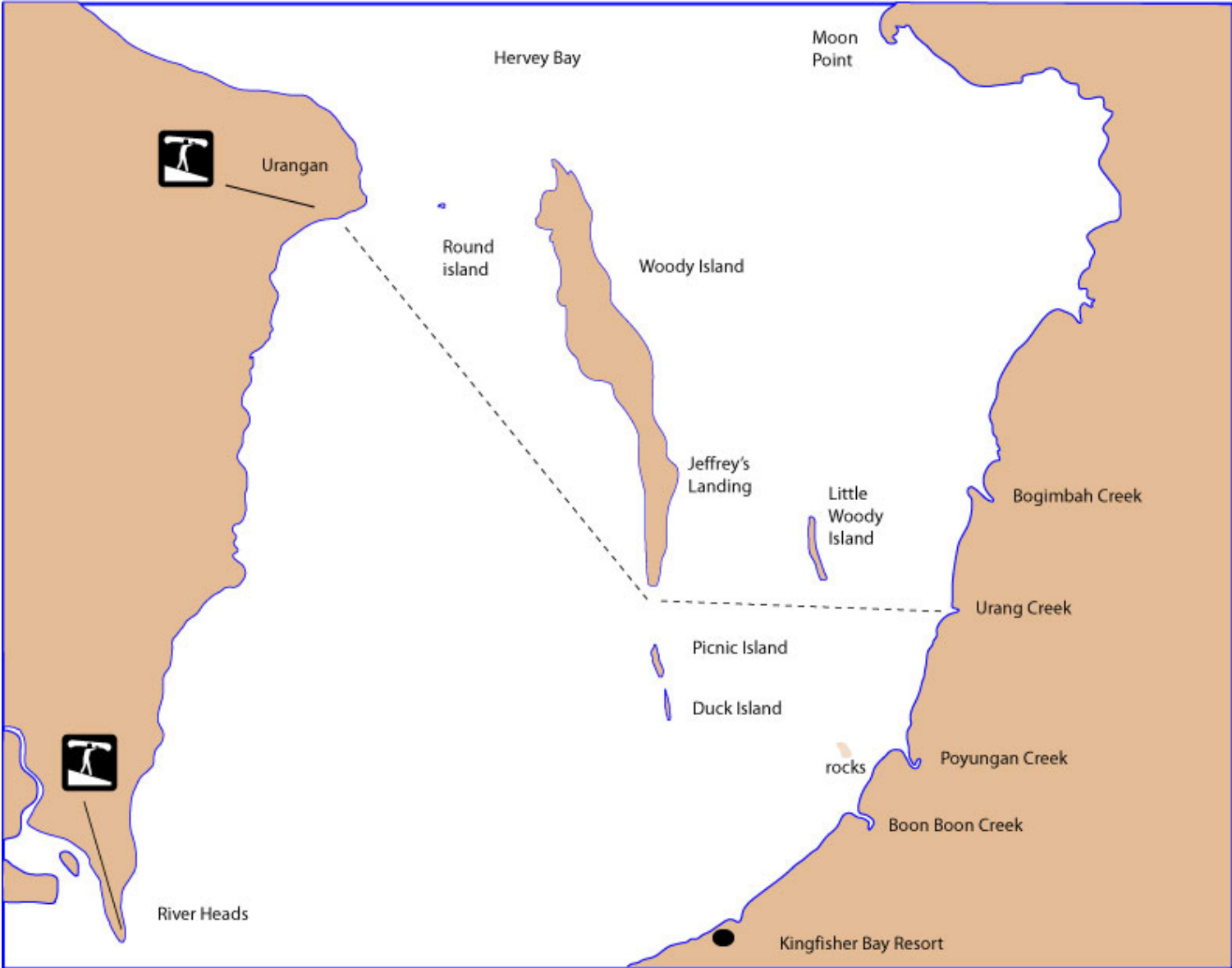


stern view



bow view

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locality map Fraser Island



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log dump, Urang Creek



mangroves growing through the hull



satellite view, Urang Creek, Fraser Island