

# Ocean House Anchor (Cocos Keeling Islands) Inspection Report



M. McCarthy

## **The Oceania House Anchor**

### **An historic relic: pointer to a recently-located shipwreck in the Cocos Islands**

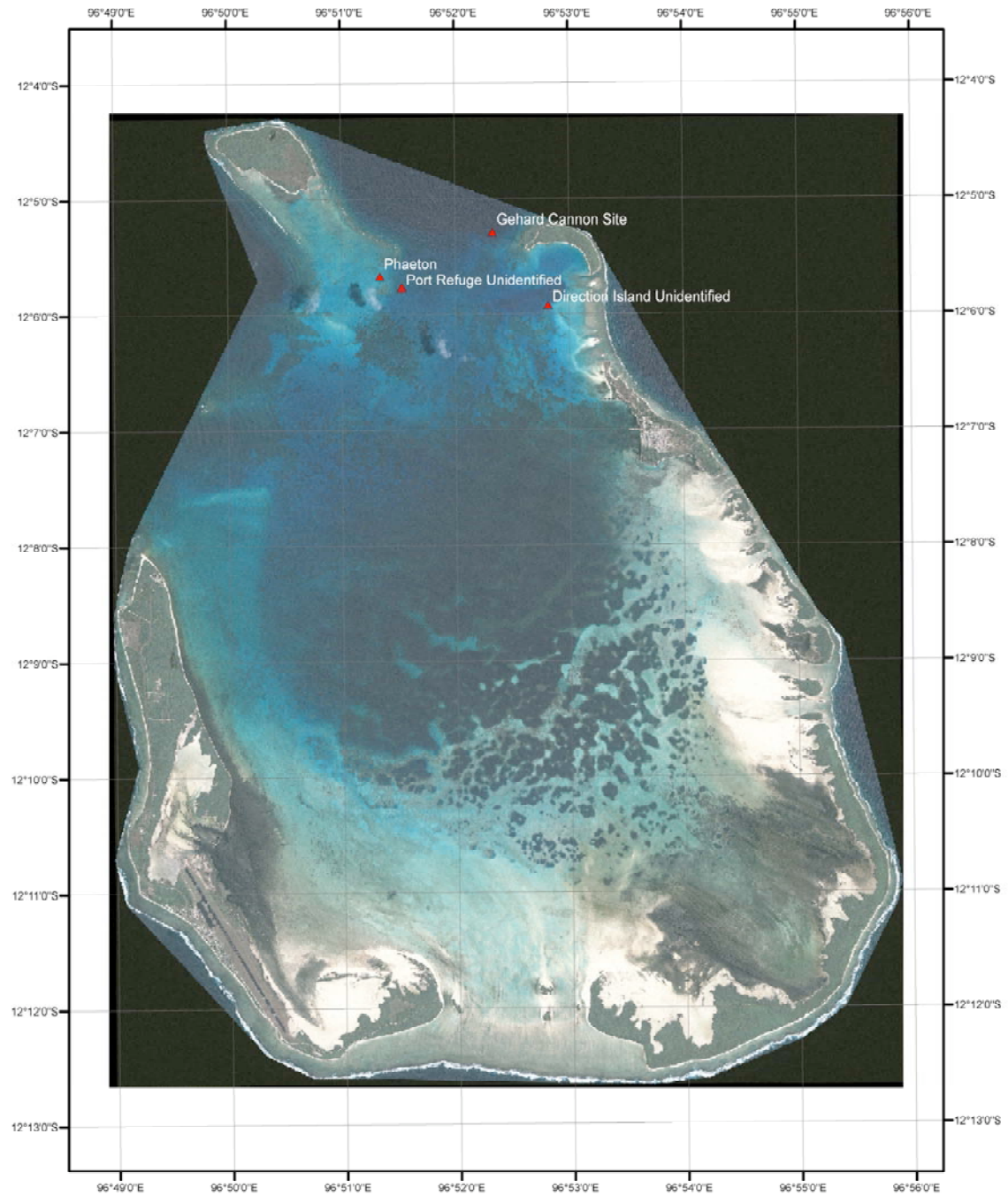
In December 2004, a portion of an early ship's anchor was seen adjacent the old boat ramp on the beachfront at Oceania House on Home Island in the Cocos (Keeling) Island group. The iron shank and the stock (which from the design was clearly a wooden one) were missing, indicating that they had been either lost in a mooring accident, in the salvage of this relic or in a wrecking process. Either way, the anchor appears to have been recovered from the sea in recent years.

*The anchor with outbuildings of Oceania House in the background*  
(R. Thorn, Parks Australia)





## Satellite Photograph of Cocus keeling Island



**Aerial Photograph of Home Island, South Keeling showing anchor site**





### **Date and size range for a parent vessel**

From experience and from a reading of number of treatises on the ship's anchor (e. g. Cotsell, 1856; Curryer, 1999), it is evident from the heavily-concreted state of this anchor, from its size and its shape that the vessel from which this anchor came is from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century and in the 300 tons plus range.

Further the configuration of the anchor does not fit that expected to have been recovered from any of the located (and heavily salvaged) sites in the Cocos(Keeling) islands. These *Phaeton* (1889), the *Direction Island Unidentified* and the *Port Refuge Unidentified*, are subject of reports in this series. Only the *Direction Island Unidentified* is of the correct vintage and size, but its location and circumstances render it highly unlikely that the anchor came from it. Unless it was broken and abandoned as a result of an accident while mooring, this renders the *Oceania House Anchor* a pointer to the location of another wreck-site in the Islands.

While there are a number of known possibilities, the fact that they will certainly be other wrecks that pre-date settlement in 1826 needs be kept in mind. See discussion following

### **Other Views of the Anchor.**

(Photo: R Thorn, Parks Australia)











As some indication of the provenance of this early to mid-19<sup>th</sup> century anchor, it is known that on the fringing reef on the southern shores of West Island lie the remains of *Sir Nicholas Francis Burton*, a vessel wrecked on 15 December 1826. On the reef opposite Direction Island lies the *Mauritius*, a French Brig, lost in 1825, whilst on the north Island lies the *Earl of Liverpool* a 229 ton brig wrecked there in the mid 1830s. All these are still to be found.

Of all vessels known to have been wrecked on the islands, the *Earl of Liverpool* is discounted given the apparent lack of heavy lifting capacity on the Island's workboat *RJ Hawke*. This would necessitate far too long a tow to the present location to have proved feasible, i.e. the anchor has most likely come from a site close to Home Island.

There are many possibilities other than *Sir Nicholas Francis Burton* and the *Mauritius*, however and these two pre-date the report of a Captain J.J. Duijntjer of the *Dankbaarheid* which put in to the islands for repairs in April 1842. There Duijntjer notes that seven wrecks were lost in the period 1828-1842.<sup>1</sup>

Thus either of the two wrecks above and all of the 'Duijntjer seven' would be candidates as the source of the Oceania House Anchor, though a brig must be considered perhaps too small a vessel for ground tackle of this size. Indications then are that this anchor is from one of the 'Duijntjer seven'

In examining the possibility that this anchor broke and was abandoned, and did not necessarily emanate from an historic wreck, an examination of the concretion on the flukes shows that both are completely covered in the deposit and in being uniform in composition and colour, that one had not been buried i.e. it was not 'set' into the seabed before breaking at the joint between the crown and the shank, as is common in severe conditions. Indications then are that this anchor was recovered from a wreck. Given that the concretion at the joint between the crown and the shank is intact, however, the evidence is that the joint broke during the wrecking process and the anchor came to lie on its flukes and crown.

## Conclusions

1. Indications are that this anchor section is from an historic wreck from the late 18<sup>th</sup> or early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the 300 ton plus range. Its location is presently known only to those who raised it.
2. The anchor appears to have been raised in modern times and it is presumed that there may be some who recall the event, or who may know of it thereby being in a position to lead Island authorities to the site

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<sup>1</sup> Note of this appears in a series of articles by C.A. Gibson-Hill on the archives of the Clunies-Ross family pertaining to the establishment of the colony on the islands.



## Recommendations

1. As it appears to have emanated from an historic wreck, this relic could be declared historic under the terms of the Commonwealth Historic Shipwrecks Act. Attention then needs be paid to items 3-5 below.
2. If the evidence above, is considered of too tenuous a nature to allow the relic to be declared historic under the Act, it needs be acknowledged that the anchor may have come from an historic wreck, unless proven otherwise, also necessitating attention to recommendations 3-5 below.
3. Discussions should be entered into with staff of the Departments of Maritime Archaeology and Conservation at the Western Australian Museum with a view to beginning the deconcretion and conservation of the relic at the Islands. This remedial work could prove a useful focal point for the local schools in passing on a real sense of 'ownership' of heritage stories and sites on to the coming generations and, it turn this could lead into Recommendation 3
4. An oral history program be entered into, possibly in concert with the actions at 2) above with a view to ascertaining the provenance of the anchor.
5. At the conclusion of items 2) and 3) above the anchor be relocated to a more public place, where it can be exhibited and interpreted to advantage.

## References

- Cotsell, G., 1856, *Treatise on Ship's Anchors*, John Weale, London.
- Curryer, B.N., 1999, *Anchors: An Illustrated History*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis.
- Bunce, P., 1988, *The Cocos (Keeling) Islands: Australian Atolls in the Indian Ocean*, The Jacaranda Press, Queensland.
- Souter, G. ND., *The Story of Cocos*. Unpublished history prepared for the Clunies-Ross family. Cocos Islands Historical Society.
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## Acknowledgements

Photos: R. Thorn, Parks Australia, Field and Technical Assistance: J. Green, G. Henderson.