

# The Sealers' Shanty

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## The Skeleton in the Hut

Captain T. Burrows sailed from Adelaide for London in *the Spirit of the South* on 4 June 1874. He sent a exploratory party ashore at Caroline Cove and these men reported they had seen a skeleton in a hut made from shipwreck salvage at the top of the plateau.

### *Exploring Caroline Cove*



Ships' wreckage on Macquarie Island. Photo Geof Copson.

*The Spirit of the South* lay becalmed off Caroline Cove on 20 June 1874 when Captain Burrows sent his Chief Officer and several other crewmen ashore to explore the island. They found the shore strewn with wreckage. They also found an iron bar or mast that had been bent and twisted into 'all manner of shapes'. **This wreckage probably belonged to the *Caroline*, which was wrecked there in 1824.**

Wind blew up strongly as the party tried to climb the plateau. The wind force was so strong and the climb so steep that the men used a boat-hook and rope to assist them.



Caroline Cove. Photo Geof Copson.

At the top of the plateau the party found a small hut, nestled amidst 'a low scrub resembling box-wood thorn, and tussock grass'. The hut had been made from ship's wreckage.

*Inside, they found a human skeleton.*

Near the edge of the cliff, a mast pole flew the tattered remains of a flag. A rusted hammer, saw and sheath knife lay nearby.

The report that a hut made from wreckage was found amidst a scrub resembling box-wood thorn is puzzling. There is box thorn on Campbell and some other islands north of Macquarie Island, but none on Macquarie Island.

*The tragic story of the person who died in the hut is intriguing – perhaps the skeleton in the hut belonged to a convict who escaped to Macquarie Island like Alexander Miller, in 1823.*



### **R**eferences

- Broxam, G. & Nash, M. 1999, *Tasmanian Shipwrecks*, Vol 1 1797 - 1899, Navarine Publishing, Canberra, p179.
- Cumpston, J. S. 1968, *Macquarie Island*, Antarctic Division, Department of External Affairs, Australia, pp82-83.
- Thomson, J.S.I 1912, *Voyages and Wanderings in Far Off Lands and Seas*, London, p 164.

### **F**urther **R**eadings

You can read the story of another convict who escaped to Macquarie Island in:

[Alexander Miller, Convict Stowaway](#)

The story of the *Caroline* shipwreck is told in:

[All Hopes in a Longboat – the Caroline](#)

### **M**ystery

The origin of the story of the skeleton in the hut is one of Macquarie Island's many mysteries.