

Skindivers Locate Hull Of Ship Which Took 75 Lives

THE wreck of the Penguin—the most elusive prize which has been sought after by skindivers for many years—has been located in Cook Strait by members of the Wellington and Hutt Valley underwater clubs.

The 842-ton Penguin, a Union Company ferry steamer between Nelson, Picton and Wellington, went down on the night of February 12, 1909, with the loss of 75 lives.

Her hull has been located in about 200 feet of water on the edge of the Terawhiti Rip. Divers have already made a preliminary descent early this year and hope to make extensive investigations of her remains during the coming season.

This latest discovery follows many others including the Defender and South Seas which foundered in Wellington Harbour, and the Nambucca and Progress in Cook Strait, and affords some exciting prospects. It could

clear up a half-century old mystery of what actually happened to the ship.

A member of the Hutt Valley Underwater Club, Mr. P. R. Hunter, said that the vessel located was almost certain to be the Penguin as every indication pointed towards it being her.

He has made an extensive study of all ships wrecked in Cook Strait and around the Wellington coastline. The position of the hull corresponds to exactly where the Penguin went down.

The Penguin was in 220 feet of water and we have located a metal, man-made object of about 200 feet," he said.

During the preliminary dive, pieces of metal were

located surrounding the main structure, but the divers ran out of air and their time was limited.

"They were only down there for a few minutes and visibility was down to about a foot," he said.

The ship is lying in very treacherous waters and is sitting on the edge of a steep cliff adjacent to the Terawhiti Rip. Divers can only go down at slack water and then only for about an hour.

Theory

The hull lies near Tom's Rock which the Penguin is believed to have hit, although the exact cause of her foundering was never actually determined. One theory was that she had hit the water-logged hull of an abandoned sailing vessel which had been floating around Cook Strait for some time.

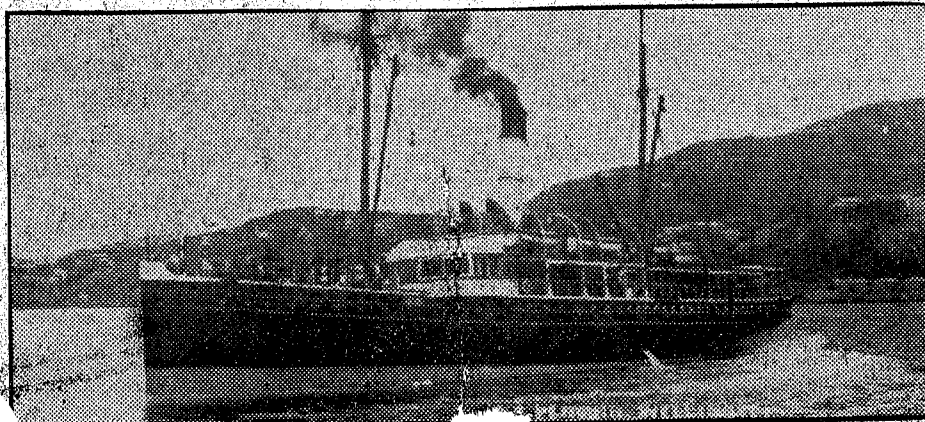
According to a member of the Wellington Club, the hull has been pounded into an unrecognisable shape, but the form is still there. It is overgrown with marine life. Skindiving in the area can be dangerous. A club member, Mr. Bruce Russell, lost his life early this year when exploring the wreck of the steamer Nambucca wrecked at Sinclair Heads in 1905.

Members of the Hutt Valley Club intend diving over the area next month to raise the propeller which will be inscribed and placed in their clubhouse as a memorial to Mr. Russell.

30 SURVIVED DISASTER

THE loss of the Penguin was one of the country's most tragic wrecks on the New Zealand coast. She is believed to have struck a rock near the outfall of the Karori Stream shortly before 10 pm on the night of February 12, 1909, when crossing from Picton to Wellington. At the time she was carrying 105 persons — a crew of 41 and 64 passengers. There were only 30 survivors.

FOUND



The Penguin, which has sat undisturbed for 57 years. She has now

been found by skindivers.