

## CASE STUDY: The Yongala Cyclone, 23<sup>rd</sup> -24<sup>th</sup> March 1911

By Mr Jeff Callaghan

Retired Senior Severe Weather Forecaster, Bureau of Meteorology, Brisbane

A severe tropical cyclone wrecked the *Yongala*, 3664 tons, just to east of Townsville with 120 lives lost. One of the searchers reported that a few miles south of Cape Bowling Green a vast swathe was cut through the bush with every tree uprooted or snapped off. Another searched found the northern side of Cape Upstart swept clean of trees, snapped off 8 feet (2.5 m) from the ground.

From the Brisbane Courier Sat 25 March 1911- At Ayr on Thursday (23<sup>rd</sup>) a very strong gale blew all the night, increasing occasionally to cyclonic force – The engine shed at the railway station blew down on the engine and verandas stables and outhouses were blown down.

The Deputy Postmaster General reported the Postmaster at Ayr advised as follows at 9 am Friday 24 March -Heavy south easterly gale blowing here since 2am, increasing at intervals to cyclonic force. All train and coach services suspended. A later report advised that the gale had veered to north-west.

Brisbane Courier Monday 27 March 1911 -When it became known in Brisbane on Saturday morning that the Adelaide Steam ship Company's fine steamer, *Yongala*, which left Brisbane on Tuesday afternoon for Cairns, had not arrived at Townsville, where she was due on Friday, naturally no little anxiety was aroused. This became considerably more pronounced as the day went on without tidings of the steamer especially in view of the cyclonic weather conditions which have been prevailing in the North during the past few days. A wire received by the Deputy Postmaster from Townsville during the morning, announcing that the *Yongala* was overdue which had left Flat Top Island (near Mackay) at 1.40pm on Thursday.

Dent Island Lighthouse stated that *Yongala* passed North of Dent Island at 6.35pm Thursday. Cape Bowling Green did not see the *Yongala*. Captain Shaland, of the *Aramac*, who has been interviewed, reported that shortly after leaving flat-top on Friday night weather conditions were so thick that he had to anchor for two hours. He saw no trace of the *Yongala*, but was not fearful of any serious calamity. He might have passed within 200metres of the *Yongala* and not seen her.

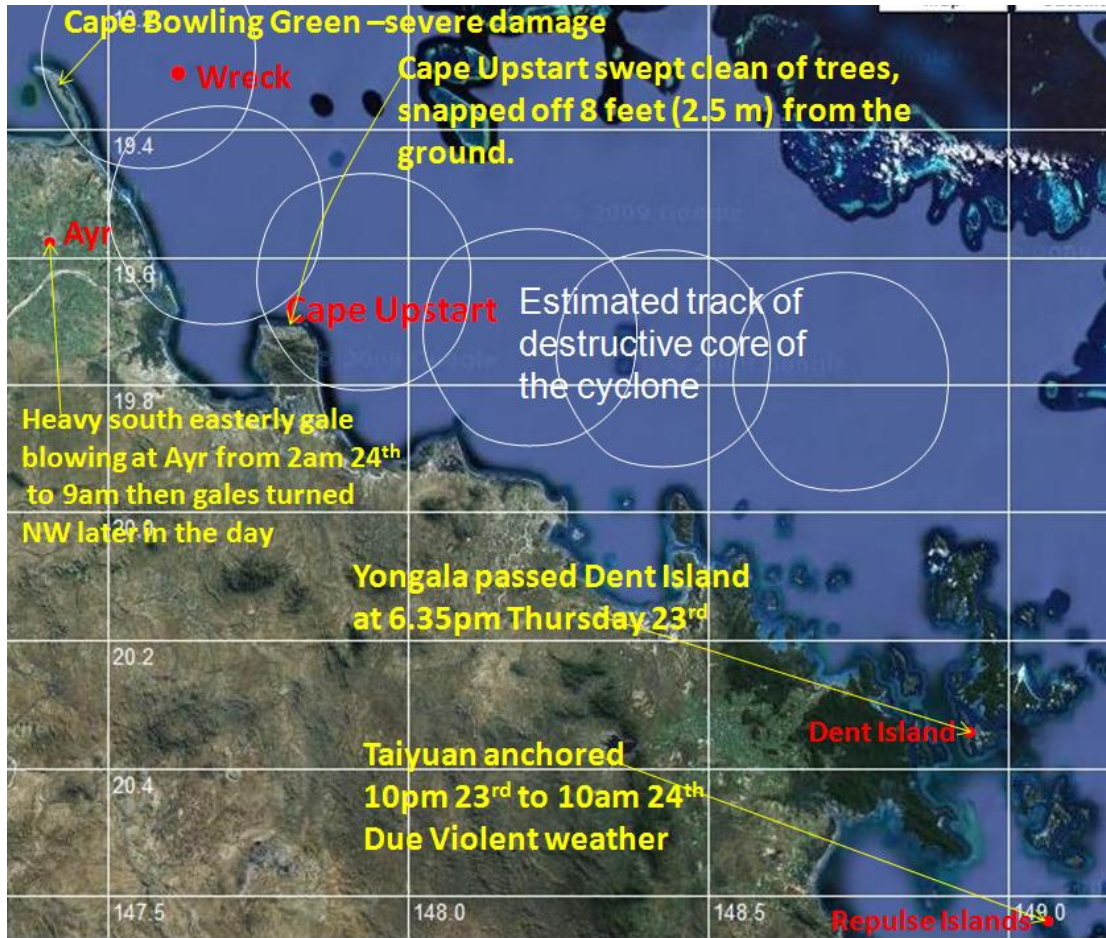
Captain Dawson, of the *Taiyuan*, reported that he anchored at 10 p.m. on Thursday south of Repulse Island, and remained there for 12 hours. It was the worst night the captain had spent on the Australian coast. He kept a lookout on the run to Townsville, but saw nothing of the *Yongala*.

Below in Figure 1 is the estimated track of the destructive core of the cyclone constructed from the reports from Ayr, the damage swathe at Cape Bowling Green and Cape Upstart and from reports from various vessels.

An early photograph of the *Yongala* is shown in Figure 2.

The *Yongala* shipwreck is registered on the Qld National Estate (place ID #14835) as a Heritage site. Its official location is: About 0.79 hectares (2.0 acres) within a circle of radius 500 metres (1,600 ft) at 19°18'27"S 147°37'31"E / 19.3075°S 147.62528°E / -19.3075; 147.62528 Coordinates: 19°18'27"S

147°37'31"E / 19.3075°S 147.62528°E / -19.3075; 147.62528, 35 kilometres (22 mi) north-east of Ayr and 100 kilometres (62 mi) east of Townsville off Cape Bowling Green.



**Figure 1** Estimated track of the destructive core of the *Yongala* cyclone



**Figure 2** A photograph of the vessel S.S. *Yongala*.