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Wood, Steel & Thousands of Rivets: the Last of the Waitemata Steam Ferries

The young colonial town of Auckland, built on the isthmus between the Waitemata and Manukau harbours, was dependent on sea transport: goods & people to and from Britain, and that other colony across the Tasman; produce by waka and schooner of the nearby Iwi to feed and shelter the growing immigrant population; and official and civilian transport by whaleboat across the harbour to the signal station at Flagstaff, later to be the suburb Devonport.

The first Waitemata steam ferry *Emu* began work in 1860 and sank the same year. But steam was unstoppable – steamer after paddle-steamer; firm after firm, until most were taken over by the Alison family's Devonport Steam Ferry Company. The paddle-steamers – among them *Victoria*, *Britannia*, *Alexandra*, *Tainui*, *Tongariro*, *Takapuna* – were side-wheeler double-enders with a rudder and a wheelhouse at each end.

When the paddle-steamers wore out, the DSFCo looked to Sydney, Hong Kong and San Francisco, and to New York-on-Hudson and the Great Lakes – screw steam ferries, double-deckers, with a propeller, a rudder and a wheelhouse at each end, were the new answer. Pushmi-pullyu ferries like the earlier side-wheelers – go that way, come back this way, without turning around. The first was the *Albatross* of 1904; the last the *Toroa* (Maori for albatross) in 1925.

Toroa, with her Clydeside steam machinery – Job. No.149, 1924 – and her Auckland-built composite hull – steel bulkheads & ribs, NZ kauri timber planking & superstructure, is undergoing comprehensive restoration to return her to operation in steam on the Waitemata. Her restoration includes a kilometre of bulb-angle framing – extruded at the old Yorkshire Lowmoor ironplate plant – and 200 sq m of plate-&-angle bulkheads, fastened with 10,000 rivets.

Built to be a floating bridge between Auckland and the North Shore, the steam ferry *Toroa* – 70 million passengers later – survives and thrives as a bridge between then, now and the future.