



# Accident Report

Grounding

*Hell Fire*

31 August 2005

Class C



# NARRATIVE

Shortly before 1230 hours New Zealand Standard Time (NZST), on 31 August 2005 the commercial charter vessel **Hell Fire** was south bound through Motuihe Channel in Auckland Harbour. On board was the Owner/Skipper and four passengers. The vessel was on a course that took her through charted Foul Ground that lies off the west coast of Motuihe Island (See Figure 1 - Excerpt NZ Chart 532 showing approximate course before grounding).

The Skipper was seated at the enclosed helm position steering manually. The vessel was travelling at an approximate speed of 10 to 13 knots. The Skipper had good visibility from the helm. Weather conditions were calm and sunny. The vessel's depth sounder was operating and a chart of Motuihe Channel was at the helm position. The tide had been in flood for 2 hours and rocks were exposed on the port side of the vessel.

At 1230 hours, **Hell Fire** struck a submerged rock. The vessel scraped over the rock and sustained severe damage to her propeller, shaft and gear box. The anchor was dropped and assistance was sought from the Coastguard on VHF radio. Shortly after, Coastguard towed **Hell Fire** to Half Moon Bay where it was lifted out of the water for repairs.

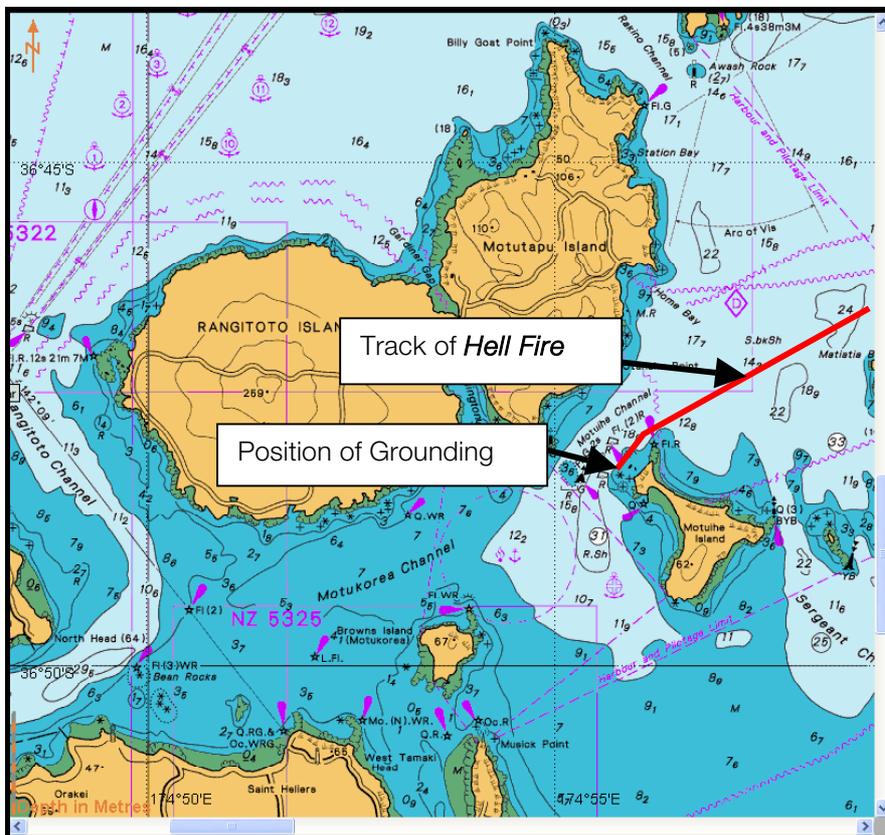


Figure 1  
Chart NZ 532

## Vessel

**Hell Fire** is a 10 metre aluminium charter vessel that operates charter-fishing trips out of Half Moon Bay in Auckland Harbour. The vessel held a valid Safe Ship Management (SSM) Certificate.

On the day of the grounding the vessel was not in commercial operation. When operating commercially, a suitably qualified Skipper is employed by the owner. The vessel's SSM system permitted the owner to operate the vessel on a recreational basis without a commercial skipper in command, subject to the vessel being operated in accordance with other commercial requirements.

## Skipper

The Skipper has owned **Hell Fire** for approximately 2 years. He had crewed on the vessel extensively with the previous owner. He holds no maritime qualifications. When questioned he displayed limited knowledge of chart interpretation. He was not able to identify danger marks properly.

## Motuihe Channel

The Channel is well buoyed and charted. NZ Chart 532 clearly shows an area of foul ground off the north west coast of Motuihe Island with dangerous rocks extending almost as far as the channel marks on the east side of the channel. Hazards to navigation at chart datum within the area include:

- A rock with two metres or less of water over it.
- A rock awash.
- Rocks that cover and uncover and dry to three metres.

## LESSONS LEARNED

It is essential for safe navigation for the Skipper of a vessel to be able to interpret chart symbols and, in particular, danger marks.

The temptation to take short cuts through foul ground should always be avoided. Keeping within deep water in a channel is a basic rule of good seamanship that should always be followed.

On occasions that vessels find it necessary to operate within foul ground areas the following points should be taken in to consideration:

- Operating within foul ground areas requires a high level of vigilance.
- Careful note should be made of the position of charted rocks. A lookout on the bow should be deployed and the vessel should be operated at a speed that enables it to avoid any dangers.
- Operating in foul ground in the same direction of the tidal flow should be avoided due to the reduced steerage at slow speed and difficulty in stopping if a danger is sighted.
- In sunshine it is strongly recommended that skippers and crew wear polaroid sunglasses to assist in identifying underwater rocks.

## SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is strongly recommended the Skipper complete either a Day Skipper or Boatmaster course before operating **Hell Fire** again.  
*N.B. The Skipper has indicated he will be obtaining a Boatmaster qualification at the earliest opportunity*
2. It is recommended the Skipper be censured for failing to operate his vessel safely.
3. It is recommended that procedures for operating as a pleasure boat be detailed in the SSM manual, including the need for written approval for such use to be obtained in advance from the SSM company on each and every occasion.