



FACTS

Type:	Bar Class Boom Defence Vessel
Length:	193.57 feet (59 metres)
Breadth:	32.02 feet (9.76 metres)
Depth:	11.06 feet (3.37 metres)
Gross Tonnage:	960
Net Tonnage:	750
Engine:	Triple Expansion Reciprocating Engine
Shafts:	One
Indicated Horse Power (IHP):	850
Speed:	11 knots
Fuel:	186 tons of oil fuel
Range:	3 000 miles
Armament:	One 12-pounder AA gun
Complement:	38

HISTORY OF THE SAS SOMERSET

The HMS *Barcross* was built for the Royal Navy in the Blythe Shipyard in 1941 and launched in the same year. She was the first in a class of 76 similar boom defence vessels which were built during World War II. After being commissioned in 1942, she sailed to South Africa where she was stationed in Saldanha Bay, laying and servicing booms. On 23 January 1943 she was renamed HMSAS *Barcross*, a name she kept until 1947 when she was laid up at the Salisbury Island Naval Base in Durban.

In 1951 the vessel was renamed the SAS *Somerset* and recommissioned as part of the South African Navy; and operational duties were restricted to salvage.

The ship was originally coal fired, but converted in 1959 to burn oil. New boilers were installed in 1967.

The *Somerset* was named after the horse which Dick King rode in 1842 on his historical journey between Durban and Grahamstown. He completed the ride of 960 km (600 miles) in 10 days in order to request help for the besieged British garrison at Port Natal (now the Old Fort, Durban) - hence the seahorse in the ship's crest.

Known fondly as the 'African Queen', she was decommissioned on 31 March 1986. At the time she was the longest serving ship in the South African Navy. She was one of the first ships of the SA Navy when it was formed after World War II. She witnessed many of the SA Navy's historic milestones and later played an important role in the history of marine salvage in South Africa.

On 24 May 1988 the SAS *Somerset* was towed from Simon's Town to Table Bay harbour where she was refurbished. On 2 September 1988 she was officially handed over by the Chief of the South African Navy, Vice-Admiral G Syndercombe, to the South African Cultural History Museum which was later amalgamated with four other museums to form the Southern Flagship Institution, now known as Iziko Museums of South Africa.