

2009 SHIPWRECK SURVEY - PRESS RELEASE 22 JULY 2009

Archaeologists from the University of Southampton's Centre for Maritime Archaeology are finishing a three week survey documenting the island's underwater heritage. The project, sponsored by the University of Southampton and the Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society has, with the help of fishermen and other Anguillians, been able to survey a number of the island's reefs and make some fascinating discoveries.

Anguillian fishermen and many islanders have undoubtedly known about these and other sites for generations. The team believes that by photographing, measuring, and assessing the material that can be seen on the surface of these sites they can better understand how it came to be there, where it was coming from, and the people who were involved in the process.



With this knowledge, the team believes that this resource can become a valuable tool for teaching the youth about Anguilla's maritime heritage. By preserving this history, Anguillians and their descendants will not only have it to enjoy for generations to come, but also have an interesting local attraction for visitors to enjoy and future archaeologists to study.



The sites located by this survey range from the late 1700s to present day. There are sites which extend our knowledge of known events and sites which tell us about history hitherto unknown. For example, when the team found a previously unrecorded anchor, several cannon and ballast near the known site of the Buen Consejo (Anguilla's only Underwater Archaeological Preserve) they were finally able to understand where the ship initially struck the coast and why the crew survived but much of the cargo was not able to be salvaged. In 1772, after a navigational blunder, the 980-ton Spanish vessel collided with the "iron shore" at Junks' Hole. The ship listed heavily to one side and the bow anchor and at least one cannon tumbled off the ship. Next to the rugged coast, the crew and passengers were able to climb ashore. The ship, however, lay on its side in a tangled mess of rigging and broken ship. The Spaniards worked to salvage what they could but were frustrated by poor weather and lack of facilities (boats, lifting equipment, etc). Three weeks later, a hurricane shifted the wreckage down the coast; a trail of cannon led from the anchor next to the shore to the current wreck site.



On a shallow reef north of Anguilla there is another place that the team has labeled the 9-Cannon Site. Fisherman “Mumba” showed the team an area where he knew there were cannon. Known as a “dump site” to archaeologists, the nine cannon were probably jettisoned from a ship in trouble on the reef. After running onto the reef, the vessel’s crew would have tried to lighten the ship by throwing anything of weight overboard. Water casks, lead shot, and finally cannon were probably all jettisoned while the crew rowed anchors into deeper water. The vessel, now lighter, would have tried winching itself off the reef, pumping water from the hold and heading for the nearest port to make repairs. We don’t know if it succeeded but we can say it never retrieved its cannon. More research and a careful investigation of the area could reveal its final fate. Cannon are difficult to date but these probably date to the Napoleonic Period (circa 1800-1820).



“Mumba” also showed the team a known anchor site. Minutes after beginning to explore the area, the vessel’s windlass, chain locker tubes, and hawse hole plates were located. Small flakes of copper sheathing and living coral features (where the coral has colonized the ship’s structure and built up inches of concretion) outline the ship’s features. Further research is required to learn the name of the ship but from the size and type of the anchor and windlass she would have been between 150-200 tons and sunk after 1820. The team measured the location and relationship of key features and will create a scale plan of the site.



A different site discovered consists of four anchors, their positions show how each failed in turn as the crew tried desperately to save their ship. They failed. The ship's ballast and parts of the vessel are incorporated into the reef in a direct line from the anchors' location. The site dates to the early 19th century. While little material is visible, it is likely that other features are imbedded in the coral.

Other artefacts found include cannon, 19th century anchors, chain and ship's fittings. The significance of these finds is not only in their physical properties but in what they reveal about trade and transportation around Anguilla . Long believed to be a backwater, Anguilla has a surprisingly rich maritime history.



Further, the “barge” in Crocus Bay and the “Chin Luen,” a fairly recent Japanese fishing boat documented on Scrub Island, demonstrate that this heritage is not only part of the island’s history but is part of the island’s recent history. Nothing was taken from the sites, which should remain property of the people of Anguilla , forever.

This survey was sponsored by the University of Southampton ’s Centre for Maritime Archaeology and the Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society. Financial and in-kind support from the Government of Anguilla, Governor’s Office, Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources and individuals living on Anguilla has made this project possible. Despite strong winds which kept the team onshore for more than a week, they have discovered a wealth of submerged heritage.



Compared to other surveys, this one has been unbelievably successful. It has shown that for every recorded wreck there are likely five which sunk without record. This survey has produced a snapshot of the visible heritage. The amount of heritage potentially buried or not visible is truly staggering. The future potential of this resource for Anguillians, visitors, and researchers, alike is real. While the earliest recorded shipwreck known is from 1628, there are likely others which are earlier. To discover a 16th Century wreck in Anguilla would be truly unique and could attract considerable attention, not only among archaeologists and historians, but also attract new visitors to the Island .

Mrs Grout believes this is possible and is looking to raise money to return to Anguilla next summer to continue documenting Anguilla 's heritage. She believes the University of Southampton and Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society can work together to create a Maritime Institute on Anguilla . Such an institution could benefit visiting researchers, tourists, and local Anguillians and serve as a centre for maritime heritage on the island.



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