

May 2008 Trip Report

By Lillian Azevedo-Grout

I would like to begin by thanking the Anguillians and residents who have made my research and work possible. Special thanks are offered to Bob Conrich, Don and Maggie Mitchell, Sir Emile Gumbs and Ijahnya Christian. Their hospitality, generosity, and support have been a godsend.

No one comes to Anguilla by accident and like many, my path to the island was unique. In 2005 I travelled to Bermuda to spend a month researching the islands' shipwrecks and underwater cultural heritage management (i.e. laws that regulate the salvaging of historic wrecks). My host, Dr. Edward Harris put me in touch with Bob Conrich of Anguilla and recommended that I contact him for a perspective of what things were like "off the beaten path." I did and everything since including this report is the result.

In September 2007, I visited Anguilla for the first time and quickly realized there is more to this island than meets the eye. My curiosity and interest was piqued and despite the brevity of my visit, I was determined to dig deeper. My current research for a PhD at the University of Southampton in Heritage Management presented a unique opportunity to combine my interests with the goals of the Anguilla Archaeological Society. Public Archaeology is engaging the public in order to share archaeological findings, promote stewardship of cultural resources and make archaeology relevant to society.

By training I am an anthropologist (BA) and maritime archaeologist (MA). With this in mind, I have spent the months in between visits researching not only Anguilla's maritime history but also the island's culture as it is today. I believe shipwrecks are more than "wrecks." They provide a way to understand culture, a rallying point for local identity, and even an attraction to visitors who wish to experience "the real Anguilla."

In May I came to Anguilla to prepare for an upcoming survey planned by the University of Southampton and the Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society for next July (2009). I had the pleasure of meeting many Anguillians and learning a great deal about the island and its people. I spoke with representatives from the Fisheries Department and Anguilla's Youth Ambassadors, with retired judges and politicians and with teachers, educators, historians and the public at large. I found that as with any selection of people, their interests ranged widely. Collectively, however, I was encouraged by what I heard; I believe the time is right for Anguillians to delve deeper into their maritime past!

The Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society has long recognized that Anguilla's shipwrecks are a unique resource. Our meeting was fortuitous and together we agreed that the time was right for a joint project supported by the Centre for Maritime Archaeology at the University of Southampton and the Anguilla Archaeological Society.

My research has identified at least 27 shipwrecks which sunk around the island. The 2009 Shipwreck Survey Project is about finding as many of these historic vessels as possible. It is not an excavation but an attempt to discover and recognize one aspect of Anguilla's history. It is hoped that the survey findings may form the basis of a continuing relationship between the University of Southampton and the people of Anguilla.