



North Carolina's Oldest Shipwreck

Richard Lawrence

This past winter ocean storms uncovered what may be North Carolina's oldest shipwreck. Starting in late-December, the Underwater Archaeology Branch (UAB) started receiving reports that a large section of a shipwreck was exposed on Currituck Beach near the lighthouse in Corolla. Among those interested in the wreck site was Ray Midgett from nearby Southern Shores. Mr. Midgett recognized this site was much older than most shipwrecks found on the beach. He based this observation on the extensive use of wooden trunnels (pegs) to fasten the vessel's timbers and the discovery of datable artifacts associated with the site.

It is rare to find diagnostic artifacts still associated with shipwreck remains on the beach. In this case, however, Mr. Midgett and one of his colleagues found a concretion attached to a plank that had come off the wreck. The concretion contained numerous lead shot and brass straight pins. It also contained a French copper coin dating to the reign of Louis XIII (1610-1643). This was not the first time Mr. Midgett and his friends found items dating from the mid-17th century while metal detecting on the beach in this vicinity. Previous finds included French, English, and Spanish coins as well as lead cloth seals.

Staff from the UAB first inspected the shipwreck on January 13, 2010. They immediately observed that the structure exhibited construction techniques found on Colonial period vessels. The UAB team also met with Mr. Midgett and his associates and examined the artifacts they had found closely associated with the shipwreck. At this time, in mid-January, protective sand was once again covering the structure and it was hoped that this episode of exposure was coming to an end.

Unfortunately a series of northeasters struck the coast, uncovering the shipwreck once again and moving it nearly three miles down the beach. Of even greater concern, the ocean waves were beginning to take their toll on the wreck, separating the stem, keel, and other timbers from the lower hull. In early April the UAB made arrangements with the Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) to remove the shipwreck from the beach. The WRC provided heavy equipment and staff with years of experience in marine construction. The recovery team assembled on the beach before daylight on April 6 and was successful in inserting large beams under the hull structure and pulling the shipwreck off the beach on this makeshift sled. The non-profit group Outer Banks Conservationists generously provided an area near the Currituck Beach Lighthouse to store the shipwreck.

During the week of May 24, students and staff from East Carolina University's Program in Maritime Studies spent three days making detailed drawings of the remaining hull structure. Plans are currently underway to move the shipwreck from its current location to Hatteras Village where it will be installed in the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum's exhibit hall for long-term curation and display.

Prior to the discovery of the Corolla wreck, the remains of Blackbeard's flagship, *Queen Anne's Revenge*, had the distinction of being North Carolina's oldest shipwreck. Blackbeard and his pirate crew lost *Queen Anne's Revenge* at Beaufort Inlet in June 1718. Although researchers have yet to identify the Corolla shipwreck, the site could easily pre-date the pirate ship by fifty years, adding a new chapter to North Carolina's rich maritime history.



The Corolla shipwreck exposed on the beach in early January. Photo by Ray Midgett.



A marine construction crew from the Wildlife Resources Commission safely removed the Corolla shipwreck from the beach on April 6, 2010. Photo by Julep Gillman-Bryan.

UNC Science Expo

North Carolina Archaeological Society

The Research Laboratories of Archaeology

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

September 25, 2010

On Saturday, September 25, 11am–4pm, the North Carolina Archaeological Society will participate in UNC's Science Expo, a free event with activities, demonstrations, performances and more for visitors of all ages!

Some of the archaeology activities in the Science Expo include:

- Tours of the Research Laboratories of Archaeology and opportunities to interact with researchers
- “Ask-the-Archaeologist” booth for artifact identification and resources
- Hands-on archaeology activities for children

You also won't want to miss:

- Keynote talk by Nobel laureate geneticist Oliver Smithies
- Demonstrations: Da Vinci surgical robot, catapults and trebuchets, wave simulation machine, virtual reality and advanced imaging
- Performances: A Phenomenal Physics show, a Brain show, and science-related musical acts
- The North Carolina Science Challenge: A series of hands-on activities that put K-8 grade students' problem solving and creativity to the test
- Fulldome digital video planetarium shows
- Science talks: Physics of sports, science and music, North Carolina's changing coastline, advances in cancer treatment and neuroscience

Additional information will be posted on the NCAS (rla.unc.edu/ncas) and RLA (rla.unc.edu) websites as the event takes shape. For more information, please contact Theresa McReynolds Shebalin at temcre@email.unc.edu.

Directions to the Research Laboratories of Archaeology

The Research Laboratories of Archaeology is located in Alumni Building on UNC's North Campus, just off East Franklin Street between Morehead Planetarium and the Old Well. Public parking is available in the Morehead Planetarium Lot, along East Franklin Street, and in the Downtown Chapel Hill Parking Deck (accessed from Rosemary Street one block north of East Franklin Street).

From Raleigh and eastern North Carolina: Take I-40 West to Exit 270 (HWY 15-501). Take a left off of the exit to get onto 15-501 going towards Chapel Hill. After 1.5 miles, the road forks. Stay to the right and get on Franklin Street when it splits off. The Morehead Planetarium Lot will be on your left in about 2.5 miles.

From Burlington, Greensboro, and western North Carolina: Take I-40 East (watch for the separation of I-85 and I-40 just east of Efland) to exit 266 – Highway 86. Turn right. Highway 86 becomes Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd (Historic Airport Rd.). Stay on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. 4.1 miles to the Franklin Street traffic light. Turn left. The Morehead Planetarium Lot is on the right about a half-mile after turning on Franklin Street.

From Durham and areas northeast of Durham: Take I-85 South to 15-501 South. Continue 1.6 miles past the I-40 interchange and take the Franklin Street exit, which veers off to the right. The Morehead Planetarium Lot will be on your left in about 2.5 miles.

**NCAS Newsletter
Publication Schedule**

All NCAS members are encouraged to submit articles and news items to Dee Nelms, Associate Editor, for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions:

Spring Issue – Feb 28	Fall Issue - Aug 31
Summer Issue - May 31	Winter Issue - Nov 30

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