

Shipwreck Hunters of the Oregon Coast



Wreck of the Peter Iredale at Fort Stevens.



Galena, near Gearhart, 1906.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Combing through history's wreckage

By Rebecca Herren
EO Media Group

Ever have a fascination with shipwrecks? Did you ever wonder about the mysteries surrounding their demise, stories of lost treasures, or about claiming the rights to abandoned wrecks?

Maritime archaeologist Christopher Dewey does and during the Seaside Museum and Historical Society's History and Hops lecture at Seaside Brewing Co. on Jan. 26, he answered questions to unravel a few mysteries and myths about shipwrecks.

Dewey is a retired naval officer, an adjunct instructor at Clatsop Community College and founder of the Maritime Archaeological Society in Astoria. He is listed on the Register of Professional Archaeologists and is a Secretary of the Interior and Oregon State qualified archaeologist. If that wasn't enough, he is a modern day shipwreck hunter in Oregon and Washington.

Unlike treasure hunters, he searches for, investigates and documents shipwrecks and maritime archaeological sites. He and a team of volunteers search sites using side-scan sonars, a magnetometer and a remote operating vehicle much like Robert Ballard used to find the Titanic, the Bismarck and the USS Yorktown wrecks, but smaller.

He does not salvage or excavate the wrecks he finds explaining, "I am not a treasure hunter, I'm not out there looking for ships full of gold doubloons. I am an archeologist."

Dewey jokingly says that he is oftentimes referred to as a garbage collector because he finds other peoples garbage and lost things throughout the world. "We search for material remains underwater."

According to Dewey, underwater archaeology looks at shipwrecks and submerged land sites both historically and prehistorically, meaning Native American and the like. "Nautical archaeology," he said, is



Christopher Dewey

not only about the ships, "it's about the information that connects us to our past and it's about maritime cultures."

One slide of Dewey's presentation revealed a photo of a bronze bow. "Entire areas in the Mediterranean are littered with these bronze bows from galleons that sank during the many battles that took place there," he said. Another slide showed a row of vessel-like casks made out of terracotta. "These are the only things left from this shipwreck from the Bronze Age." The 40 to 50 casks found measure about 1-foot-wide by 2-foot-tall. This style of stackable container held grains, oils and wine.

Over the years, Hollywood has glamorized shipwrecks and treasure hunting in such movies as "The Deep," "Fool's Gold" and "The Goonies." But who really owns abandoned shipwrecks?

Up until 1988, divers could sneak around and salvage a few trinkets they found on abandoned shipwrecks. But due to the damage many historical wrecks received from salvaging, the Abandoned Shipwreck Act was signed into law.

Shipwrecks embedded in lands in which they lie belong to the State including rivers, lakes and up to three miles offshore.

An archaeological site, Dewey explains must be 50 years or older in the State of Washington and 75 years in Oregon. He discourages treasure seekers from making a site claim for excavation due to the mass amounts of paperwork and the amount of money needed for an excavation. "It's expensive to claim an excavation site and by doing so many historical objects have been lost to private collections."

Sites around shipwrecks are as important as the artifacts. "If they had been lost into a private library, there would have been nothing left to see because the ship is gone," Dewey said, referring back to the wreck with the containers. "So there is a good reason to leave artifacts where they lie."

The shipwreck of the Peter Iredale is the most visible and well-known wreck on the Oregon coast. Located on Clatsop Spit, its skeletal structure towers above the wet sands during low tide. Even though larger and more famous shipwrecks such as the Titanic and Peter Iredale

are intriguing, Dewey said lesser-known ships that have wrecked in the region equally capture his attention.

One such wreck was found on the Seaside beach in November 2014. Three men were metal detecting in the dunes and uncovered a large piece of wood. Dewey investigated and sent his data and a drawing of a boat keel to the state's archaeologist. After much research, the state concluded it was a 1950s trawler.

It didn't take long for the Colewort Creek boat to be identified. The abandoned boat was located in the Lewis and Clark National Historical Park and through word of mouth, a relative and a photo, the boat was determined to be a 1920s square stern gillnetter owned by a local man who transported milk from a dairy farm to the Astoria market.

The ongoing Beeswax Wreck Project is a shipwreck near Nehalem beach. The ship is thought to be the Santo Cristo de Burgos, a Spanish galleon from 1693 that wrecked sometime around 1700 between Cape Falcon and the Nehalem Spit.

OSU researcher gets up close and personal with gray whales

By Rebecca Herren
For EO Media Group

Summer vacationers are not the only part-time residents of our region.

About 200 gray whales in the Pacific Coast Feeding Group return every year. Instead of migrating with the rest of the population north to the Bering Sea, they cavort for several months along Oregon's coastline.

Known as resident whales, animals in the group do not live in the area year-round.

Tracking gray whales

Oregon State University graduate student Florence Sullivan studies gray whales.

She is part of a research team for Geospatial Ecology

of Marine Megafauna Lab or GEMM Lab, studying the Pacific Coast Feeding Group, gray whales that feed in the southern waters between northern California and southeastern Alaska.

At the Jan. 18 "Listening to the Land" lecture presented by the Necanicum Watershed Council and the North Coast Land Conservancy at the Seaside Library, Sullivan noted that gray whales do not feed during migration, which makes the Oregon Coast an important habitat for them on their return migration to Alaska.

The focus of Sullivan's research is to document the foraging behavior of the feeding group, document the effect of manmade disturbances, over-



REBECCA HERREN/CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Florence Sullivan, center, discusses the "Watch Out for Whales" brochure with Lianne Thompson, Jeff Gage, Judith Pearson and Jim Border.

all health, body condition and the whales' response to changing ocean conditions.

After the findings are completed, Sullivan will work

with local communities and whale-watching operators to create scientific guidelines for vessel operation in the presence of feeding gray whales.

The researchers' viewing location is concentrated between Titchener Cove and Mill Rocks near Port Orford and Depoe Bay. The team uses a surveyor's instrument called a theodolite to track and map the movement of individual whales as they forage. The data collected shows the whales' traveling patterns between kelp beds, how they search for food and how they interact with vessels.

New research techniques such as Go Pro cameras and aerial drones benefit the team to closely observe the whales' patterns and behaviors, and hydrophones aid in recording the ocean noise — natural, human and mechanical — whales become exposed to.

In an effort to gain a better

understanding of the foraging ecology of the gray whales' feeding group, the team collects samples of a particular prey called mysid. Mysids are small, shrimp-like crustaceans found near the kelp beds.

"We think the reason they're attracted to these foraging hotspots along the Oregon coast is an abundance of mysid shrimp," Sullivan said. "During summer months, the mysid can be really dense from the sea floor to the surface and really close to shore. We want to know if this wealth of foraging is enough to get these whales to disrupt their migration north, or is there some other mechanism that makes 200 whales act differently than the other 20,000? That's what we hope to find out."

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