

Photographs reveal underwater wrecks off MDI

By Laurie Schreiber | May 14, 2011



(Courtesy of Zach Whalen)
 The wheelhouse from the wreck of the *Northern Miner* makes a ghostly apparition in the water off Frenchboro.

BAR HARBOR — Zach Whalen has spent the past five years diving on boat wrecks around Mount Desert Island and the nearby offshore islands.

His photographs and maps of the wrecks will be the subject of an exhibit at the Dorr Museum of Natural History on the College of the Atlantic campus in June. The show will open on Friday, May 27, at 4 p.m.

Whalen started diving seven years ago, thanks to his godmother, a dive instructor who lives in San Diego, Calif.

“I’ve been diving ever since,” he said. “I think the underwater world got to me. There’s something about being weightless and seeing this whole world out there and exploring and seeing things.”

Whalen said he became particularly fascinated by boat wrecks. A senior at College of the Atlantic, his research around wrecks is the basis of his senior project.

“I’ve talked with people a lot about shipwrecks,” he said. “It’s really cool seeing something that has a story behind it, and it’s also being reclaimed by the sea — life is attaching itself to the wreck.”

Whalen credited local shipwreck historian Franklin Price for his help in finding some of the wrecks in the area. He said he used the “Acadia Maritime Cultural Resources Inventory” — published in 2009 by Price, Joshua Daniel, Kristen Chasse and John Stallings — as his primary text.

For the bulk of his boat support, he credited Ed “Diver Ed” Monat, who operates the *Starfish Enterprise*.

He said he found it interesting that other wreck inventories skip the Midcoast and Down East areas. This is partly due, he said, to the lack of evidence.

“Some of it has to do with the coast here; wrecks don’t stick around,” he said. “They get bashed apart pretty quickly by the rocks and the tides. So there are not any grand wrecks sitting on the bottom here. But doing the research and figuring out what is left, I’m trying to put together a picture to fill in the history and the lives of those lost at sea.”

Among the wrecks he’s explored are an old fishing boat, the *Northern Miner*, which sank in the early 1990s off Frenchboro; boilers from the old steam yacht *Ara*, which sank off Little Duck Island in 1927; a large anchor off Mount Desert Rock; old anchors and ship parts found at several sites off the Porcupine Islands; and a schooner wreck on Long Ledge. He

said he also plans to explore the wreck of the ferry for the old cog railway that used to go up Cadillac Mountain, which now rests at the bottom of Eagle Lake.

“While finding a wreck site that can be identified may be a challenge, this is where research and exploration will work together to connect the past and present,” he said.

The wrecks date back to the mid-19th century, he said.



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