Wreck Inventory of Ireland Database and Wreck Viewer

By Connie Kelleher, Underwater Archaeology Unit

In Ireland, all wrecks over 100 years old are protected by law. Any activity on these wrecks requires permission and a licence, which are issued by the National Monuments Service. Unlicensed diving on protected wrecks or using metal detectors or other detection devices at such sites or to search for underwater archaeology is prohibited.

The Underwater Archaeology Unit (UAU) continues to collect information about shipwrecks. They maintain the Wreck Inventory of Ireland Database (WIID) and online Wreck Viewer. Both of these are updated as new sites are discovered or new information is obtained on known wreck sites. The WIID contains a list of over 18,000 shipwrecks in Irish waters, with the online Wreck Viewer providing information on all wrecks with known locations, over 3,900 records to date. The Wreck Viewer is accessible by clicking on: **www.archaeology.ie**

Working With Others

The National Monuments Service's UAU undertakes surveys and excavations of sites when required, as well as working with colleagues in other departments on seabed mapping and recording of shipwrecks. The work of INFOMAR, for instance, the joint seabed mapping venture between the Geological Survey of Ireland and Marine Institute, has identified significant numbers of new sites as well as detailed mapping of known wreck sites. This information in turn is added to the National Monuments Service's WIID and Wreck Viewer data.

Divers and fishermen are the eyes and ears of the sea and it is important to build constructive and sustainable relationships between the State and those using the ocean if our underwater cultural heritage is to be safeguarded for the future. The UAU liaises with local divers, dive clubs and fishermen on wrecks like the *UC-42* and RMS *Lusitania* or when working on projects like the 1588 Spanish Armada wrecks in County Sligo.

By working together our underwater cultural heritage can be recorded, managed and protected, as well as being enjoyed by everyone together as a shared heritage.

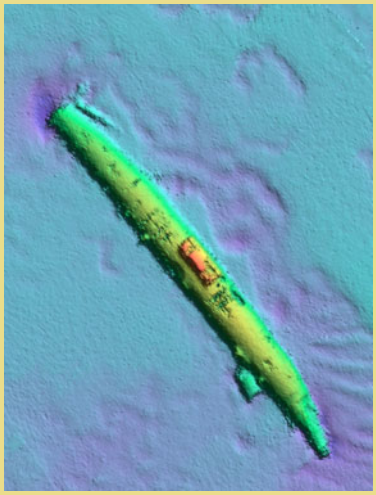

Image courtesy of © INFOMAR - Geological Survey Ireland/Marine Institute

Plan view of multibeam survey data of the German Submarine *UC-42* acquired by the RV *Keary* in 2018.

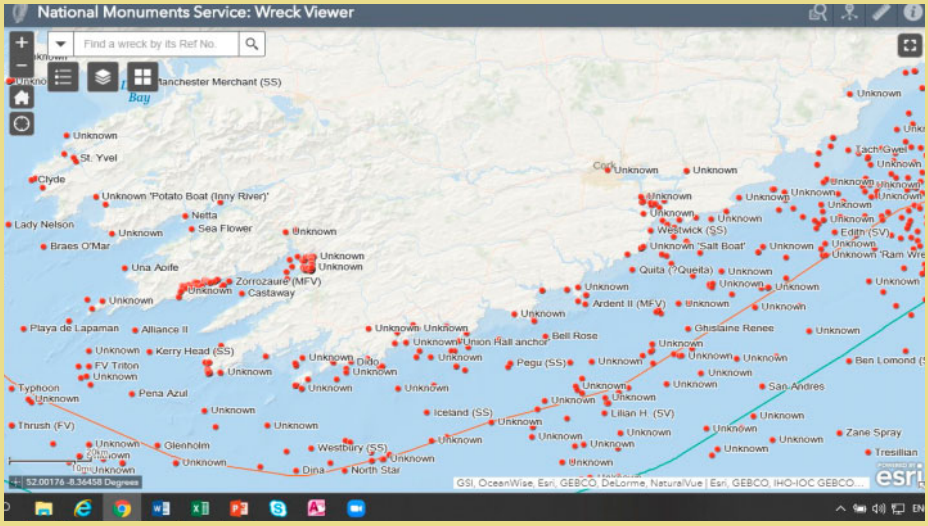

Image courtesy of © National Monuments Service

Detail taken from the NMS' online Wreck Viewer showing some of the known wrecks off the coast of Cork — accessible at www.archaeology.ie

Image courtesy of © Paul Kay

Perhaps one of the most famous wrecks in the world Greenpeace's *Rainbow Warrior* was raised and resunk and is now an artificial reef. The bow, shown here, is covered in jewel anemones.

A New Purpose Under the Sea

By Paul Kay

Whilst it is always sad when a ship sinks and becomes a wreck, the sinking can be helpful to marine life, providing the ship was not carrying a damaging cargo such as oil.

There are some advantages for marine animals living on or even near to wreckage. Some wrecks become legally protected because of their historical importance. This means that they are undisturbed by fishing or other activities, which might otherwise take place. As a result animals, such as rare fan mussels, can survive in these protected areas. Wreckage can also offer homes to animals, which the surrounding seabed cannot give them, such as some corals that have special needs. So wreckage can be home to creatures that otherwise may be rare to a locality.

© 2020 Sherkin Island Marine Station & its licensors. All rights reserved.