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N.S. crew believes it found Morgan's ship

By Davene Jeffrey / Staff Reporter



A coral-encrusted cannon from the Merchant Jamaica, a ship captained by buccaneer Capt. Henry Morgan that sank off the coast of Haiti in the 1600s

A Nova Scotia film team believes it has discovered the wreck of a ship that belonged to the famous English buccaneer Capt. Henry Morgan off the shores of Haiti. "We found the Merchant Jamaica, or at least we are pretty sure it is," says Rick Haupt, president of Oceans Discovery Network of Halifax. Mr. Haupt and his Nova Scotia team first spotted the wreck 18 months ago while making a documentary about the Bluenose. About six weeks ago, they were able to return to the waters off the south coast of Haiti. This time, they were part of a joint project with German shipwreck hunter Klaus Keppler of Sea Explorer AG. Local underwater photographer Dave Gaudet filmed the wreck at no small risk to himself. Because the shoal is within two to three meters of the surface, the surf action would drag divers across the sharp coral. "Quite a lot of skin was lost on those reefs out there," and a number of wetsuits were ruined, Mr. Haupt said. But Mr. Gaudet was most concerned for his camera. "Literally the surf was pulling me . . . six feet across and then 10 feet the other way. "I was doing everything I could to keep the camera from getting pounded."

And his camera is not easy to control. "It's a little smaller than a Volkswagen," he joked before comparing it to a patio barbecue. Photos taken of the wreck show broken pottery, cannons and even the ship's anchor. German scientists have dated some relics from the wreck and confirm they are from the 17th century, Mr. Haupt said. On another reef, his crew discovered the wreck of a much larger warship, which he believes to be an English vessel from the same period. The ship carried 50 to 60 guns and probably would have been manned by at least 600 sailors, he said. The marine explorer believes the secret to that ship's identity lies with its cannons and the foundry marks they bear. "It's like being a detective on a crime scene," Mr. Haupt said. The British kept exacting records of where all of their cannons were made, he said. Although Capt. Morgan was famous for plundering ships; Mr. Haupt says his team will leave the wrecks intact. "We are nice guys, by the way," he said. "We believe very strongly in leaving those shipwrecks how they are. "The gold we find lays in the documentaries we make."

And Mr. Haupt's team is already dreaming of spinoff projects, such as coffee-table picture books, documentaries and travelling museum shows. Much is known about Capt. Morgan's exploits, due in part to the captain's own records. "He had his own travel writer with him," Mr. Haupt said. And the writer documented the captain's raids and later published a book. Mr. Haupt's team will probably return to Haiti as soon as hurricane season is over this fall.