

allenXPRESS

Newsletter of Allen Exploration 5
October 2024

ALLEN^X
EXPLORATION

allenexploration.com



Newsletter 5

Captain's Log
Untapped Promise

On the Banks
Airlifting 'Wormholes'

Meet the Team
Dr Michael Pateman

CAPTAIN'S LOG

All photos © Allen Exploration

Good news, the weather has been holding. Despite rumblings of incoming storms, now confirmed, Allen Exploration's fleets and our divers have held our nerve. We're back on the main mound of the *Nuestra Señora de las Maravillas* in the northern Bahamas. Or what's left of it after past salvors pulled apart and picked over the remains since 1656. Because nothing was ever published from the salvage operations of the 1970s to 1990s, nobody can really say who did what where! For sure, though, nobody has ever approached the old ship as rigorously, respectfully and systematically as us.

We're airlifting small pockets of sediment trapped in hollows below and beside ballast that pit the hardpan like Swiss cheese. And diving with high expectations that numerous small finds fell between the cracks of the galleon and its hull, blitzed by storms and hurricanes. It's back breaking work, but if we're going to tell the final chapter of Our Lady of Wonders, there's no other choice.

So far, so good. In one trench alone the team from the *Axis* research ship has recorded 24 silver Spanish coins, a Chinese porcelain sherd, four musket balls and five pieces of split shot. Elsewhere, two escudos gold coins, part of a large silver plate and several tobacco pipe stems have turned up. And there lies a mystery. The Spanish supposedly preferred cigars to pipes. Could these have been smoked by the *Maravillas'* crew after all? Or were they thrown overboard by later 17th-century salvors passing the time as their Native American and enslaved African divers risked their lives underwater?

As the end of the season nears, the archaeologists are focused on recording the new wrecks AllenX has discovered and scatters of cannons. I've managed to get in a quick visit to the *Madama do Brazil* recovery ship that sank in August 1657 while salvaging the *Maravillas*. Its wreck off Gorda Key, southwest Great Abaco Island, is full of untapped promise. The small copper ingot I found reminds us how its story is much more than about gold and silver.



Carl & Gigi Allen strike emeralds



Carl Allen dives a giant anchor

The small copper ingot I found reminds us how its story is much more than about gold and silver.

All the while, glassy smooth seas and a super harvest blood moon marking the autumn equinox have enchanted us. When the weather and waves behave like this in the northern Bahamas, right here, right now, I can't imagine doing anything better in life.

Carl Allen

ON THE BANKS

Heading to the Maravillas



September is always the best month at sea for Allen Exploration and 2024 hasn't disappointed. The team has been anchored off the western Little Bahama Bank. We're rigorously investigating the ballast pile that once balanced the good galleon *Maravillas* and allowed it to sail stable.

But it's no longer one small pile of rocks. Past salvors, using rake-like technology called dredges in the 1680s, plus earth-shaking hurricanes, have somehow spread the ballast pile across an area 150 feet long and 200 feet wide. In places the ballast pile, where each rock measures from the size of a hand to 3 feet long weighing up to 75 lbs, still stands 4 foot high. Most are granite river rocks mixed in with 5% quartz.

The team's focused on investigating what might survive under and around the ballast spread, something nobody's attempted before. The site has been heavily degraded. Everything above the

Sunken silver coins



THIS TIME IN HISTORY

On the night of October 8, 1492, Christopher Columbus spotted a great flock of migrating birds against the moon and ordered the *Pinta*, *Nina* and *Santa Maria* to follow them towards land. And, so, the first European contact in the Americas took place in The Bahamas at about 7am on Friday, October 12, when the admiral anchored off Long Bay in San Salvador Island. Columbus reached Rum Cay two days later. On October 24 and the 25, the Spanish fleet crossed over the dangerous rocks and shallows of the Great Bahama Bank. Columbus found the original settlers of The Bahamas, the Lucayans, to be "sunburnt peasants" of a "primitive simplicity" living in a paradise where small birds sang "the song of nightingales" and the gardens and woods were filled with the "loveliest groups of trees I have ever seen... like those of Castile in the month of April and May" – grudging respect in a backhanded compliment.



Gold of the Maravillas

ballast is long gone, fished up by salvors since 1656. The wooden hull has completely vanished, too. What's left are finds fallen through the cracks into holes in the hardpan of the seabed that in places have wormed their way 3-4 feet down into the natural rock.

Airlifting out the sediments covering the bedrock holes is bruising work. But we only need one chest to have spilled its contents in an historical wormhole for the results to be spectacular. The signs are promising. So far in this area AllenX has recovered two escudos gold coins, over 100 silver coins and piles of musket balls and split shot.

There's literally tons of work to do here and so far we've managed to get in just two trips of two days each. The plan is to hang on in there, working on the *Maravillas'* ballast pile until late October.

For now, we're back on shore. Hurricane Helene is heading our way. In a few days time, we're hoping to get another three to four days on site. AllenX will keep at it for as long as the waves allow.

DID YOU KNOW?

The ex-lawyer William Shirley arrived at Nassau in 1760 after his ship, the *Mermaid*, was cast away on the Bahama Keys. Governor Shirley immediately learned that October from "Sundry merchants of New Providence and Others, Commander of or interested in Privateers" that "the Business of Privateering is the most beneficial and almost the only profitable Trade carried on in these Islands."

Nassau had become an English vice-admiralty court in 1697. In wartime enemy ships were towed into New Providence to be declared as spoils of war. Spanish traders were brought into Nassau and declared lawful prizes in March 1760 alone. Between October 1740 and March 1748, 117 enemy prizes were condemned in Nassau's vice-admiralty court with a combined value of almost three-quarters of a million pounds.



Silver Maravillas coins

THIS TIME IN HISTORY

On October 30, 1629, Charles I granted his Attorney-General, Sir Robert Heath, proprietary rights over the area of the American mainland, including The Bahamas. The country was formally annexed after Sir Robert was “kindled with a certain laudable and pious desire as well of enlarging the Christian religion as our Empoire & encreasing the Trade & Commerce of this our kingdom...”

FIND OF THE MONTH

For storing foodstuffs on the high seas, Spain relied on ovoid-shaped jars that changed remarkably little between the 16th and 18th centuries. They are a calling card of Spanish shipping and trade found from Japan to England. The wreck of the *Nuestra Señora de las Maravillas* is no different. At the last count, AllenX has recorded two intact jars, as well as 55 rims and necks and 13 bases, alongside 10,920 body sherds off the western Little Bahama Bank. The galleon’s hundreds of storage jars, seemingly once kept mainly on the orlop deck to store general foodstuffs, are today shattered and scattered far and wide, 2.0 kilometers north/south and 2.2 kilometers east/west.

These types of containers are known as olive jars, *botijas*. They turn up on pretty much all Spanish wreck sites, often in huge numbers, from the 1554 fleet lost off Texas through to 602 jars on the *Conde de Tolosa* and *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* sunk off the Dominican Republic in 1724 while heading from Cadiz with provisions and mercury for the mines of New Spain. At least 108 jars went down with the *Atocha*’s central hull in 1622, while the *Buen Jesus y Nuestra Señora del Rosario* had at least 209 olive jars on board when it sank in the same hurricane off the Tortugas Islands in the Straits of Florida and plummeted 400 meters down.

Historical documents from the Casa de Contratación House of Trade in Seville show that olives and olive oil were just one commodity in an

enormous shopping list that these jars carried. Their contents may have been mainly wine, olive oil and vinegar, but a common second tier included olives, almonds, hazelnuts, raisins, honey, liquor, capers and rice. Less common products included butter, sweet wine, salted meat, pickles and even gunpowder.



A Maravillas olive jar

enormous shopping list that these jars carried. Their contents may have been mainly wine, olive oil and vinegar, but a common second tier included olives, almonds, hazelnuts, raisins, honey, liquor, capers and rice. Less common products included butter, sweet wine, salted meat, pickles and even gunpowder.

Jar mouths were originally sealed with conical corks held in place with rabbit or goatskin and secured in hulls with rope, discoveries from elsewhere and written nuggets show. At the end of the 16th century, a jar cost 40 maravedis when empty and 306 maravedis when filled with wine (at a time when there were 272 maravedis to the silver peso or piece of eight).

The average Spanish sailor's daily diet was made up of 1.5 pounds of biscuit, six ounces of pork a day for four days of the week and on the remaining days six ounces of cod, plus two ounces of mixed rice and chickpeas. Most daily calories came from bread, salt beef, beans or chickpeas. Cheese on Mondays and Wednesdays added 667 calories, and salt cod on Fridays and Saturdays 163 calories. All in all, the diet's 4,130 calories on meat days and 3,743 calories on fish days was generous and healthy for the age. Many of these foods would have been stored in *botijas*.

Although Spanish storage jars were made in the Moquegua Valley of southern Peru to send local wine and brandy by llama pack trains to the silver mines of Potosi high in the Andes, the vast majority of Spanish 'olive jars' were made in the southern Spain regions of Seville, the nearby Guadalquivir Valley, 75 kilometers northeast of Seville and in Cazalla and Cordoba.



Maravillas olive jars

THIS TIME IN HISTORY

After being appointed Deputy Governor of The Bahamas, Read Elding, of mixed race, captured five notorious pirates, Ounca Guicas, Frederic Phillips, John Floyd, John Vantein and Hendrick Van Hoven, known as the “grand pirate of the West Indies.” The rogues were tried in Nassau on October 23-24, 1699. Van Hoven, a Dutchman, swore he had “slit the throat of many a Spanish dog” but had only attacked Spanish shipping, enemies of his own country. The pirates were hanged at Fort Nassau and put in iron cages on October 30 as a warning to others. As he was strung up, the grand pirate was said to have whispered something about a “treasure ship [that] can be found... at reef... south... Bahama...” The pirate hunter Read Elding, the first and only non-white to hold a position of authority in The Bahamas for 250 years, would later be charged with piracy, as well, in October 1701 but bribed his way out of prison.

DID YOU KNOW?

Lighthouses protecting coastal interests have been major coastal landmarks from Egypt and Israel to Britain since Roman times. A warning system for The Bahamas only became a reality in the 19th century by comparison. In earlier times, locals violently opposed these structures, which threatened their livelihood salvaging ships. Off Abaco Island alone, one ship was lost every month. Lights risked ending the lucrative days of wrecking.

The British Imperial Lighthouse Service commissioned 11 manned light stations across The Bahamas. The 62-foot-tall white brick tower with red lantern built in 1817 at the western end of Hog Island, modern Paradise Island, at the entrance to Nassau harbor, is the oldest surviving lighthouse in the West Indies. Another followed at Elbow Reef on Abaco Island in 1863 after the Service's officers were horrified to be first-hand witnesses to six ships smashing into a coral reef. The lighthouse on Great Isaac Cay was opened in 1859 to guide traders transporting sea salt out of Inagua, rum from Nassau and limestone to the USA. It's said that during a full moon, ghostly noises swirl around the lighthouse, which is haunted by a mother and child, the Grey Lady, shipwrecked there in the late 19th century. Even in 1969, two of the lighthouse keepers disappeared and were never seen again.

MEET THE TEAM

Dr Michael Pateman

Allen Exploration's Director of The Bahamas Maritime Museum, Dr Michael Pateman, spent most of his childhood on his father's 17-foot Boston whaler, fishing, swimming and sailing. His fascination with the past didn't come from the water though. "One of my chores I hated oh so much," he says, "was weeding the yard, until one day I found some old coins – old to me, though from the 1950s. What else is buried out there, I wondered?"

Michael later switched from studying computer programming to archaeology, marine ecology and museum studies at Miami University in Ohio. He topped off his higher education with a PhD in heritage planning from the University of Cincinnati and worked on and off for the Antiquities, Monuments & Museum Corporation in The Bahamas.

Michael's dreams of finding a career in nautical archaeology in his home waters was frustrated by a national moratorium on wreck hunting. So, he



focused on the Lucayans instead, the island's first Indigenous people going back to the 7th century AD. Because the Lucayans buried their dead in caves now submerged or next to blue holes, he ended up diving into the sunken past from a different angle.

Then in 2012 Michael dived his first wreck, the *Peter Mowall* trafficking enslaved Africans when it

THIS TIME IN HISTORY

At 8pm on October 1, 1866, the vortex of the worst hurricane in living memory swept across Nassau in New Providence. The eye of the powerful category-four hurricane was said to be over 23 miles in diameter. Winds of over 140 miles per hour lashed the shores. The roof of Fort Charlotte's artillery barracks was blown off in New Providence. The sea broke through the esplanade and shore barrier, washing hundreds of tons of sand and wrecks into the road.

In Nassau, the English warship HMS *Nimble* was cast onto the shore; a steamer sank in the northern harbor mouth; and the *General Clinch*, the last surviving blockade runner of the American Civil War (1861-1865), was dashed to pieces against the public wharf. The southern shore was "strewn with wrecked craft, in some places piled in clusters one upon the other," Governor Rawson wrote. On Hog Island (Paradise Island today), wave crests reached the height of the lighthouse's gallery, 60 feet above the sea.

When the hurricane passed, 92 ships had been destroyed, around 387 people died, 1,000 more were left homeless and 612 houses were lost.

sank off Lynyard Cay in the Abaco Islands in 1860. The water may have been very shallow and the diving very rough but a pumped-up Michael realized he wanted more of this underwater archaeology business.

By way of a stint as the Director of the Turks & Caicos National Museum, Michael was signed up by Allen Exploration as the Director of its Bahamas Maritime Museum. "I always advocated that commercial salvors should work with archaeologists," he says. "It was a model I'd preached to UNESCO, only to be shot down by most academics. They said the two can't work together. Here was an opportunity for AllenX to merge the two. Plus, Carl Allen didn't want to sell any artifacts but to keep the collection together."

Michael's favorite finds from the wreck of the *Maravillas* include a wonder of a sword handle. "I like to find personal artifacts that put a spotlight on the people onboard wrecked ships," he says. "When Jim Sinclair and I were cleaning the sword handle, at first we thought it was iron," he remembers. "Then we realised it was silver and finally saw letters on it. They read 'Es De Don Martin De Aranda Y Gusman,' 'This



belongs to Don Martin De Aranda Y Gusman.' We were blown away by the intricate details but also mystified. This man died before the *Maravillas* was wrecked, records showed. What was going on?

Family records later revealed that it was Guzman's son who died on the galleon and took his father's cherished sword to a watery grave. Guzman Junior's role on the galleon remains unknown, mainly because the list of survivors and crew members on the *Maravillas* is so fragmentary. Out of 600 people on board, the names of around 500 are lost to history. "Was he a paying passenger?" Michael wonders. "Possibly. Maybe that's why we don't have his name."

AllenX has had a tremendous impact on The Bahamas, Michael has no doubt. "We've had close to 10,000 school children come through the museum and its lab. They've seen a side of The Bahamas they had no clue about. To me, this is the best side of the project."

Through educational programs the museum lets school kids get hands-on experience, putting back together broken modern mugs and cleaning pennies to simulate conserving coins. At the end of one visit, Michael remembers a fourth-grade school student looking at his teacher and telling her, "Well, that's a field trip. We need more like that." In another, a kid told Michael, "I'm doing your job for you. I'm going to just come back and take your job." To which Michael replied, "Good, take my job, please. That's the whole point of this."

As for what else is still out there, Michael knows that "The Bahamas has a limitless potential for underwater archaeology. It's a challenge because the environment is so dynamic. Sometimes you find shipwrecks that are well-preserved. In other cases, we find sites that have never been touched by human hands, but everything's gone. That's just how dynamic the environment is."

"Plus, The Bahamas is well known for its wreckers," Michael adds. "While a wreck may not have been touched in modern times, it may have been heavily salvaged shortly after being wrecked. Initiatives like AllenX's Bahamas Lost Ships Project is uncovering hundreds of unknown wrecks just waiting to be dived. The key thing is that not all shipwrecks are about shiny treasure. The artifacts tell cultural



Gusman's silver sword

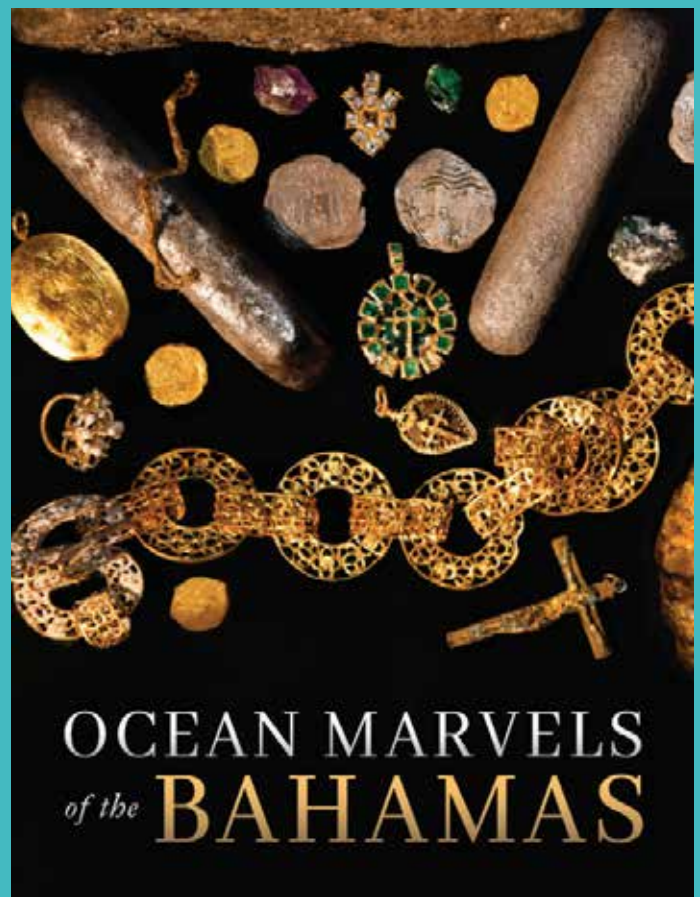
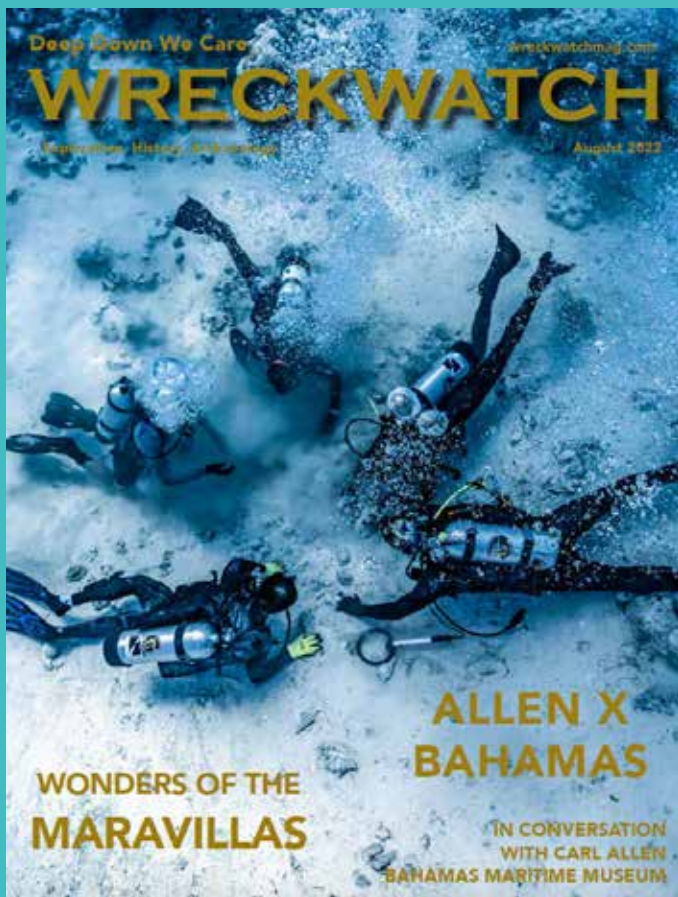
stories. Anything you can think of is still out there. Yet so little underwater archaeology has been done in The Bahamas."

In the future, Michael would like to expand AllenX's research program, hopefully to find one of two slave wrecks believed to lie somewhere in its survey area. They include the *Celeste* wrecked in 1819. "There are well over 30 slave ships wrecked in The Bahamas, and only one has been positively identified," Michael regrets. "If we can find either of these ships, it would be a massive coup."

Michael feels good about the future of underwater archaeology in The Bahamas because AllenX's work is opening the eyes of Bahamians to potential future careers. "Underwater archaeology is not just something you see on TV," he ends. "It's not just something foreigners can do. AllenX has plans to really expand its educational program in the next couple of years. We're looking to inspire some future archaeologists because of our work."

Michael presents Allen X's book *Ocean Marvels* to Philip Davis, Prime Minister of The Bahamas





To find out more about AllenX's adventures, don't miss *Wreckwatch* magazine's special issue on the wonders of the *Maravillas* (wreckwatchmag.com). And hot off the press, AllenX's new book, *Ocean Marvels of the Bahamas*. Available from bahamasmaritimemuseum.com & shopwalkerscay.com.

To dive deeper into AllenX's historical and archaeological research, *Ocean Dispatches* is available from The Bahamas Maritime Museum: bahamasmaritimemuseum.com.



Rediscover the History of The Bahamas



THE BAHAMAS MARITIME MUSEUM

BAHAMASMARITIMEMUSEUM.COM

PORT LUCAYA MARKETPLACE, FREEPORT, GRAND BAHAMA

ALLEN^X
EXPLORATION

+
BAHAMAS
MARITIME
MUSEUM
.COM