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130-year-old ice-bound shipwreck yields to modern technology



Diver in space-like suit retrieves wheel of the Breadalbane submerged for 130 years.

The northern-most shipwreck known has finally yielded some of its secrets three years after it was first located and 130 years after the vessel went down off the coast of Beechey Island about 95 kilometres from Resolute, Northwest Territories.

Recently, at the National Geographic Society in Washington, the almost perfectly preserved wheel from the three-masted sailing vessel was put on display. It was retrieved by two Canadian divers during the first week in May.

The ship and a companion vessel had originally been sent out in 1853 to locate the British explorer Sir John Franklin. In August of that year, ice ripped through the hull of the *Breadalbane* and the ship sank in about 15 minutes. Fortunately, the *Breadalbane's* crew of 21 all managed to escape across the ice to another ship.

Sonar sighting

In 1980, the ship's final resting place was sighted by sophisticated side-scan sonar

aboard the Canadian Coast Guard ice-breaker *John A. Macdonald*. The discovery capped a five-year search by Toronto physician-explorer-diver Joseph MacInnis. The ship, which sank in about 103 metres of water, was photographed in 1981 with remote-controlled television cameras. However, two later expeditions which sought to reach the ship with human divers were foiled by dangerous ice conditions.

In 1981, the ice was too weak to hold equipment, and in 1982 the exploration team found the site covered with small mountains of broken and shifting ice.

This year, Dr. MacInnis and a small team from the National Geographic, which has underwritten part of the cost of outfitting the expeditions, made an exploratory visit in March simply to examine ice conditions. They had not planned to make a dive until next year when more information about ice movement had been gathered. However, they discovered the ice over the ship was thick and



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