

18th century vessel discovered in Trinity Bay

“We found her matey! We found her!” – British divers

By DENISE PIKE

The Compass

What is believed to be the remains of an 18th century pork vessel has been found off Dildo Island, Trinity Bay.

For almost 200 years, the legend of the ship, referred to by local residents as the *Gasper*, has been passed down through generations.

At last, thanks to the efforts of Dildo resident Gerald Smith and five English divers, it appears the sunken *Gasper* has finally been located.

According to the legend, some time around the late 1700s or early 1800s, the ship was bound

for St. John's carrying a large load of pork. It is not known from where the ship set sail, but it has always been speculated she was blown off course in a northeasterly storm, hit the Red Rocks off Dildo Island and sunk somewhere near the Island.

The load of pork she'd been carrying floated into a crevice of Dildo Island, which eventually became known as the Pork Gulch. Men from Dildo sailed to the island, gathered up the pork and used it to feed their families during that winter.

While the story of the pork ship and the Pork Gulch were believed to be true, there was never any concrete evidence to prove its authenticity. The ship's

records were never found and no fragments of the sunken ship were available to substantiate its existence.

The *Gasper* existed only through oral tradition, that is until Monday, Aug. 3 when Smith and the English divers turned the legend into an historical fact.

A team of Royal Air Force divers from Lineham, England were filming the numerous whale bones left in the bay as part of an underwater museum at South Dildo.

One of the five divers, Arthur Kingdom, was an acquaintance of Smith's.

"I asked him if he could come out to Dildo Island and take a

look for the pork ship," Smith said.

Smith indicated an area about 300 metres out and 150 feet down to where the ship was presumed to have foundered and the divers began their search.

"They had been gone for about two hours when they came back shouting, 'We found her matey, we found her!'" Smith said.

The ship was located 10 feet from the spot where Smith had indicated in 149 feet of water.

"They said she was covered in silt but still intact."

Even with a few small pieces missing from her bow and stern the 100-foot ship is still 82 feet in length.

Amazingly the mast is still by

her side and the pork barrels are still standing on deck.

Smith attributes the good condition of the ship to the depth and water temperature. "It's about one degree down there and that probably preserved her for this length of time," he said.

Smith is anxiously waiting to see pictures the divers took of the shipwreck while they were under water.

"The whole community will be able to enjoy this, especially the seniors who still like to recall the story of the ship. These pictures will bring it all together for them."

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