



The well-preserved paddle-box of the paddle wheel of the 20th-century steamer *Vera Figner*, a wreck recently discovered in Russia's Silva River, was marked by a star, which was clearly visible (right); Historical photo of the *Vera Figner* paddle steamer (below)

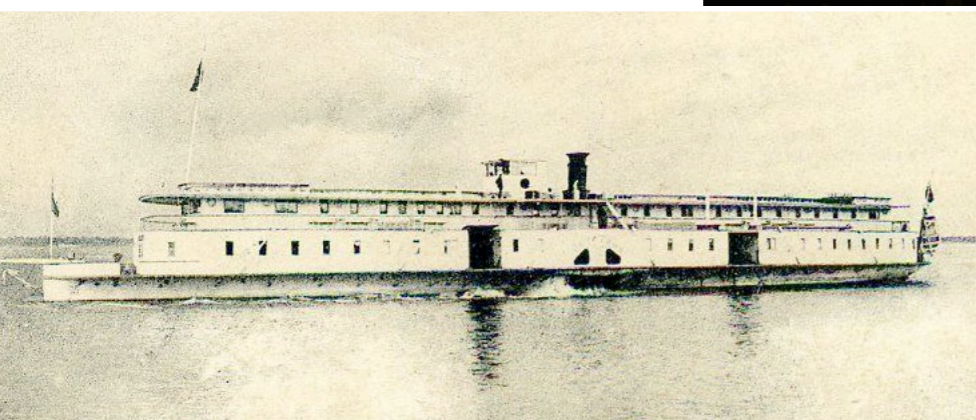
Text and photos by Pavel Lapshin

Scuba diving is a diverse and breathtaking activity where, upon submerging, one can find oneself drifting along the waves of history. Such an opportunity presented itself to me during my recent visit with fellow divers in Perm, who discovered an interesting object under the ice in the Sylva River.

Diving the Recently Discovered

Vera Figner Wreck

20th-Century Paddle Steamer in Russia's Silva River



The Sylva River flows through the territories of the Sverdlovsk and Perm regions in Russia, passing near the well-known "Perm Anomalous Zone." It has magnificent shores and is very popular among tourists and water sports enthusiasts.

Even though navigation on the river is not treacherous, it was in this place that an actual paddle steamer shipwreck was recently discovered on the bottom of the river. The fact that there was an object lying on the riverbed had been well

known to locals for a long time. But, until last year, nobody knew exactly what this object was.

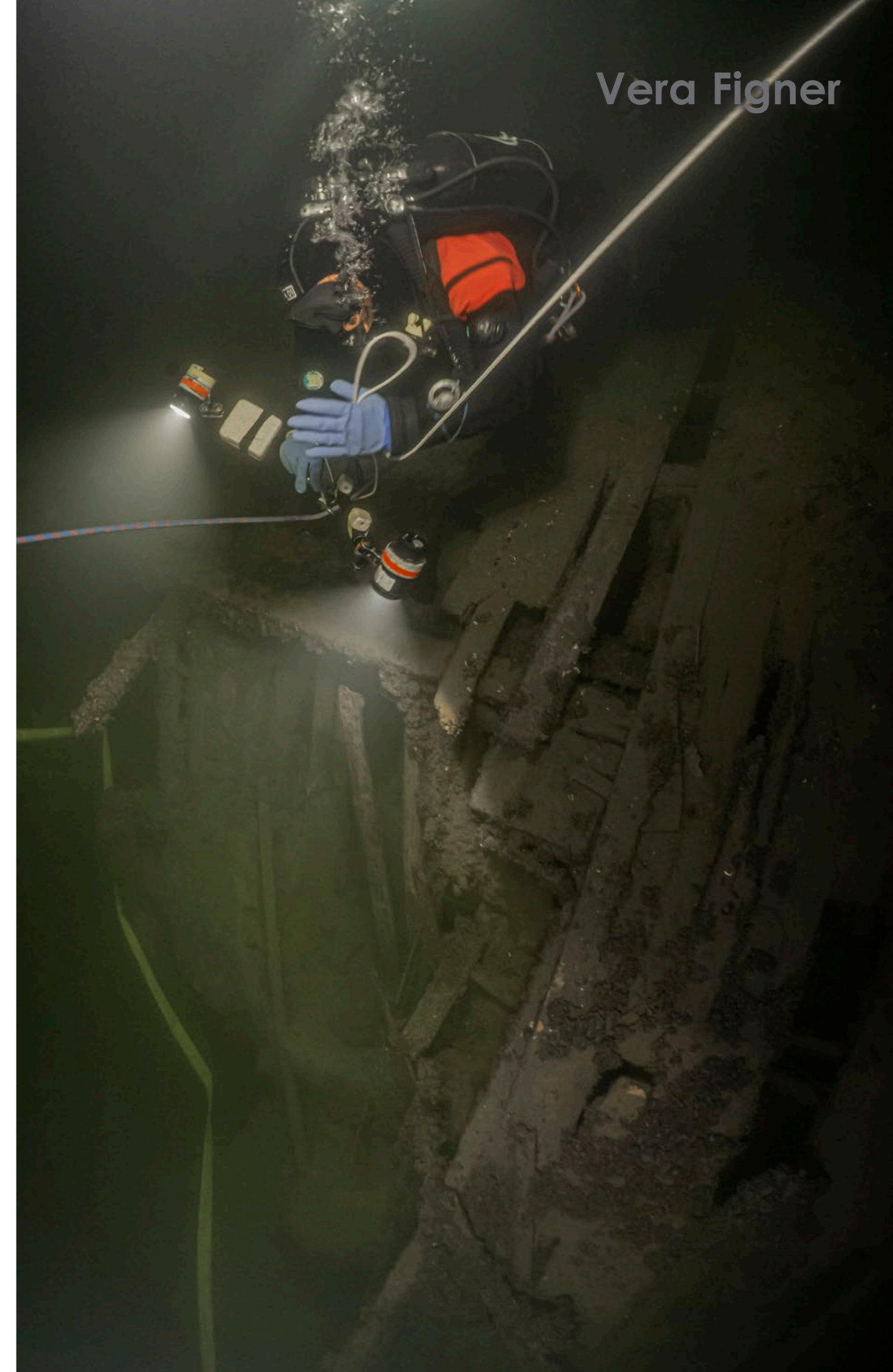
This is when divers from Safety Stop Club, a Perm scuba facility, got down to business. They scanned the supposed coordinates of the

object, located it, made several dives, found the remains of the ship, and later identified it to be the paddle steamer *Vera Figner*.

Historical background

The history of the ship is rich and





Vera Figner

Diver inspects the wreck of the Vera Figner wreck

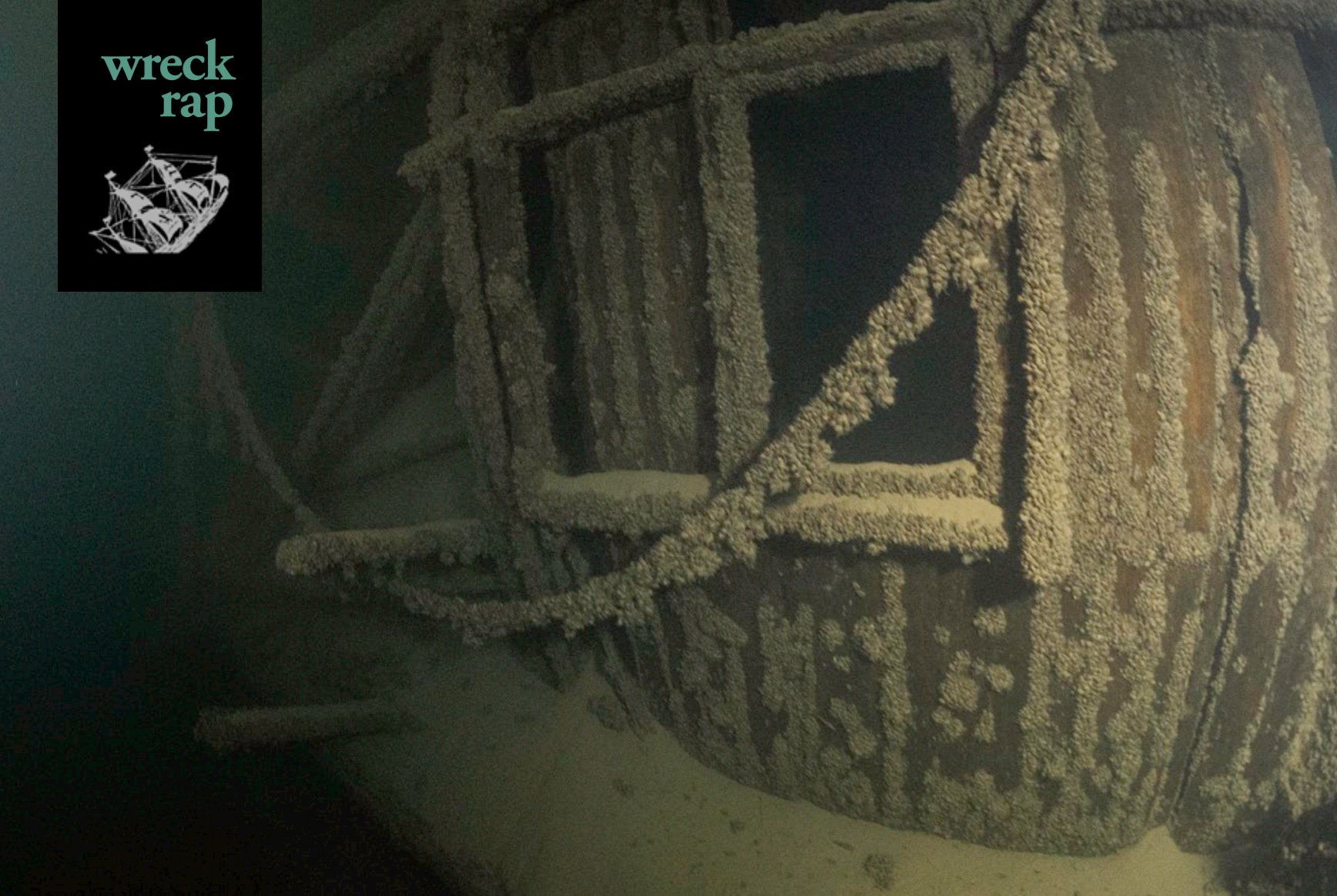
diverse. The steamer was originally built in the city of Murom in 1904. Named after the Russian empress Catherine the Great, it made its maiden voyage as *Ekaterina*, and was built to be luxurious. With exquisite wood decor, carpets and chandeliers, it looked in the beginning like a floating palace.

But after a change in ship owners, it was renamed *Kharitina* and became a cargo ship. All the excesses and luxury were removed. Then, after the Revolution of 1917, the steamer was renamed again, now after the revolutionary figure, Vera Figner. It was redesigned to carry Soviet citizens along the vast Russian rivers.

During World War II, it was a supply vessel, participating in cargo shipments and evacuations of refugees from war zones, including Leningrad. Finally, 15 years after the end of the war, it was anchored permanently on the Sylva River, and sank in 1966, unable to withstand the pressure of the ice in winter.

Superstructures on the wreck were damaged and there was a lot of silt (above and left)





Diving the wreck

Speaking about the dive itself, visibility in Russian rivers is much better during the winter season, but because of the freezing cold, my friends from Perm had to set up a whole research camp on the ice of the Sylva, cutting several entry holes into the ice above the steamer and setting up warm shelters for people and gear nearby.

I had only one day to photograph the wreck, and it was just on the day when the air temperature dropped below -20°C. But, of course, there was no chance this fact would stop us!

The village of Sylva lies 30km from the city of Perm. The ice was thick enough to carry a car, so after arriving in the village, we drove straight to the



Diver at air vent (above) and cabin window on the deck of the Vera Figner



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View of a cabin on the main deck (right); Silt on the wreck stirred at the slightest touch (below); A star marked the paddlebox of the paddle wheel (center)



Vera Figner



steamer's location, which was very convenient. After the dive briefing and planning the dive, we jumped into the freezing waters.

The water was cold—almost zero degrees Celsius—but visibility was very good, about seven to eight meters. The steamer rested at a depth of 12 to 18m.

Approaching the wreck, it looked as if it had been torn apart. It was said that there had been an attempt to pull her out to the shore at one point. The superstructures were destroyed and

at the slightest touch.

We moved along the starboard side of the wreck, examining the stern. We then moved on to the well-preserved casing of the paddle wheel, marked with a large star, which was clearly visible. There were fragments of the cabins on the first deck, which partially remained. The pipes of the steam engine looked surreal.

Unfortunately, we did not have enough time to fully explore the ship during our two short dives, leaving

there was a lot of silt, which turned the water into a dense murky curtain

further exploration for future expeditions. But what we did manage to see and photograph made an indelible impression.

The chance to see history hidden deep below the ice as well as the chance to show images of the wreck and share admiration for the new findings—these opportunities are exactly what maintain the spirit of exploration and constantly inspire us to pursue new adventures. Keep traveling and explore! ■

Pavel Lapshin is a diver, photographer and explorer based in Russia. For more information, visit: [instagram.com/pavellapshin_deepravel](https://www.instagram.com/pavellapshin_deepravel)



Molluscs cover the wreck's rails and ropes (above); Diver inspects the casing of the paddle wheel (top).

Museum of Wrecks opens in Stockholm

Vrak – Museum of Wrecks is a new maritime archaeological museum in the middle of Stockholm. It opened on Thursday, 23 Sept 2021.

Vrak – Museum of Wrecks is a new museum about the Baltic Sea's unique wrecks and cultural heritage, and is the sister museum to the Vasa Museum in Stockholm. Nowhere else in the world are there as many well-preserved shipwrecks as in the Baltic Sea.

Vrak brings their stories to the surface while leaving the wrecks themselves and their artefacts on the seafloor where they are best preserved. The new museum serves as a hub for wrecks, new discoveries and research throughout the Baltic Sea region.

The new museum allows visitors to dive into the past with the help of various digital solutions. On

the seafloor of the Baltic Sea, there is a unique cultural heritage, featuring wrecks and other historical relics from the Stone Age to the present time. Vrak is part of the government agency, the Swedish National Maritime and Transport Museums.

In the first exhibition, the visitor is brought to the bottom of the Baltic Sea with the help of an immersive film experience. The mythical wreck "Resande Man" is shown in scale 1:1 and presented using a hologram and the visitor experiences the feeling of moving through an old shipwreck.

The museum is housed in an old boat hangar designed by architect Paul Hedqvist in 1941. The architectural firm Fahlander Arkitekter have carefully redeveloped the building with sustainable materials like concrete, oak, steel and glass, which have associations with the sea, ships and the seafloor.

The museum is located at: Djurgårdsstrand 17, Djurgården, Stockholm. See, visit: vrak.se ■



In the museum exhibition "Resande Man," visitors walk on a carpet with a reproduction of the wreck in 1:1 scale.

WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Wisconsin Historical Society archaeologists, assisted by divers from the Dane County Sheriff's Office, recovered the historic canoe from Lake Mendota on 2 November 2021.

1,200-year-old canoe found in Wisconsin lake

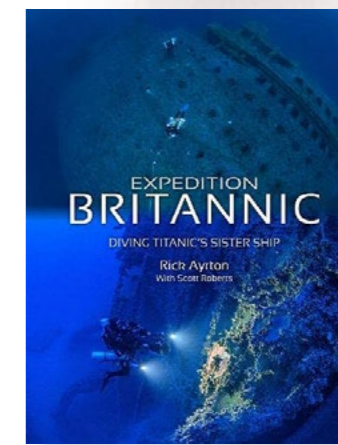
Carbon dating places the vessel in use around A.D. 800, centuries before European arrival.

Wisconsin Historical Society maritime archaeologists recovered a historic dugout wood canoe from the bottom of Lake Mendota in the US state of Wisconsin yesterday, just a few months after learning of its existence in June 2021. The canoe is a remarkable artifact made from a single tree.

Tamara Thomsen, a maritime archaeologist with the Wisconsin Historical Society and owner of Diversions Scuba, first came across what she thought was a log sticking out of the bottom of the lake while riding an underwater scooter in June, alongside co-worker Mallory Dragt, CNN reports. After investigating the find, Thomsen determined the log was actually a dugout canoe.

Excavation of the area around the canoe began in late October 2021, and maritime archaeologists recovered artifacts from the site early on in their process. Net sinkers, rocks that were flattened by hand tooling, were recovered from within the canoe, indicating the vessel may have been used for fishing.

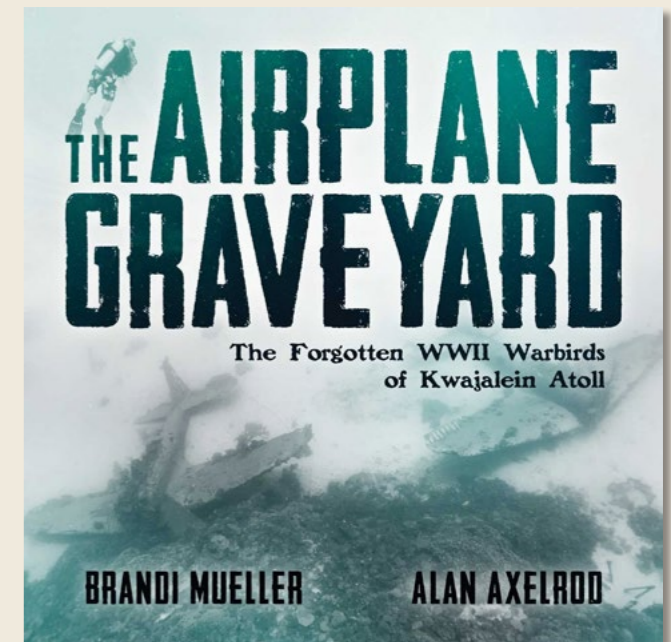
The canoe was raised from a depth of about 30ft with the assistance of the Dane County Sheriff's dive team. The canoe was transported to Wisconsin's State Archive Preservation Facility and placed into a custom-built storage vat containing water and a bio-deterrent to protect the canoe from physical deterioration. Over time, a chemical solution will be added to the vat, which will eventually replace the water in the cellular structure of the wood. The preservation process is estimated to take approximately three years. ■ SOURCES: WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



New book on Britannic

Welcome to the Britannic, the Titanic's sister ship. At over 100 metres below the surface, diving this wreck requires meticulous planning, precise execution and good conditions—and a high level of technical-diving proficiency. This book tells the story of Rick Ayrton's expedition to dive this wreck, from the planning, logistics and preparation, to a dive-by-dive exploration of it. Features original photographs of the ocean liner.

Publisher: Dived Up Publications
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ISBN-10: 1909455415



Never before published in book form, see extraordinary images of the forgotten American WWII airplanes resting on the bottom of the Kwajalein Atoll lagoon, from award-winning underwater photographer Brandi Mueller. Available on: [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)