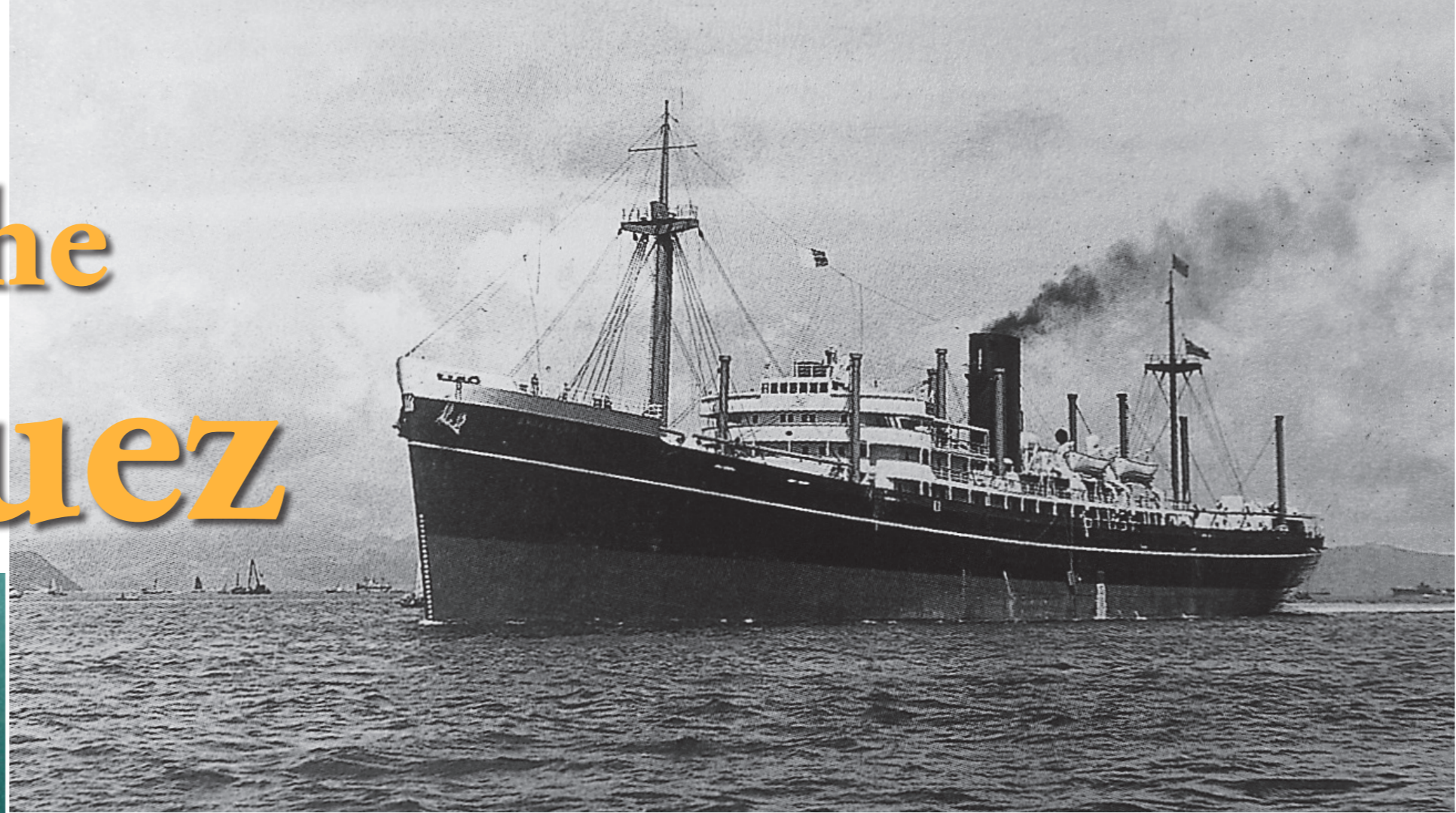


Text and photos by  
Peter Collings

The wreck of the *Shillong* lies at 223m  
just north of the July Oilfield, and at the  
time of writing has not been dived

# Shipwrecks of the Gulf of Suez



As the Red Sea narrows at its northern extreme, a long thin arm of water stretches north towards the Mediterranean. It is the Gulf of Suez. Squeezed between the Sinai Peninsula and the Egyptian mainland, the entrance to the Gulf is marked by a treacherous finger of reef known as Sha'ab Ali. A busy, narrow and important seaway dating back beyond the opening of the Suez Canal, it is a vital and important trade route linking east and west. It is also a hive of industry, with oilfields dotted along its length, and refineries along its banks. Here, we have located a series of new wrecks.

Not much diving takes place here. The coral reefs die away as the water becomes shallower and indeed less clear due to the presence of sand and silt. Water temperature, too, plays a part in the ecology, with temperatures plummeting to 16°C in winter. While it is not a viable tourist area, it is a haven for new unexplored shipwrecks—with the added bonus of some unusual marine life.

Heading north past Sha'ab Ali the first headland, Ras Dib, heralds an area rich in shipwrecks. First, are the *Attiki* and the *Muhansia*—both visible from the surface, well salvaged and well “dispersed”. Lying in only a dozen meters of water, they are home to many shoaling fish and very large examples of the endemic species of nudibranchs found elsewhere in the Red Sea but in greater numbers and larger than text books would suggest.

Once more, there is a captain  
on the bridge of the *Birchwood*

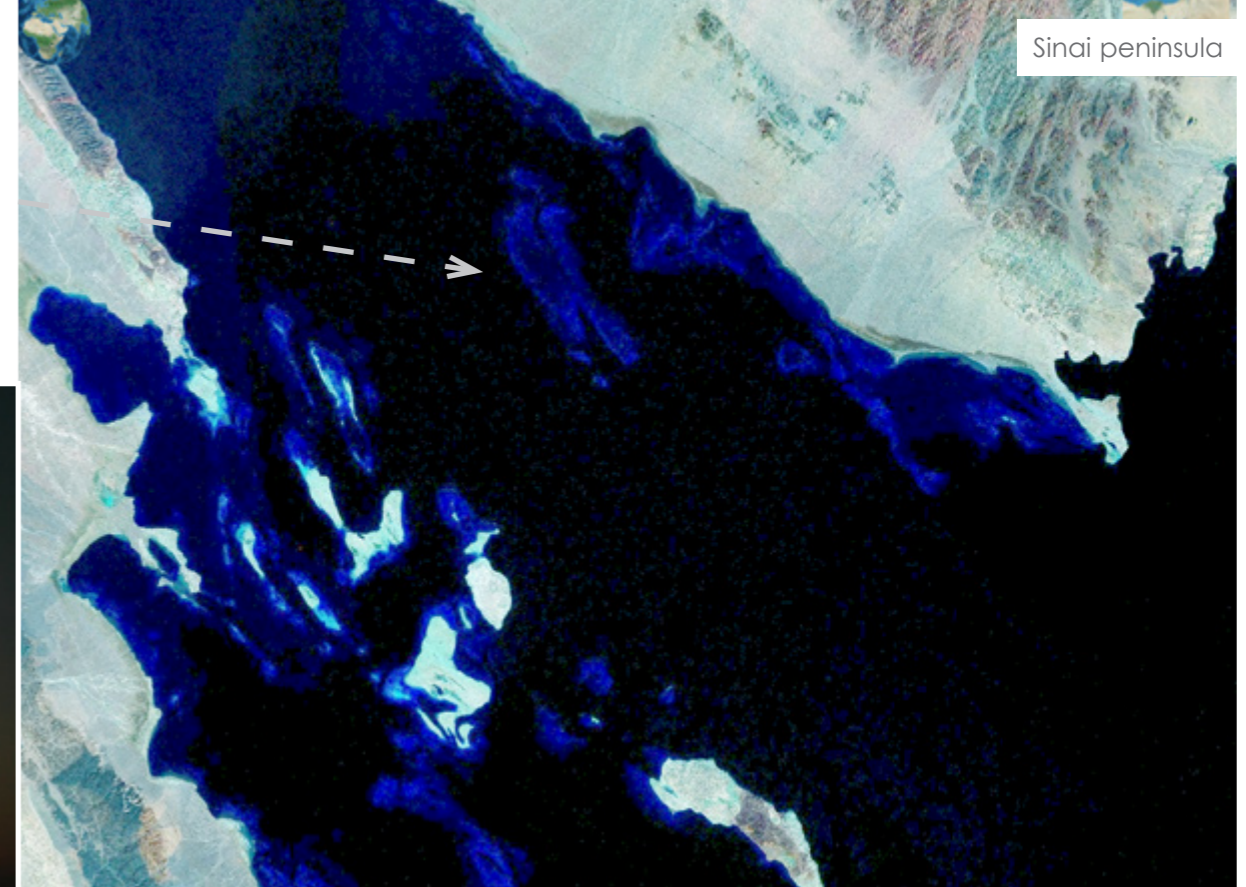






Wreck of *Lara Security* near Ras Shukier

Satellite photo of the southern entrance to the Gulf of Suez. The shallow reef structure in the middle is the infamous Sha'ab Alo where so many ships have foundered



Rounding the headland, we find the *Elliot*, her superstructure above water is well embedded into the reef, her head-long grounding evident from the attitude of her rudder. Divers can enter the hull, swim through and into the engine room and take a walk around. Half a mile offshore where the water is deeper and clearer, lie three modern merchant ships—as yet unidentified—in less than 50 meters of water. Discovered during the 2004 Geoserve/SSS Expedition, their secrets are yet to be unlocked and their stories yet untold.

It is hard to stop even when the day comes to an end. Zodiac searching for a wreck in the very last rays of sun



At Ras Shukier, the hustle and bustle of the oil industry becomes very evident. Close to shore are two shallow wrecks, while again offshore there are several deeper wrecks.

**Birchwood 11** (Plastics Wreck)

Lying to the north of the port in a large bay with three other wrecks there is a small 50 meter motor cargo ship lying on its starboard side in 12m of water. Totally intact, light streams into the holds and bathes the entire wreck. A shoal of juvenile barracuda circles her mast, which is

complete with radar array and aerials.

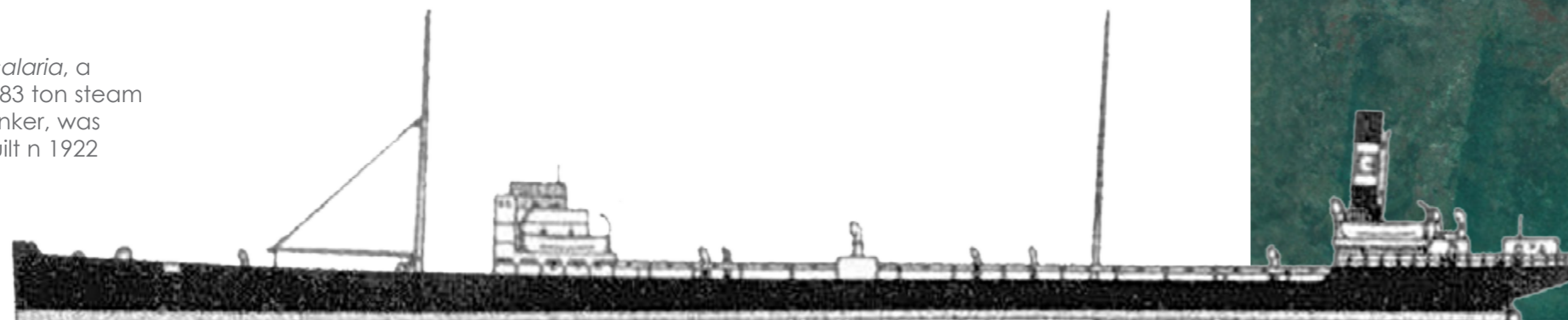
Just forward of the superstructure itself at the aft of the vessel is an intact crane, obviously used to service the hold. The criss-cross framework of the jib is covered with encrusting life. Superb swim-throughs from the weather deck into the holds are easily accomplished, her cargo bags of polythene granules float hard against the port hull. The fo'c's'le is easy to access and explore, and her winch gear, like many parts of the wreck is covered in

The wrecks in the northern Red Sea still remain virtually untouched.

There may well be less coral in the Gulf of Suez, but there is still plenty to explore



*Scalaria*, a 5683 ton steam tanker, was built in 1922





# Gulf of Suez Trivia

The Gulf of Suez is the arm of the Red Sea, 300 km long and 50 km wide, that extends between the Arabian Desert and the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt. Along the mid-line of the Gulf lies the border between the continents of Africa and Asia.

The Gulf of Suez is a relatively young rift basin, dating back 40 million years. It is a shallow flat bed basin with depths ranging between 50 and 75m with depths increasing in the southerly direction but stays under the 100m mark at the confluence of the Red Sea.

The Red Sea lies between arid land, desert and semi-desert, and is unique among the seas of the world as no river flows into it. Since there is absence of rivers and permanent streams, terrigenous (derived from the erosion of rocks on land—ed.) material is only supplied to the Red Sea by rain-torrent. The scarcity of rainfall and no major source of fresh water to the Red Sea result in the excess evaporation as high as 205 cm per year and high salinity with minimal seasonal varia-

tion.

The main reasons for the better development of reef systems along the Red Sea is because of its greater depths and an efficient water circulation pattern. The Red Sea water mass exchanges its water with the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean via the Gulf of Aden. These physical factors reduce the effect of high salinity caused by evaporation and cold water in the north and relatively hot water in the south.

Strong currents and atmospheric pressure gradients control the influx of less saline and colder water from the Gulf of Aden through the Street of Bab al Mandab during winter. The north-heading current mixes with a south-heading wind-driven surface current from the northern Red Sea.

A thermocline at a water depth of about 200-400m separates the mixing water zone from Red Sea Deep Water at relatively stable temperature and salinity conditions. The maximum turbulent mixing zone is probably in the central Red Sea.

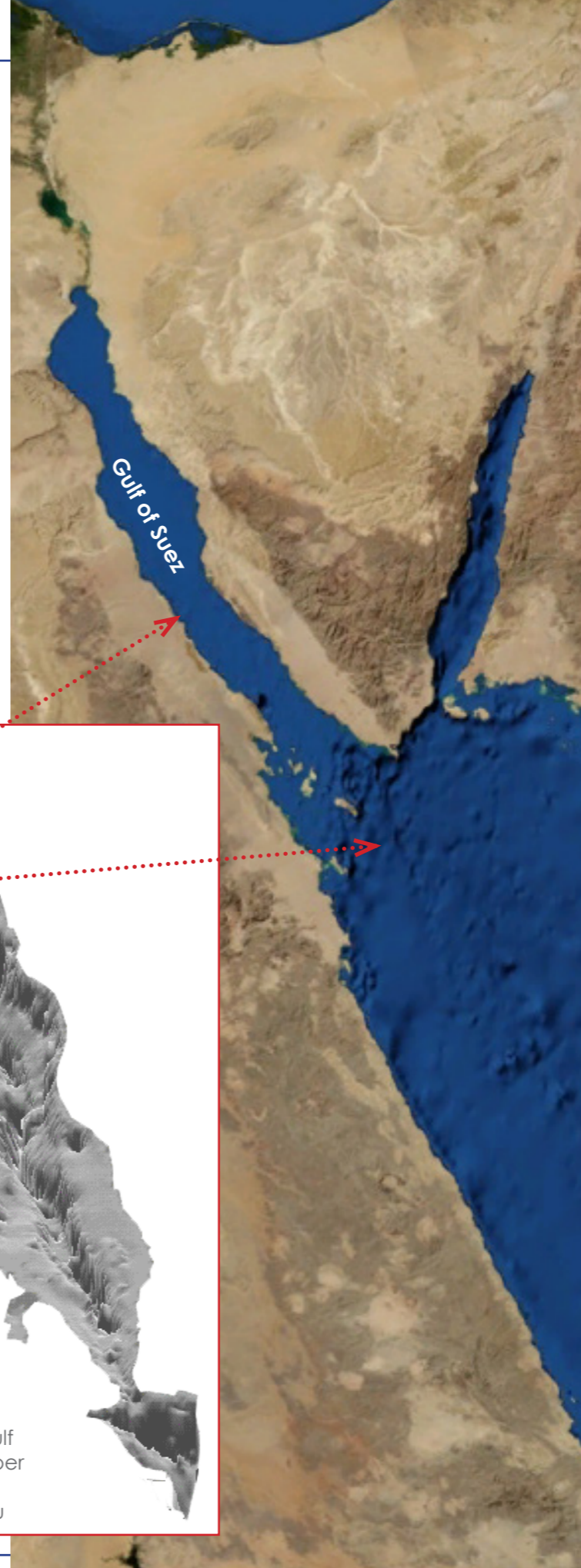
## Suez

Both the Suez Gulf and the Suez Canal get their names from the city of Suez, which is situated on the shores of the Gulf of Suez to the west of the Suez Canal in Egypt.

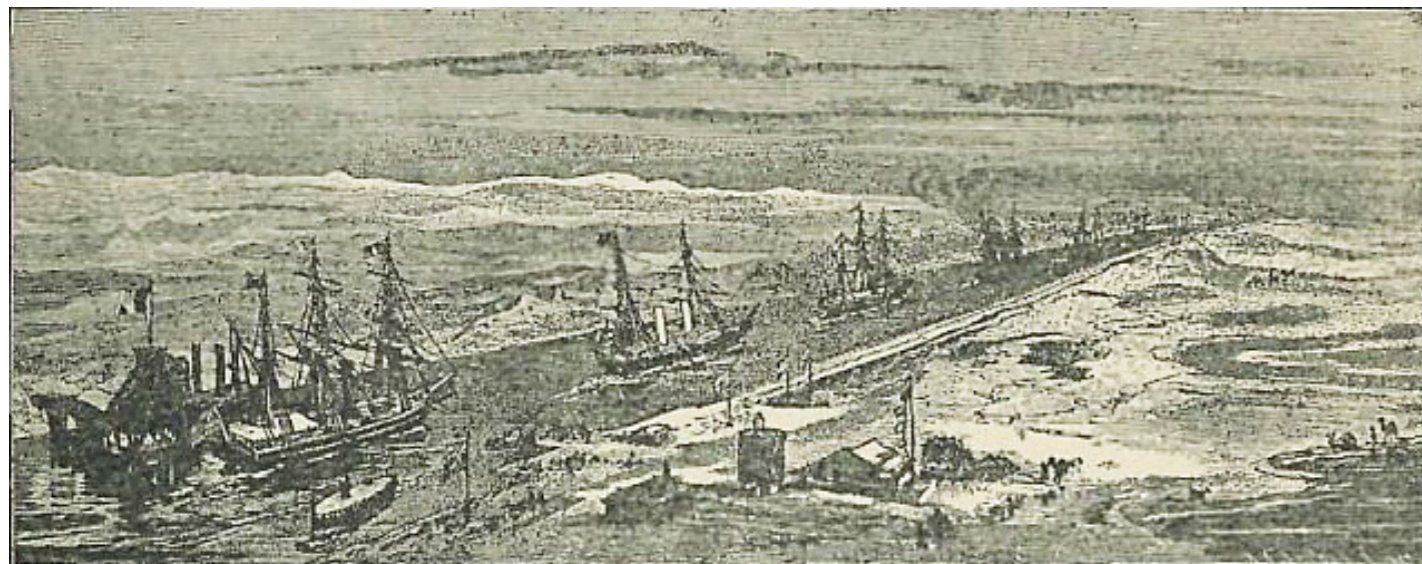
The Suez Canal offers a significantly shorter passage for ships than passing round the Cape of Good Hope. Today, the canal is a vital link in world trade, and contributes significantly to the Egyptian economy. There was a canal from the Nile delta to the Gulf of Suez in ancient times, when the gulf extended further north than it does today. This fell into disuse, and the present canal was built in the nineteenth century.

The construction of the canal was proposed by the engineer and French diplomat Ferdinand de Lesseps, who acquired from Said Pasha the rights of constructing and operating the canal for a period of 99 years. Construction took 11 years, and the canal opened on the 17th of November, 1869. ■

Gulf of Suez lies between the Sinai peninsula and the African continent on the left. The gulf itself is relatively shallow as compared to the rest of the Red Sea



Depth profile of the Red Sea. On this map, one can see that the Gulf of Suez sits (upper left corner) in a shallow plateau



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## X-RAY MAG Expands Harald Apelt joins the team

HAMBURG, GERMANY  
Former editor-in-chief of Tauchen, Europe's biggest monthly dive magazine, Harald Apelt has joined X-RAY MAG as an associate publisher. In this capacity Harald will work with both editorial matters and oversee sales and marketing.



**In 2008, X-RAY MAG will be published eight times a year**





The *Scalaria* was sunk in 1942 as a result of an enemy aerial attack; eleven lives were lost. She lies in shallow water, with only the lower hull remaining having been dismantled below the water-line

### About the author

Peter Collings has been escorting wreck safaris in Egypt since 1993. He is the author of no less than nine dive-related books including *Shipwrecks of the Egyptian Red Sea*. His work has been published internationally since 1983. Peter and his team, the Red Wreck Academy, have been responsible for locating and identifying over 30 wrecks in Egyptian waters the latest being the Greek steamer *TURKIA*.

sponge and encrusting corals. Her bow appears intact and a deep scour ran along her keel, becoming circular by her prop and rudder. Her starboard running light lies protruding from the sand.

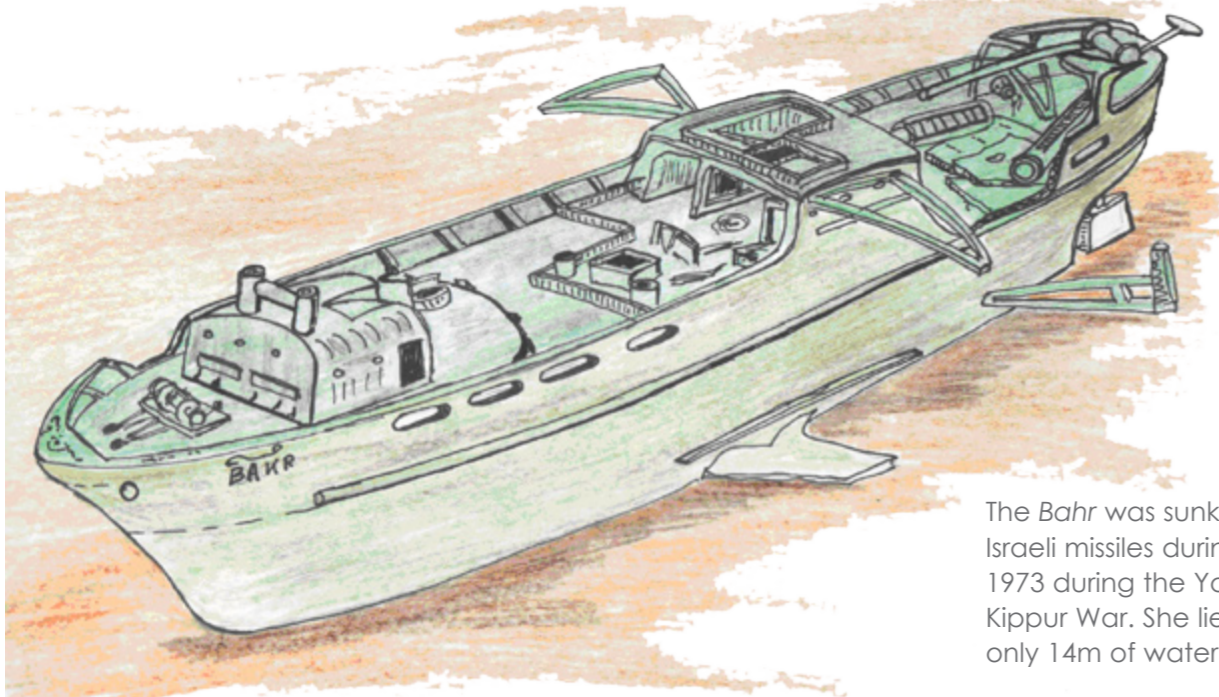
Hundreds of nudibranchs smother the red sponge fingers found throughout the wreck. Shoals of rabbit fish huddled together everywhere. Snowflake morays, again a rare occurrence on a coral reef, are common place here. Almost every surface of the wreck is alive with anemo-

nes, sponges and small crustaceans. The brilliant reds, oranges and greens highlighted by torch beams.

### Laura Security (The Eagle Wreck)

Close by, this 40m long vessel sits upright with its bridge out of the water. It is named after the eagle, which made its roost on top of the wreck. Many of the hull plates have fallen to the seabed allowing sunlight to stream through its vertical supports highlighting shoals of fish.

The strong sunlight, afforded by the shallow depths, provides endless photo opportunities. With the hull intact, the bow and stern are very photogenic, and the supporting fish life is quite amazing. Due to its location, the wreck is blessed by the afternoon sun and the long beams of light shine through many holes in the wreck. Those who are not put off



The *Bahr* was sunk by Israeli missiles during 1973 during the Yom Kippur War. She lies in only 14m of water

Exploring the remains of the *Scalaria* on a good day with great visibility can be a rewarding experience. Image is from the bow section





by the lack of depth are well rewarded.

### The "Pd" Wreck.

(D.b. Gemini)

The target area of the SSS survey revealed some strange wreckage on the seabed, including a large circular depression. No wreck was ever found but winches, ladders mooring cleats, ventilation cowls covering a vast area—all attracting a reef's population of fish—was all that could be seen.

The aforementioned depression is completely

round some two meters deep. It seems man-made and full of snapper and jacks so perhaps this is the answer.

The American jack-up drilling barge *Gemini* was damaged while drilling off *Ras Shukier*. The sea bed collapsed under one of the legs on October 8th, 1974. Eighteen people died. During salvage operations, it rolled over almost capsizing, bending all its legs. It was written off as a total loss at a cost of £4.1 million, removed and broken up.

Hitting pay dirt. Just look at those happy grins. The name plate from the *Scalaria*—depicted in a cleaned condition on page 37—is brought to the surface

Crane or boom on the survey vessel *Bahr*



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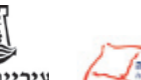
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Reversing wheel in the engine room of the *Scalaria*

### Wreck of the *Shillong*

Built at Vickers Armstrong, Walker Mar 1949, for the P&O LINE, the *Shillong* was 8934 tons and 522 ft long. She was captained by E.J. Spurling and on a journey from London over Hamburg to Tsingtao with 87 crew and six passengers and carrying general cargo, when she collided with the *Purina Congo*.

She now rests in 223m, just north of the *July Oilfield*, in the separation channel, and at the time of writing, has not been dived. Hopefully, our forthcoming expeditions will locate her.

### Ras Gharib

This headland again is a terminal for the oil industry and marks the limit of diving exploration. To the best of my knowledge, no one else has ever been diving this far north. But there is evidence to suggest at least another 20 wrecks are lying in these waters. Again,



Lost in 1988, the *Aboudy* is still virtually intact. The entire wreck, which is teeming with life, can be explored

the holds spilling out onto the seabed, and a diver can swim from the fo'c's'le through her holds to the bridge section at the stern, where the engine room can also be found.

Marine life includes shoaling barracuda and fusiliers, emperor angle fish, crocodile fish, torpedo rays and encrusting corals and sponges. Visibility is subject to swell, as the seabed consists of sand.

### *Bahr*

The motor survey vessel belonged to the United Arab Republic General Petroleum Co was sunk at Ras Gharib by Israeli missiles on October 14th, 1973, during the Yom Kippur War. Russian built, she was 416 tons, 147 ft long. She lies in only 14m of water.

### *Scalaria*

Built in 1922 for the Anglo-Saxon Petroleum Co at Swan Hunters, this 5683 ton steam tanker was attacked by enemy aircraft using aerial torpedoes and bombs while off *Ras Gharib* with a cargo of dirty oil. She was sunk on October 19th, 1942, with the loss of 11 lives. Her captain, J.Waring survived.

One of the ships officers, Mr Armatage, was awarded the George cross and the Lloyds medal for his actions in saving the lives of his fellow crewmen as they clung to her anchor chain, surrounded by burning oils. She was 411 ft long, 55 ft beam and 30 ft draught, capable of ten knots and fitted with triple expansion engines. She lies in shallow water, with only the lower hull remaining having been dismantled below the waterline. ■

there are several very interesting wrecks in shallow water with more lying in deeper water.

### *Aboudy*

A small aluminum hulled, 400ton cargo ship 76m long, sank May 7th, 1988. She was carrying a

Thousands of bottles of cough medicine lie around the *Aboudy*

cargo of cattle, aluminum extrusion and thousands of 300ml bottles of cough medicine! Laying on her side totally intact, her masts running horizontal towards the shore, her stays still in place, she is slowly succumbing to the invasion of marine life. The entire wreck can be explored, sheltered from any swell from the exposed open sea. Remnants of the cargo lie in





# fact file



## Red Sea, Egypt



SOURCE: WWW.CIA.GOV

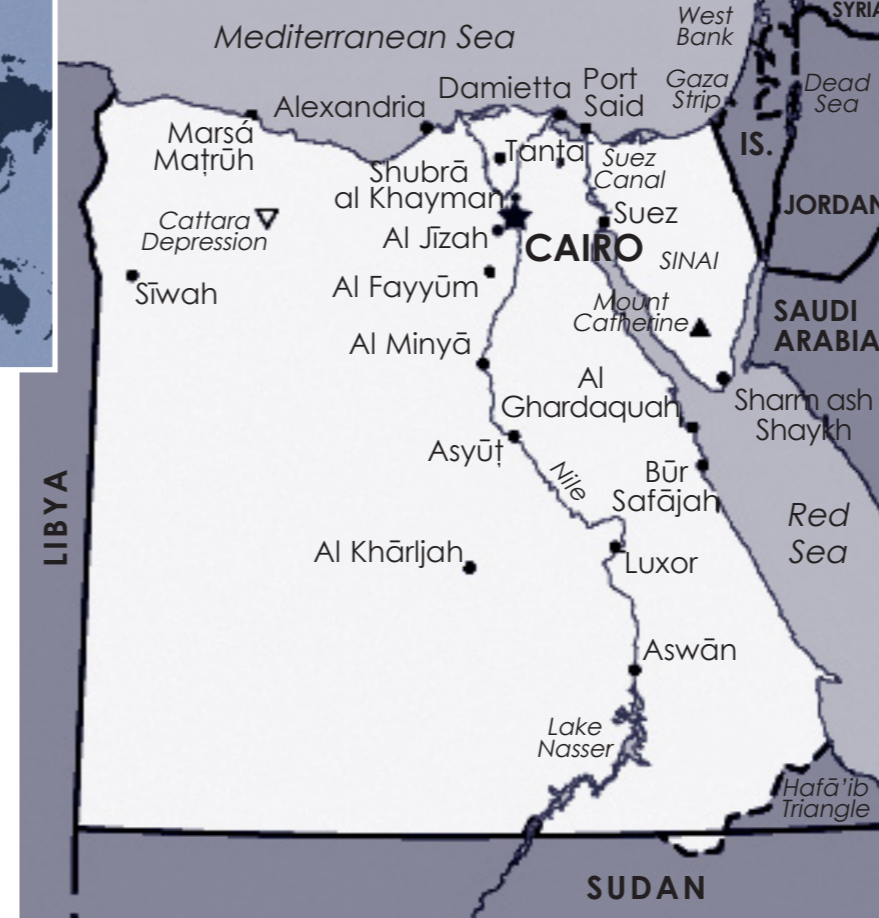
**History** One of the world's great civilizations was born on the banks of the Nile. Due to the richness and regularity of the annual flooding of the Nile River as well as the semi-isolation of the valley created by the surrounding deserts, the rise of a unified kingdom around 3200 B.C. brought a series of dynasties into power in Egypt for the next three millennia. In 341 B.C., the last native dynasty fell to invading Persians who in turn were replaced by the Greeks, Romans, and Byzantines. It was the Arabs in the 7th century who introduced Islam and spread the Arabic language and religion throughout the region over the next six centuries. Around the year 1250, a local military caste, the Mamluks, took control. They continued to govern the country after the Ottoman Turks conquered Egypt in 1517. In 1869, the Suez Canal was completed and Egypt became an important center for world trade. However, it also fell heavily into debt. In order to protect its investments, Great Britain seized control of Egyptian government in 1882. However, some allegiance to the Ottoman Empire maintained influence in Egypt until 1914. Egypt gained partial independence from the UK in 1922 and acquired full sovereignty following World War II. The time-honored place of the Nile River in the agriculture and ecology of Egypt was altered by the completion of the Aswan High

Dam in 1971 and the resultant Lake Nasser. Even so, dependence on the Nile continues, and with a rapidly growing population—the Arab world's largest—and limited arable land, resources and society continue to be stressed. The government has initiated economic reforms and massive investments in communications and physical infrastructure in an effort to ready the economy for the new millennium. Government: Republic. Legal system: Based on English common law, Islamic law and Napoleonic codes. Capital: Cairo

**Geography** Egypt occupies the northeast corner of the African continent. It borders the Mediterranean Sea—between Libya and the Gaza Strip—and the Red Sea north of Sudan, and includes the Asian Sinai Peninsula. Coastline: 2,450 km. Terrain: Vast desert plateau is interrupted by the Nile River valley and delta. Lowest point: Qattara Depression, 133 m. Highest point: Mount Catherine, 2,629 m. Egypt controls the Sinai Peninsula—the only land bridge between Africa and the remaining Eastern Hemisphere. Egypt also controls the Suez Canal—a sea link and major trade route between the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean Sea. Because of its size and juxtaposition to Israel, Egypt plays a major role in Middle Eastern geopolitics. However, Egypt does continue to depend on upstream neighbors and deal with



World map and map of Egypt



the dominance of Nile basin issues. The country is also prone to influxes of refugees.

**Climate** Desert—hot, dry summers with moderate winters. Natural hazards: periodic droughts; a hot, driving windstorm called *kham-sin* occurs in springtime; dust storms, sandstorms; frequent earthquakes, flash floods, landslides

**Environmental issues** Desertification—agricultural land is being lost to windblown sands and urbanization. Soil salination below the Aswan High Dam is increasing. Oil pollution is threatening coral reefs, beaches and marine habitats. Additional water pollution comes from agricultural pesticides, raw sewage and industrial effluents. There are very limited natural fresh water resources away from the Nile River, which provides the only perennial water source. Rapid population growth is overstraining the Nile River and other natural resources.

**Economic** In the last three decades, the Egyptian government has reformed the highly centralized economy handed down from President Nasser. Energy subsidies, and personal and corporate tax rates were reduced, and several enterprises were privatized in 2005 by Prime Minister Ahmed Nazif. There was a stock market boom, and GDP grew by about 5 percent for the next two years. Unfortunately,

living standards remain the same for the average Egyptian despite these achievements, compelling the government to continue to provide subsidies for basic necessities. These subsidies have helped increase a growing budget deficit continue to be a significant drain on the economy and foreign direct investment continue to be low, however, export sectors—especially natural gas—show positive prospects. Agriculture: cotton, rice, corn, wheat, beans, fruits, vegetables, goats, sheep, cattle, water buffalo. Industries: textiles, food processing, tourism, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, hydrocarbons, construction, cement, metals, light manufactures. Natural resources: petroleum, natural gas, iron ore, phosphates, manganese, limestone, gypsum, talc, asbestos, lead, zinc.

**Currency** Egyptian pound (EGP). Exchange rate: 1EUR=7.69EGP, 1USD=5.69EGP, 1GBP=11.25EGP, 1AUD=4.69EGP, 1SGD=3.73SGD

**Population** 80,335,036 (July 2007 est.). Ethnic groups: Egyptian 98%; Berber, Nubian, Bedouin and Beja 1%, Greek; Armenian and other European (primarily Italian and French) 1%. Religions: Muslim (mostly Sunni) 90%, Coptic 9%, other Christian religions 1%. Internet users: 5 million (2005)

**Languages** Arabic (official), English and French is understood by educated classes

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