

Channel Islands Shipwrecks

A Classroom Activity for Ocean Gazing Episode 20: The final frontier

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Credits: Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary, NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries

Grade Level: 9-12

Lesson Time: 1- 3 hrs. (depends on number of sanctuaries and shipwrecks explored)

Materials Required

[Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Chart](#)

Summary

Explore shipwrecks from the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary on the West Coast of the U.S.

Objectives

- ✓ Report on the historical background of shipwrecks within a sanctuary
- ✓ Practice using latitude and longitude by plotting shipwreck locations on a map.
- ✓ Assess the environmental factors contributing to shipwreck locations
- ✓ Discuss ocean navigation in a historical and modern context

Vocabulary

Radar, Seamount

Introduction

The [Channel Islands National Marine](#)

[Sanctuary](#) encompasses 1,658 square miles of ocean and nearshore habitat surrounding San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa and Santa Barbara Islands. A fertile combination of warm and cool currents results in a great variety of marine life, including forests of giant kelp, flourishing populations of fishes and invertebrates and a wide array of marine mammals and marine birds.

There are many documented shipwrecks in the waters of the sanctuary, such as the California Gold Rush passenger steamer [Winfield Scott](#) which stranded on Anacapa Island and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The significant number of shipwrecks within this sanctuary's boundaries can largely be attributed to prevailing currents and [weather conditions](#), combined with natural hazards. The [shipwreck remains of the Channel Islands](#) reflect the diverse range of activities and nationalities that traversed the Santa Barbara Channel. European sailing and steam vessels, California-built Chinese junks, American coastal traders, vessels engaged in island commerce, and a Gold Rush-era side-wheel steamer have all been lost in these waters. Each has a story to tell about the history, technology and society of



earlier times. Between the years 1853 and 1980, an inventory of over 140 shipwrecks was documented in the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary and National Park. To date about twenty sites have been located. The Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary has a very active shipwreck reconnaissance program, and several of the submerged sites have been recorded through the development of underwater maps.

Data Activity

Part 1: Be a Shipwreck Detective

Print out the [chart for the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary](#). (This requires Adobe Acrobat Reader. [Click here](#) to download this for free).

Go to the [Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary Shipwreck Database](#), and plot the shipwrecks listed in the data table by placing a small x and the shipwreck's name at the spot on the map where the latitude and longitude intersect.

1. Are there certain areas within your sanctuary that seem more prone to shipwrecks than others? Can you think of any reasons why this may be the case?
2. Are there certain times of year when there seemed to be more shipwrecks reported? Can you think of any reasons why this might be the case?
3. How many shipwrecks were reported in your sanctuary before 1942? How many were reported after 1942? Can you think of any reason for this difference?

Check your answers with our answers.

Part 2: Be a Shipwreck Historian

It will be easiest for your students to study the individual historical reports if you have printed them out ahead of time and made

copies. In each sanctuary's database, click on the name of the ship to access the historical report. In some cases, a report may contain another link to an image and more information; be sure to print out that information also.

1. Name two vessels lost in this sanctuary seventy years apart. They were owned by the same company and on the same coastal route at the time of their loss, and each one carried a precious metal as part of its cargo.
2. Name the vessel that was being used in a famous feature movie when it sank.
3. Name three vessels built within five years of each other at the same shipyard and lost in this sanctuary within a six-year period.
4. Name the shipwreck that was engaged in transporting illegal contraband.
5. The founder of a prominent university in California named this ship in honor of his wife.
6. What shipwreck caused over 300 passengers to be stranded on an island for eight days; the desolate island was not much more than a rock.
7. Mariners now have modern technology assisting them in navigating the Pacific West Coast. Would you consider ocean travel? Explain why you are excited about or hesitant about going to sea.

Check your answers with our answers.

Answers

Part 1

1. Are there certain areas within your sanctuary that seem more prone to shipwrecks than others? Can you think of any reasons why this may be the case?

Answer: San Miguel Island and the south side of Santa Rosa Island. Reasons –

prevailing currents, weather conditions, and natural hazards.

2. Are there certain times of year when there seemed to be more shipwrecks reported? Can you think of any reasons why this might be the case?

Answer: There are no particular times of year when there were more shipwrecks reported. Ships could encounter bad weather and fog in any season on the West Coast, and this factor, combined with navigational hazards, led many ships to their graveyards.

3. How many shipwrecks were reported in your sanctuary before 1942? How many were reported after 1942? Can you think of any reason for this difference?

Answer: Number of shipwrecks before 1942: 22; number of shipwrecks after 1942: 8. This difference can be attributed to the refinement of radar technology needed for use in World War II.

Part 2

1. Name two vessels lost in this sanctuary seventy years apart. They were owned by the same company and on the same coastal route at the time of their loss, and each one carried a precious metal as part of its cargo.

Answer: *Winfield Scott* (1853) and *Cuba* (1923), Pacific Mail Steamship Co.

2. Name the vessel that was being used in a famous feature movie when it sank.

Answer: *W T Co. No. 3*, *Mutiny On The Bounty*

3. Name three vessels built within five years of each other at the same shipyard

and lost in this sanctuary within a six-year period.

Answer: *J. M. Colman*, *Dora Bluhm*, *Comet*

4. Name the shipwreck that was engaged in transporting illegal contraband.

Answer: *Wampas* (a.k.a. *Grey Ghost*)

5. The founder of a prominent university in California named this ship in honor of his wife.

Answer: *Jane L. Stanford*

6. What shipwreck caused over 300 passengers to be stranded on an island for eight days; the desolate island was not much more than a rock.

Answer: *Winfield Scott*

Related Resources

[National Marine Sanctuaries Shipwrecks DATA Activity](#), [Maritime heritage](#), [Archeology](#), [Conservation](#)

References

Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary. NOAA National Marine Sanctuaries.

<http://channelislands.noaa.gov/>

“Shipwrecks: The Winfield Scott.” National Park Service.

<http://www.nps.gov/chis/historyculture/winfieldscott.htm>

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<http://channelislands.noaa.gov/focus/kiosk.html>

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[http://channelislands.noaa.gov/shipwreck/
shiphome.html](http://channelislands.noaa.gov/shipwreck/shiphome.html)

“A Recent History of the MBNMS Region.”
Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.
[http://montereybay.noaa.gov/sitechar/rech
ist.html](http://montereybay.noaa.gov/sitechar/rechist.html)

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[http://channelislands.noaa.gov/bridge/cin
ms1.html](http://channelislands.noaa.gov/bridge/cinms1.html)

Sources

The related podcast episode for this activity
can be found by going to the podcast section
of www.oceangazing.org