

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 10, 2003

Contact:
Bruce Lewis
Point Cabrillo Light Station
Bruce@prwebsite.com
707-964-3844

Sheli Smith
Frolic Dive Leader
Sheliosmith@yahoo.com
707-287-3771

ARCHAEOLOGISTS TO MAP GOLD RUSH SHIPWRECK

'Frolic' Wreck Site A Candidate for State Underwater Park

MENDOCINO, Calif. – July 11, 2003 – A team of divers led by four prominent maritime archaeologists will explore and map the remains of the *Frolic*, one of California's most important Gold Rush-Era shipwrecks. The underwater mapping will take place July 28-August 8.

The *Frolic*, laden with Chinese household goods bound for San Francisco, went aground off the Mendocino coast in August 1850, at the north end of what is now the Point Cabrillo Light Station & Preserve in Mendocino. The lost bounty included 21,000 porcelain bowls, marble inset tables, a prefabricated house with oyster shell windows, and 6,109 bottles of Edinburgh ale.

Although the ship's crew, Pomo Indians and 20th century divers have claimed much of the cargo, more may be buried under the remaining hull, according to San Jose State anthropology professor Tom Layton, Ph.D., principal *Frolic* researcher and author of '*Voyage of the Frolic: New England Merchants and the Opium Trade*' (Stanford University Press, 1997) and '*Gifts from the Celestial Kingdom: A Shipwrecked Cargo for Gold Rush California*'.

Layton became interested in the *Frolic* in the summer of 1984 when he and a group of his students discovered blue and white Chinese potsherds at a Mitom Pomo Indian village ruin far from the coast on a remote ridge in Mendocino County,

From that discovery came two *Frolic* books (a third is on the way), a local theatre production and a wealth of artifacts donated for historic preservation by local residents who have dived on the wreck. A majority of the recovered artifacts are in a permanent exhibit at the County Museum in Willits, California. A smaller collection is on display in the Point Cabrillo Lighthouse, a few hundreds yards from shipwreck site.

“Because of its age and cargo, the *Frolic* is one of the most important Gold Rush wrecks for California history,” explained Napa Valley College Professor Sheli Smith, Ph.D., maritime archaeologist and a specialist in Gold Rush era artifacts. “We expect to learn how the ship came into the cove, how she was constructed and then determine if the hull is covering additional cargo.”

Dr. Smith is coordinating the project for the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Her work on shipwreck investigations has taken her around the world including the Caribbean, Atlantic, Mediterranean, Pacific and Indian Oceans, focusing on vessels from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries.

Joining Dr. Smith will be noted maritime archaeologist Paul Hundley, curator at the Australian National Maritime Museum and a specialist in Gold Rush era vessels; maritime archaeologist Annalies Corbin, Ph.D. of East Carolina University, known for her work as a 19th century material culturalist, and underwater parks specialist Charles Beeker of Indiana University, a leading expert in underwater park development for submerged cultural resources.

The goal of the project, according to Dr. Smith, is to initiate a detailed study of the ship’s physical remains. Study results could lead to an artifact recovery effort next year.

“Detailed underwater measurements and drawings will be integrated into a comprehensive map of the wreck site,” she explained. “When and where possible, still photography and video will be used to augment the drawings, the recorded details and their relationship on the wreck. Daily updates, including photos and notes from diver journals, will be posted to the project website, www.pointcabrillo.org.

A dive team will report its findings at 6:30 p.m. Aug. 6 in the Caspar Community Center in Caspar, between Mendocino and Fort Bragg. The findings also will appear on the light station website, www.pointcabrillo.org.

The survey project is funded by a \$5,100 grant from State Parks to the Point Cabrillo Lightkeepers Association (PCLK), whose volunteers and board members will provide the dive team with logistical support throughout the mapping project.

Point Cabrillo Light Station & Preserves is one of the newest additions to the California State Parks. The preserved lighthouse was reinstated as an active federal Aid to Navigation in 1999 and opened to the public in 2000.

Point Cabrillo is one of the nation’s most complete light station with all but one of its original buildings intact. The entire light station, including three lightkeeper houses, will be completely restored within the next few years.

Editors Note: Pictures of recovered treasure are available by email, from Leslie Walery, at California State Parks, 916-651-8724, lwale@parks.ca.gov.

###