

AQUANEWS

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Family sells rights to sunken ships

1715 Fleet may still hold more treasure

BY JOHN McCARTHY • FLORIDA TODAY • July 5, 2010

A horrendous storm packed thrashing winds, battering waves and terrifying lightning. Wooden sailing ships -- laden with gold, silver and jewels and headed for Europe -- pounded onto reefs. Hundreds of sailors drown and the ships full of treasure settle into "Davy Jones's Locker," the bottom of the sea.

That was the start of many a swashbuckling "B" movie during the golden age of Hollywood. It was also the start of a tale that led to the rise -- 250 years later -- one of the most colorful men to call Florida home. And now story tale is turning a new page. The family of the late treasure-hunting legend Mel Fisher has sold the salvage rights to the "1715 Fleet," 11 Spanish ships that were wrecked by a hurricane that year along the coast from Sebastian to Stuart. It is these wrecks that led to the area's moniker as the "Treasure Coast."

The new owners of the salvage rights think there could be up to \$900 million in booty waiting to be found.

Brent Brisben, operations manager for the new salvor, 1715 Fleet -- Queen's Jewels LLC, said he and his father first heard in February that the Fishers were interested in selling their rights to the wrecks. William Brisben, a successful real estate developer and former U.S. representative to UNICEF, decided to pursue the deal and closed June 28 for an undisclosed price.

Fisher was famous for his 1985 discovery of the wreck of the Atocha, a Spanish ship that sunk off the Keys in 1622. Fisher recovered a reported \$400 million in gold and silver from the ship, which is generally considered the most valuable wreck found.

In the years after the Atocha find, Fisher gained fame as the "World's Greatest Treasure Hunter" and made public appearances draped in gold chains recovered from the site.

But the Indiana native and one-time chicken farmer first started treasure hunting in the waters off Sebastian in the early 1960s.

(Continued on page 4)

AQUANEWS

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Things you probably don't see under water:



Rockland Aquanauts Organization Inc.

Mission Statement:

To provide, promote, and advance environmental protection, care, and voluntary clean-up of waterways by any and all lawful means; to promote the importance and care in every manner possible by environmental awareness and otherwise; to purchase, print, publish, and circulate literature to promote the importance and care of the waterways and the work of the Corporation. To perform all acts the Corporation may deem appropriate or advisable in such operation; to establish, provide, and voluntary clean-up waterways, to encourage, support and subsidize the cleaning and protection from pollution.

TEXTING FRENZY

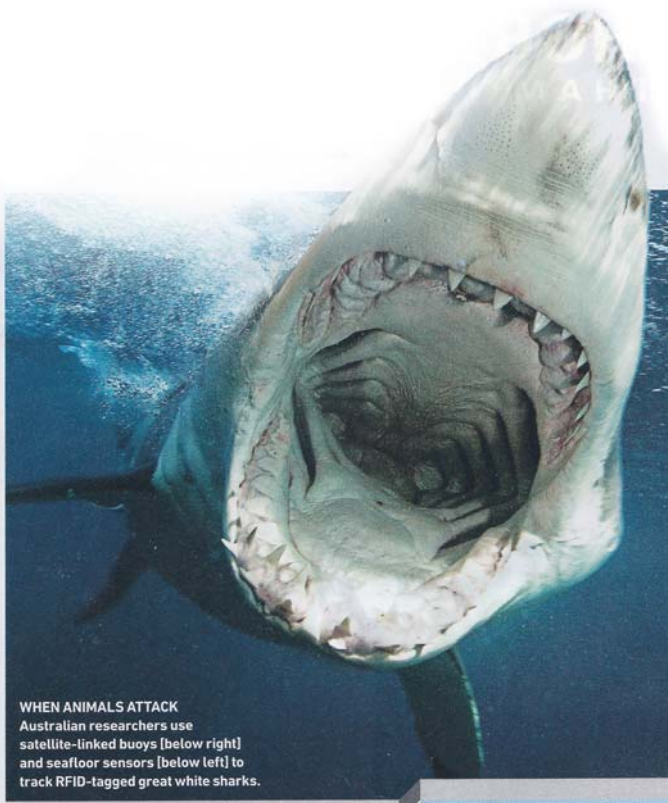
Popular Science, Aug 2010 by McLachlan, Justin

A research effort doubles as a shark-attack warning system

Great white sharks have been around for more than four million years, yet they remain one of the world's most mysterious animals. Scientists know that the beasts have special organs for sensing electromagnetic fields and that their jaws can snap down with 4,000 pounds of force. But migration patterns, which are critical for conservation efforts, are mostly unknown. That will change now that marine biologists in Australia can follow the whereabouts of 75 of the man-eaters using radiotransmitter tags and a network of 20 satellite-linked buoys.

It's not known how far great whites-whose worldwide numbers are estimated to be fewer than 3,500-migrate or if there's a season when they spend more time near the coast, says Rory McAuley, a senior research scientist with Western Australia's Department of Fisheries. McAuley hopes that the buoys, along with about 50 sensors on the ocean floor, will also reveal behavior. This information could help authorities better predict the monthly risk at beaches and restrict seasonal shipping routes to protect sharks from boats.

As a bonus, the work could give swimmers a heads-up when a great white is closing in. If a tagged shark swims within approximately a quarter-mile of a coastal buoy, the system sends a text to lifeguards on nearby beaches. Even swimming at top speed, it might take the dangerous fish a couple of minutes to reach shore, possibly enough time for the lifeguards to drop the phone and sunscreen and get folks out of the water.-JUSTIN MCLACHLAN

**OMG GR8WHT!**

Most shark attacks are on surfers, probably because the silhouette of a dude paddling out on his surfboard looks just like a delicious sea lion.



During the years, his family has continued to work the waters off the Treasure Coast and operate Mel Fisher's Treasure Museum in Sebastian.

The family will continue to run the museum, said Fisher's granddaughter, Nichole Abt.

But the number of other ventures the family is involved in -- plus the desire for some of Fisher's children to ease into semi-retirement -- made the time ripe for the sale of the 1715 rights.

"We just kind of got our hands full," Abt said.

Brisben said he would work with subcontractors who worked for the Fisher's. The state of Florida takes 20 percent of the findings, while the salvage company and subcontractors split the rest.

Calm waters make summer the prime time to work the wrecks, some of which are in less than 20 feet of water. So far this year, one subcontractor, Gold Hound LLC, has recovered a gold-rimmed portrait pendant, a gold doubloon, five silver coins, a gold ring and other artifacts.

The load was recovered in one day in just 10 feet of water, said Gold Hound's Capt. Greg Bounds. "It was a day dreams are made of."

Brisben and Bounds said new technology would likely to reinvigorate the hunt for treasure from the 1715 Fleet. Bounds noted the recent find was in an area he had been eyeing for a while, but a sophisticated magnetometer led him to the exact spot.

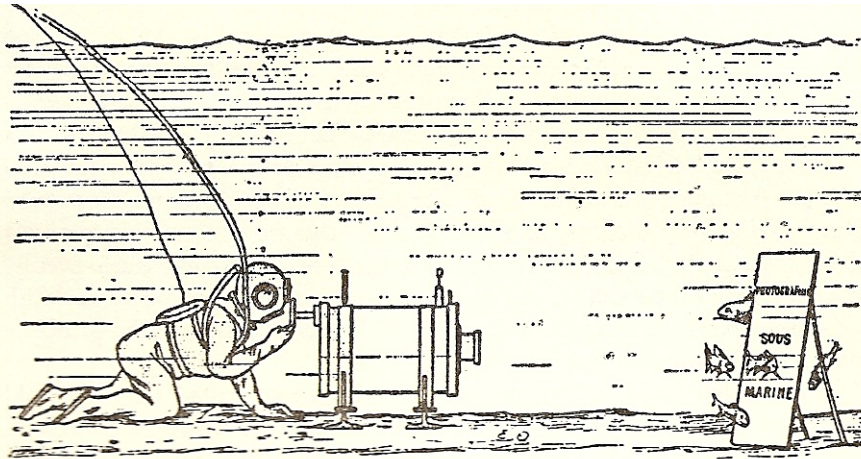
Brisben pointed out that only six of the 11 ships have been found, and salvors such as Bounds are using new technology to try to find the remaining five ships.

"They spend their winters thinking about, 'Where are the other ships?' " Brisben said.



Spanish reales are shown recently from the 1715 Fleet at the McLarty Treasure Museum on A1A, part of the Sebastian Inlet State Park. (FLORIDA TODAY file)

Sent in by Steve Improte's Father



Louis Boutan makes undersea snapshot, 1897. (La Photographie Sous-Marine)

The First U/W Photographer? By Lada Simek

Louis Boutan was a lecturer at the Paris Faculty of Science. At this time, photographs were taken on glass plates with wet collodion emulsions. Boutan acquired a fixed focus camera, (focusing under water was thought to be impossible) and fitted a control lever which opened and closed the shutter. At the end of the exposure, which lasted ten minutes to a half hour, he could move the lever which would then close the shutter and dropped the exposed plate, leaving a fresh one for the next picture. He put this device in a copper, waterproof box with three glass ports, two for his viewfinder and one for the lens. The camera was pressurized with an external rubber balloon which compressed the air in the camera to the same pressure at depth.

The date was 1893. He reported the apparatus as “not very practical”.

To eliminate the pressure problem, his second camera was a “wet” one, where water was able to circulate inside. (1894). He reported the results as “very mediocre”. Invariably there was some undulation of the shutter mechanism causing some blur in the pictured. His third camera had an astigmatic lens that could be focused before diving. It took pictures seven by nine and a half inches. His final accomplishment was underwater lighting. His light source was a glass balloon with a spiral magnesium wire and containing oxygen. There was considerable difficulty with this, as his balloons tended to explode or burn unevenly. “I may have rejected it too soon. With a few modifications it might be improved.” Indeed it was. It is the principle of contemporary flash bulbs.

SCUBA DRIVING

Popular Science, Aug 2010 by Keats, Jonathon

Submarine genius Graham Hawkes turns out a lightweight leisure vehicle

Graham Hawkes is known for crafting near-perfect undersea vehicles- sleek, winged subs that ferry eco-explorers to the greatest depths of the ocean. But when a brilliant billionaire shows up and asks for something even more sophisticated, it's time to draw up a new plan.

Last summer, Richard Branson commissioned Hawkes to build a sub no heavier than 1,600 pounds, the weight limit on Branson's 105- foot catamaran. But even Hawkes's most svelte deep divers weigh at least 4,000 pounds. Trimming battery or engine weight, Hawkes realized, would hurt performance, but the thick hull required to safely contain compressed air contributes some 1,500 pounds of the bulk. That was weight that could go, Hawkes thought, so he began designing a new category of submersible: a submarine featuring open cockpits.

To dive in a roofless sub, Branson's passengers will need to dress for the conditions. Outfitted in air-regulator masks that draw oxygen from an onboard supply, passengers can plunge to 130 feet and zip around coral reefs at a swift 4 knots for two hours. (Wetsuits are optional.) The stripped-down model weighs in at less than 1,500 pounds. "The idea was to be able to move through the water with the grace and agility of marine animals," Hawkes explains. He dubbed his invention the Deep Flight Merlin and delivered the three-seater to Branson this spring. Now he's gearing up to produce an entire line of Merlins with room for one to six passengers each. The wait time for a Merlin is four months, and they start at \$700,000-the price you pay to become one of Branson's aquatic peers. -JONATHON KEATS



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California Artificial Reef Bill Signed by Governor Schwarzenegger

A two-year effort by California Ships to Reefs (CSTR) to lay the ground work for artificial reefing projects in California was hailed as successful when Governor Schwarzenegger signed AB 634 into law July 15.

The bill, sponsored by Diane Harkey, R-Dana Point, protects state and local governments from liability associated with scuba diving, particularly on ship-based artificial reefs. Without this protection, government agencies would be reluctant to allow reefing in their jurisdictions.

“California Ships to Reefs is proud of its all volunteer organization, the Legislature and Governor for passing AB 634. The Governor’s signature comes at an historic time, the tenth anniversary of HMCS Yukon’s reefing in San Diego,” said Joel Geldin, Chairman and CEO of California Ships to Reefs.

“Today, California has removed a major impediment to artificial reefing. We are enthusiastic about the new unlimited opportunities ahead to create a network of artificial reefs on the state’s coastline, improving ocean life and enhancing our recreational diving and fishing industries,” Geldin added. The well organized lobbying campaign by CSTR helped propel the bill through the Legislature with remarkable bipartisan support. Dean Rewerts, Vice President of Reef Development of CSTR said, “We appreciate how the Legislature was able to reach across the aisle and pass AB 634 without a single no vote, working for the common good of California. California Ships to Reefs believes the entire state owes thanks to Assemblywoman Diane Harkey for her foresight in carrying AB 634, making it easier to create man-made reefing projects in California to the benefit of the state and the environment.”

Assemblywoman Harkey commented, “Fear of lawsuits has hampered efforts to expand recreational activities in many communities. I am pleased that Governor Schwarzenegger signed into law our legislation reducing liability for local and state governments while allowing for more recreational activities such as scuba diving, aiding coastal economies, the environment and the state of California.”





Approved Hessian Lake Dive's 2010



Saturday June 19th @ 9am

Saturday August 14th @ 9am

Sunday September 5th @ 10am

Saturday September 25th @ 10am

Sunday October 10th @ 10am

Saturday October 23rd @ 10am

Everyone must meet at parking lot 1 by the administration building, at the designated time. The timing is very important now because we need to have a park escort take us to our parking area by the Lake. Anyone that misses the escort will have to stay parked in the upper lot and walk down to the Lake. We also have to leave by escort all at the same time. These are new Park rules.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES

Rockland Aquanauts Organization
2010 Dues

I guess it is that time of the year again, Membership Dues are due.
Last year all our members received much more than they gave out to the Organization.

As usual you will be receiving a tax donation for the first \$25.00. Don't forget we have all the BBQ lunch's after every Lake Dive.

So please send in your dues to;
So please send in your \$42 dues to;

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September 2010

Family Sells Rights, Texting Frenzy, Scuba Driving, Artificial Reef, Hessian Lake, 2010 Dues

**We are currently looking for a place to have our 2010
Annual Dinner...**

Any suggestions?



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