

# BEDWELL BAY WRECK — SEALING SCHOONER

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**Official Number:** Unknown

**Registry:** Unknown

## CONSTRUCTION

This wreck is as yet unidentified. Structural evidence indicates that she was a small sailing vessel. Most such craft were schooners. However, the term “schooner” was used loosely on the coast. Sloops and other rigs were common too.

Local schooners were derived from British designs of the early nineteenth century. They were rarely longer than 25 metres or more than 100 tons. They had wooden hulls with clear decks save for a low cabin aft of midships. Most were two-masted. Schooners had fore-and-aft canvas stretched between booms from the back of the mast. They had no crosswise square sails at all. By the 1920s most had auxiliary gasoline engines.

There were hundreds of similar vessels on the coast. Many were built here, more came up from the United States or the Atlantic Seaboard. They were used for coastal trading, sealing, fishing, and myriad other tasks.

## OPERATIONAL HISTORY

Small schooners were extensively used as coastal traders in the nineteenth century. They bartered with First Nations communities and supplied pioneer camps and settlements. They gradually gave way to larger, regularly-scheduled coastal steamships around the turn of the century.

Sealing grew out of coastal trading. At first, seal pelts were bartered from Indian hunters. In 1868 the schooner *Favourite* took native spearmen to grounds far off the west coast of Vancouver Island. Others quickly emulated their success. Boats worked up the coast until they reached the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. These were the main northern fur seal rookeries. Over-hunting soon depleted the stocks. To protect their own hunt on the islands, the United States began seizing pelagic sealers on the high seas. Royal Navy warships, in turn, protected the fleet in 1890. Tensions, seals, and sealers all gradually diminished thereafter. An international treaty in 1911 ended the pelagic hunt in exchange for compensation.

At least 225 schooners were known to have been in the trade. Horrendous numbers were lost at sea. By the end, many more were semi-derelict, kept afloat solely to cash in on the compensation settlement. Even so, scores of former sealers went on to second careers. Sheer numbers make them difficult to trace.

The largest group turned to fishing, particularly for halibut. Early halibut boats carried small dories for the actual fishing. By the 1920s most were longlining with power gurdies right from deck. Virtually all the schooners were then fitted with gas motors and were reregistered as power boats. In fact, “halibut schooner” came to mean a type of motor craft whose sails were used only for stability.

A surprising number of former sealers turned to rum-running in the 1920s. A few of the old craft lasted into the '30s and '40s and beyond. The *Thomas F. Bayard* carries on still.

## LOSS

Bedwell Bay was long used as a place to moor idle vessels and as a ship graveyard. This vessel was probably abandoned.

## SALVAGE

Unknown.

Source: Vancouver's Undersea Heritage – Shipwrecks and Submerged Cultural Sites in Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound, David Stone, *Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia*, 1994, pages 18-21.



Courtesy: Vancouver Maritime Museum

## Typical Sealing Schooner — The *Markland*

Source: Vancouver's Undersea Heritage – Shipwrecks and Submerged Cultural Sites in Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound, David Stone, *Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia*, 1994, pages 18-21.

## SEARCH / DISCOVERY

The site has been known to divers since the 1970s at least. Early visitors found “collectibles”, indicating that the site was known to only a few people. A machine often taken to be an engine was bolted to the foredeck. Back then, one could swim inside the hull. Since then it has been used for diver training and has suffered wear and tear.

The bulwarks and topsides have collapsed, the hull has settled, the “engine” dropped-out, and there is no way to get inside now.

## STATUS

UASBC divers mapped parts of the wreck in 1986. The *Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound Survey* re-examined her in five expeditions from 1991 to 1993. The wreck was videotaped, photographed, and mapped to record her current condition.

The site is close to shore on the northwest side of Bedwell Bay in Indian Arm. Latitude and longitude are 49° 19.63' N. by 122° 54.75' W. The bay provides a very calm and protected underwater environment.

The wreck lies on a mud slope studded with stones, her bow pointing south-southwest at 214°. Depths are 26 feet to the stern and 36 feet down to the bow. The hull is fairly profuse with small anemones and is home to perch and baby rockfish.

The wreck is upside down and skeletal. The keel and the aft deadwood are still prominent; the keelson is periodically visible inside the hull. A strip of outer hull planking reaches a metre or so from each side of the keel. Beyond that, only patches remain. Some swaths of ceiling (inner) planking still exist inside. The shape of the hull is delineated by the stubs of doubled frames which stick out on both sides. Many are broken off at the turn of the bilge; others complete the curve but have snapped off at the top end. What remains is 26.1 metres from stem to sternpost and 5.86 metres across.

All the wood is quite deteriorated. Even the keel has gaps where it has completely rotted away. The stern overhang is now a jumble of disarticulated timbers. The hull topsides have collapsed, leaving a fringe of broken frames around the wreck. The weight of the vessel broke the stempost. It lies beyond the west (port) side, along with what may be a section of forecastle.

Divers who saw her when she was more intact concluded that she was a sailing craft. UASBC surveyors thought likewise in 1986. Her hull profile is less clear now but the nearly flat bottom and prominent deadwoods do echo plans of the schooner *Thomas F. Bayard*. Divers looked for a mast said to be nearby. None was found. There is no evidence of the craft's rig.

All of the fasteners are iron. A large iron hanging knee clings to the outboard end of a midships frame on the port side. An iron cutwater clads the bow. There is no sign of copper sheathing.

There is a large rudder of sailing-craft type. It is elegant for a work boat: wide at the top, it tapers down from there. The bottom rudder hinge protrudes from the keel almost a metre aft of the sternpost. The gap created implies that there once was a propeller. However, repeated scrutiny failed to find any sign of a shaft or stuffing box. The best explanation is that the powertrain was removed before the vessel's career was done.

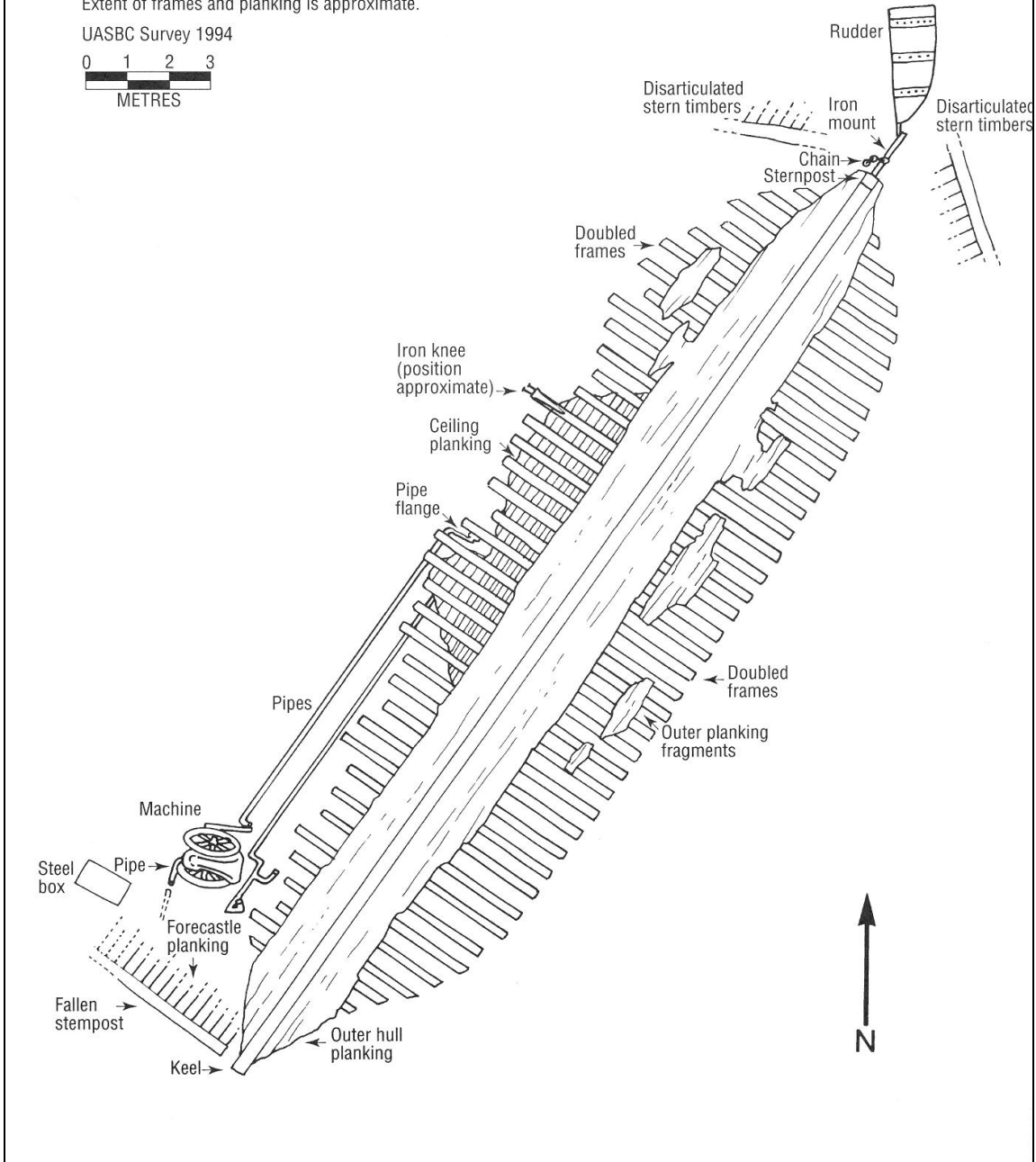
The “engine” lies upside down near the port bow. It has an upright “cylinder” on a flaring base and two large flywheels on the sides (it can be seen in the frontispiece photograph at the beginning of this book). One survey diver reported seeing an exhaust pipe. Axles, sprockets, and drive-chains lie underneath. A thick metal pipe connects to the cylinder and disappears into the mud. Two similar pipes flank the machine and run aft along the ceiling planks to about amidships.

Source: Vancouver's Undersea Heritage – Shipwrecks and Submerged Cultural Sites in Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound, David Stone, *Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia*, 1994, pages 18-21.

# BEDWELL BAY MYSTERY WRECK

Extent of frames and planking is approximate.

UASBC Survey 1994



Source: Jacques Marc, UASBC

Source: Vancouver's Undersea Heritage – Shipwrecks and Submerged Cultural Sites in Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound, David Stone, *Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia*, 1994, pages 18-21.

The machine ought to be highly diagnostic. So far, though, research has not pinned down what it is. The old notion that it was an engine cannot be discounted entirely. Its corroded remains can be interpreted as a single-cylinder gas motor or even as a small steam donkey. In either case, it was too far forward to propel the ship.

Our hypothesis is that it was a chain-driven water pump. It looks rather like the upright models designed to save deck space. If it was a pump, the pipes connected to it had the capacity to move a lot of water. Their routes through the ship indicate that they drained holds rather than the bilge.

A high-volume water pump suggests a fishboat, fishpacker, or fish scow. Some former sealers became halibut boats; others were turned into herring barges. They were the right size to be fishpackers in the pilchard boom, 1925 to the early 1940s.

Photographs from the early 1930s show dozens of fishing boats rafted together in the cove where the shipwreck lies. UASBC expects that she came from the fishing industry.

## **CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS**

UASBC produced a site plan, videotape, and photographs of this wreck, which record her current condition and diagnostic features.

The evidence is that this vessel originated as a sailing craft. An engine and propeller were probably fitted later, and then were removed again. The suspected pump and its complex of pipes and gears also smacks of an add-on late in the vessel's history. The implication of this material record is that the vessel had a succession of careers. It is plausible that she started off as a sealing schooner. It is at least as likely that she ended up in the fishing industry.

If she was a sealing schooner she would be representative of a historic class of vessel. In fact, the schooners were doubly historic since they also served as coastal traders. UASBC intends to continue archival and underwater research in order to identify this shipwreck.

The wreck is an attractive recreational dive. She is shallow and safe, especially now that divers cannot go underneath her. She has suffered from user damage in the past so a plaque requesting visitors to be specially mindful of her fragility would aid her preservation.

The fishpacker *Western Dispatcher* is sunk just a short swim away. UASBC recommends that the two wrecks be linked by a sign-posted, self-guiding, underwater trail. The rope trail should commence from shore or a buoy to minimize anchor damage to the wrecks. It would also keep dive boats away from a water skiing course which is set up nearby each summer (informal discussions with club members show that divers on the wrecks are not considered to be a problem). Underwater plaques along the route would point out artifacts and architectural features of the wrecks, the history of each ship, and conservation messages.

## **REFERENCES**

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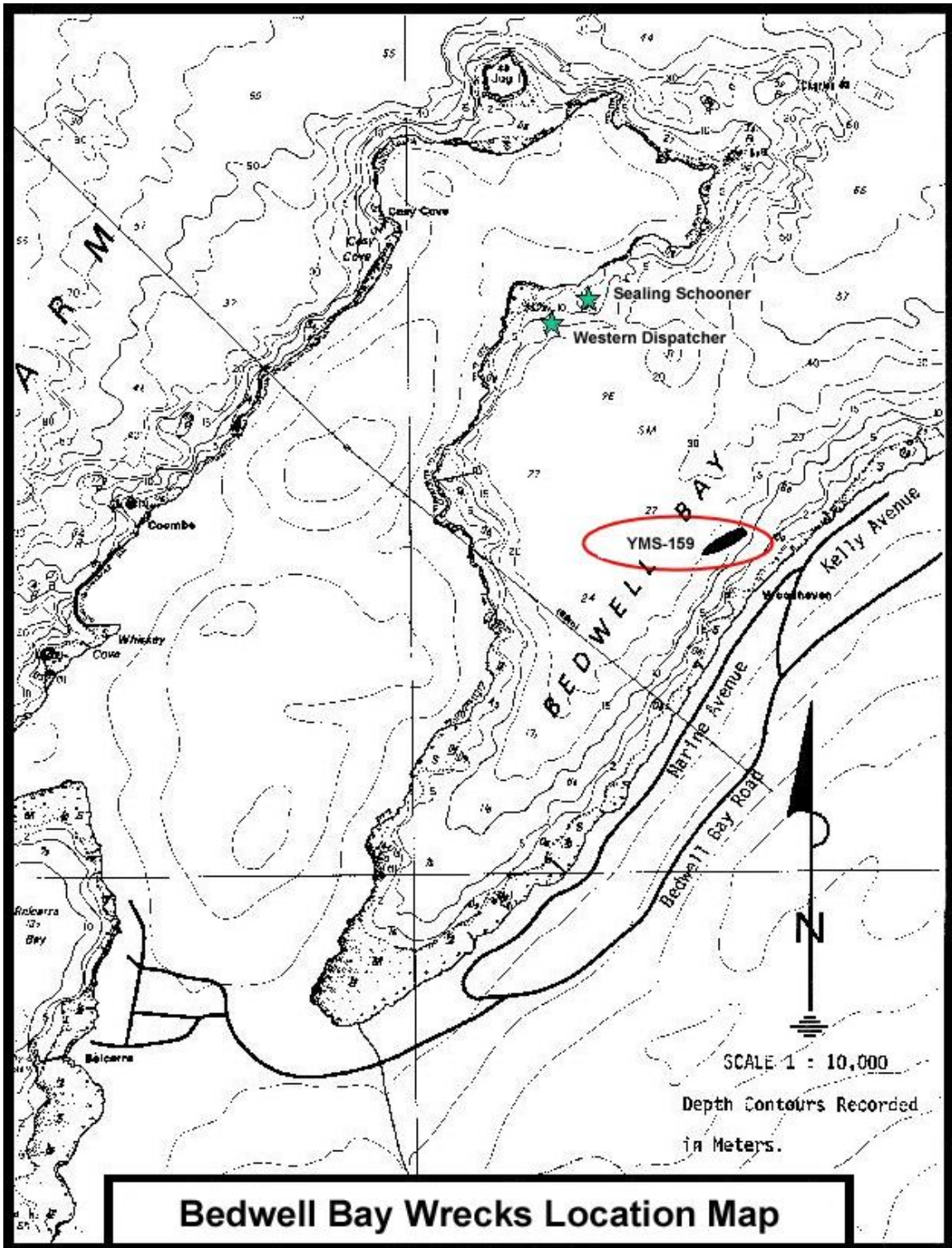
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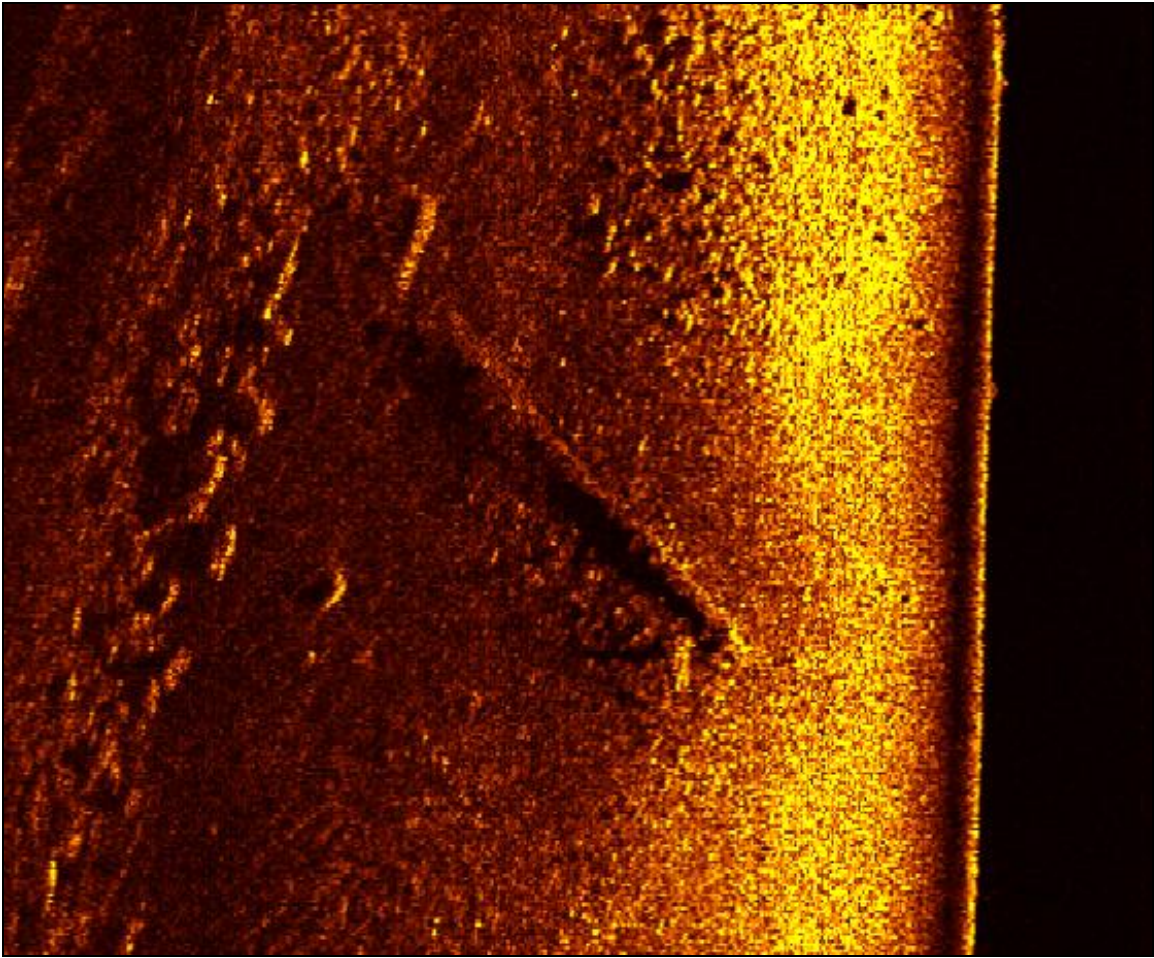
Source: Vancouver's Undersea Heritage – Shipwrecks and Submerged Cultural Sites in Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound, David Stone, *Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia*, 1994, pages 18-21.



Source: Jacques Marc, UASBC

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Source: Sidescan sonar image courtesy of Imagenex Technology Corp.

**Sidescan sonar image of the Sealing Schooner shipwreck in Bedwell Bay**  
(Image from an Imagenex YellowFin 540kHz Sidescan Sonar)

Source: Vancouver's Undersea Heritage – Shipwrecks and Submerged Cultural Sites in Burrard Inlet and Howe Sound, David Stone, *Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia*, 1994, pages 18-21.