▲ Reefs
● Springs

FLORIDA DIVING LOCATIONS

GPS Coordinates for dive locations throughout Florida
are available on the internet @
http://www.floridafishing-boating.com/

MUSEUMS AT SEA

"The sea speaks a language polite people never repeat. It is a colossal scavenger slang and has no respect."
—*Carl Sandburg*

The sea always has stories to tell.

At various depths in different spots along Florida's coastlines are 10 sites known as Underwater Archaeological Preserves. Scuba divers and snorkelers crowd these sites for their scenic beauty, marine life and historical value.

"All of them have a unique story to tell," says Della Scott-Ireton, an underwater archaeologist with the state.

SAN PEDRO

Divers come from all over the world to see Florida's preserves, which are the most extensive network of sites in the United States. State officials plan to add the 11th site, a shipwreck off Stuart called the Georges Valentine, soon. Each site features an underwater plaque and laminated site guides available at local dive shops.

"A fallacy persists that all shipwrecks are covered in gold and treasure," Scott-Ireton says.

However, these sites offer visitors a chance to learn about each ship's true history, she says.

The *Urca de Lima,* Ft. Pierce

A hurricane hit this ship off the coast of Florida in 1715, sinking it and all of its exotic cargo. The ship carried wares like chocolate, cowhides, vanilla and silver in its hull. The Spanish crew planned to sail back to Spain where these goods would fetch high prices. When the state converted the site to a preserve it replaced a historic anchor and added a replica cannon.

"It's an example of what a real colonial shipwreck is," Scott-Ireton says. Opened in 1987, this site was the first Underwater Archeological Preserve in Florida.

The *San Pedro,* Indian Key

Another hurricane doomed this ship, and its fleet of more than 20, during the journey across the Atlantic in 1733. The fleet carried a variety of riches including gold and silver, which were critical to Spain's economic vitality at the time. Crews salvaged more precious metal than listed in the ship's manifest. The *San Pedro* is one of Florida's oldest artificial reefs. Populated by a variety of marine life and surrounded by coral and stones, this reef gives divers a grand view.

"It's one of the most beautiful reefs you'll see," Scott-Ireton says.

The *City of Hawkinsville*, Old Town

This 19th century steamship lies mostly intact at the bottom of the Suwannee River. The ship was used to transport lumber through Florida and also hauled supplies for the construction of rail lines. Divers can explore the huge deck of the ship in shallow, dark water at the only underwater preserve located in a river.

"It's one of our creepiest shipwrecks," Scott-Ireton says.

The *USS Massachusetts*, Pensacola

The oldest battleship in America attracted salvage crews in the 1950s but Pensacola residents intervened and the ship soon belonged to the state of Florida. The site is now a giant artificial reef. Built by the United States in 1890, the Massachusetts became one of the first heavy caliber, heavy armor ships in the new "Steel Navy." The ship served in the Spanish-American War and had one of the first onboard wireless telegraphs. Divers can still view its eight and 13 inch gun turrets and torpedo tube.

The *SS Copenhagen*, Lauderdale-by-the Sea

This 325-foot steamer ship, built in England, hauled goods across the Atlantic. Its captain stranded it on a reef in 1900 on a journey to Havana, Cuba with a load of coal. After several attempts to save the ship it was abandoned and forgotten. Many charter boats refuse to fish off of the wreck site because the community respects its abundance of marine life and natural beauty, Scott-Ireton says.

SS TARPON

SS COPENHAGEN

SS Tarpon, Panama City

The Tarpon lies deeper than any other underwater preserve. Its varied history included being owned by Henry Plant and being commanded by Captain Willis Green Barrow, who built a reputation on reliability as he ferried supplies and communication between ports in the Gulf of Mexico. On its final voyage, the ship sprung a leak in its bow, and went down, taking 18 members of its crew, including the captain. The wreck site has good visibility, allowing divers to see a variety of open ocean marine life.

"There's always a sea turtle asleep under the boiler," Scott-Ireton says.

Half Moon, near Key Biscayne

The German racing yacht was among the fastest of her day, racing at international regattas throughout Europe, Scott-Ireton says. The British captured it as a war prize in 1914. The ship made its way down to Miami where it served as a floating speakeasy during prohibition under the disguise of a "fishing platform" before sinking on a shallow sandbar during a storm.

The *Lofthus*, Boynton Beach

The owners of this ship wanted it to travel the world's oceans to maximize its profits. It carried a load of lumber when it wrecked off Florida's East coast on its final voyage. Crews dynamited the ship's hull to access the cargo because it was more valuable than the ship. Strong currents exist around the site, constantly covering and uncovering different areas, making the site appear different every dive, Scott-Ireton says.

The *Vamar*, Port St. Joe

Rear-Admiral Richard E. Byrd piloted this ship through the Antarctic in 1928, making it the first metal-hulled ship to journey there. In 1942, the ship sank amid mysterious circumstances off Port St. Joe. The ship navigated two sharp turns while leaving the port but still sank while traveling straight in calm water during good weather. War-weary residents suspected the foreign crew of sabotage, but a clear reason for its demise was never reached.

The *Regina*, Bradenton Beach

This molasses tanker became stranded in shallow water during bad weather in 1940 while on its way to New Orleans. The tanker's 350,000 gallons of molasses leaked out into the Gulf of Mexico creating a sticky mess on the beach. The "Sugar Barge," as locals call it, is close to the shore and known for its marine life including dolphins and manatees.

For more information on the current sites or to nominate a new site, visit **dhr.dos.state.fl.us/archaeology/underwater/preserves.**

USS MASSACHUSETTS