

Shipwrecks at North Rock

WB Smith Tug 32 28 29.27 N, 64 46 08.01 W

Crystal Catfish 32 28 32.88 N, 64 46 10.08 W

The wreck of Henry May?

North Rock is Bermuda's biggest reef preserve and has at least two shipwrecks near it and perhaps many more.

The remains of one vessel can be found in the first sand hole to the south of the North Rock Beacon directly under and adjacent to a small blind breaker. This is the remains of a WW1 era steam tug belonging to WB Smith that sank when servicing the old tower. The wind swung around and smashed the tug on the breaker leaving the crew to swim for the Beacon on North Rock where they sat for a couple of days until people ashore realized they had not returned and sent out a rescue party.

In and above the sand one can see metal the parts of the vessel along with what appears to be some sheathing and iron struts along with a myriad of metal fitting, pipes etc. There are some small pieces of timber in evidence but as one would expect from such a dynamic area there is very little timber to be found. There is a small hand water pump in the sand hole.

On the northern side of the Beacon is the lead ballast from the **Crystal Catfish** that wrecked on the rock in 1977 after a radio beacon mixup and her captain Jack Hunt fell asleep. A massive, difficult and ultimately unsuccessful salvage operation ensued with the ship being left to break apart. The primary evidence of her today is her lead keel, a testament to the dynamic environment that North Rock confronts.

In 2006 a salt glaze Bellarmine shard was discovered in the area that that dates from the late 16th to early 17th Century. Coupled with an anchor and ballast the find lends credence to a story that puts the wreck that carried the first recorded Briton, Henry May, to Bermuda at North Rock in 1594. A film about that discovery and Bermuda's sea level rise history was made in 2008 called Riddle of the Crest. <https://vimeo.com/9173090>

The North Rock site is buoyed with a 1km no fishing limitation.

It is a very popular dive and snorkelling site with stunning clear water, extremely healthy hard and soft corals and the sand has large pink elements. The area is pristine and used by marine scientists as a control site for a wide range of studies.

As with all shipwreck sites in Bermuda all cultural materials are protected and should not be interfered with or removed. If something is seen at North Rock that divers or snorkellers think is of interest please record its location, take photographs from a variety of angles and contact the Custodian of Historic Wrecks.