

## Regiment helps to restore ‘Sea Venture’ remains



By Sarah Lagan

The few remaining timbers of Bermuda’s founding ship the Sea Venture are to be restored this weekend.

A new dive division of the Bermuda Regiment, led by Sergeant Major James Self, will be directed by Phillippe Max Rouja, the Department of Conservation Services’ custodian of historic wrecks, in a bid to preserve the ship, which was wrecked on our reefs on July 28, 1609, leading to the first permanent settlement on the Island.

Timber troubles: The remains of the Sea Venture are being eaten away by naval shipworm

Robert Steinhoff, chairman of the Historic Wrecks Authority, which supports the restoration, was one of the team members of the Sea Venture Trust that excavated the site in the 1980s, and has been lobbying for this project for the past few months.

A team will be dispatched from Fort St Catherine’s beach on Saturday morning to carry out the work.

Aside from more than 400 years of ocean weathering, the wooden remains of the ship have fallen victim to “an innocuous biological agent”, the teredo worm.

Better known as naval shipworm, it gorges on wet wood and has hidden the exposed remains of almost all pre-19th century wrecks.

The Sea Venture is almost completely invisible, with all wood above the sand having been eaten away.

Archaeological investigations by Edmund Downing, Teddy Tucker, and later Smokey Wingood and John Adams, would reveal how much of the timber remained. This has been expertly documented.

“From pylons to boats, the teredo worm is the bane of many a marine engineer”, Dr Rouja said.

The primary weapon in Dr Rouja’s arsenal is sand, which he describes as “kryptonite” for the teredo worms.

“We will package ‘kryptonite’ in jute bags at Fort St Catherine beach and deliver them to the section of the wreck site where these timbers are most exposed, creating a pile on the bottom that will help to protect these last tender morsels of wood from Bermuda’s first ship from a very hungry worm.

“Some might suggest that this is a futile mission and some part of me would agree, but as is the case for much human endeavour that works to put off the inevitable, I would venture that its importance is tied more to the act of caring than ultimately succeeding, and that isn’t futile at all.”

The restoration project has been named as the signature event of the Regiment’s 50 Dives in 50 Days effort.

Participants will help to lay the sand bags on the site of the wreck, under Dr Rouja’s supervision.

As well as assisting Conservation Services and the Historic Wrecks Authority with the project, the Regiment’s dive division is aiming to continue to grow its membership and use national and international media to promote diving in Bermuda.

Sgt Maj Self said: “The opportunity to dive the Sea Venture is a privilege in its own right. It is an opportunity to dive the start of Bermuda’s history.

“The Regiment has not only been given the opportunity to dive the Sea Venture, but also a chance to help preserve this unique wreck site.

“I thank Philippe Max Rouja and Robert Steinhoff for this opportunity.”