

HISTORIC SITES AND MONUMENTS

SAILING VESSEL WRECKAGE, SOUTH-WEST COAST OF ELEPHANT ISLAND, SOUTH SHETLAND ISLANDS

Working Paper submitted by the United Kingdom

Introduction.

The need to take steps to protect historic sites and monuments in Antarctica was recognised at the very first meeting of the Treaty Parties (Recommendation I-IX refers). Since then the concept of affording protection to such sites has been incorporated in Annex V of the Environmental Protocol to the Antarctic Treaty. To date, 74 Historic Sites or Monuments have been included in the list annexed to Recommendation VII-9.

However, as with all protected areas in Antarctica there is a need regularly to review those areas or artefacts listed as historic sites or monuments to ensure that they continue to meet the reason for their designation. Where they do not, it seems appropriate either to take steps to ensure that the validity of the site remains, or to remove the site from the list of Historic sites and Monuments.

Following such an approach, this Working Paper reviews the status of the most recently listed Historic Site (number 74) and, on the basis of the most up-to-date information, proposes changes to the listing of the site.

Wreckage of a large wooden sailing vessel on the South-west Coast of Elephant Island.

At CEP I, the United Kingdom submitted a working paper (XXII ATCM/WP 21) detailing the discovery of the wreckage of a large wooden sailing vessel in a small cove on the South-west coast of Elephant Island, South Shetland Islands.

The significance of the find (no other such historic wreck sites are known in Antarctica), and the suspicion that the wreckage might be either that of Dr Otto Nordenskjöld's *Antarctic* or Sir Ernest Shackleton's *Endurance*, prompted ATCM XXII to list the cove and the surrounding coast of Elephant Island as Historic Site number 74 (Measure 2(1998)).

At CEP II the UK tabled Information Paper (XXIII ATCM/IP 35) which provided a progress report on the efforts being made to identify the vessel. At the time circumstantial evidence suggested that the wreckage was not that of the *Antarctic* or *Endurance*, but was instead an American sealing ship, the *Charles Shearer* (Annex A).

Current Information.

The wreckage has been surveyed by parties from the UK's Ice Patrol Vessel, HMS *Endurance*, in March 1998, and again in January 1999. On each occasion small samples of some of the timbers were removed. These samples were returned to the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge, for dendrochronological analysis.

The results of these analyses have confirmed that the wreck timbers are not of Scandinavian origin. This evidence coupled with detailed examination of the photographic survey of the wreck, and comparisons with the original plans of the *Endurance*, have demonstrated that the wreckage is not from the *Antarctic* or the *Endurance*.

Further, the 1999 timber samples have dated the main timbers (i.e. the date at which the trees were felled) at mid 19th century (approximately 1847) which is compatible with the estimated time of construction of the *Charles Shearer* (although the precise date of construction of this vessel has not yet been determined).

Thus, whilst the evidence in favour of the wreckage being that of the *Charles Shearer* is not substantial, there is nothing to oppose this theory and it remains the most viable option.

Review of Historic Site Number 74 – The South-west Coast of Elephant Island.

On being alerted to the existence of the Elephant Island wreckage the CEP and ATCM took commendably swift action to protect the area, at least until further investigation had provided a clearer view on the provenance of the wreck. In doing so a significant length of the shoreline of the South-west coast of Elephant Island was included to allow for the possibility that further sections of the wrecked vessel may have been washed ashore along the coast. But this has not proved to be the case.

Now that those investigations have been largely concluded, it seems appropriate to review the status of the site for the longer-term. Three options appear available to the ATCM:

- 1) Maintain the existing designation;
- 2) Reduce the size of Historic Site No. 74 so as to include only the bay where the wreckage is located;
- 3) De-designate the site and remove it from the list of Historic Sites and Monuments.

Dealing with each of these in turn; Option 1, whilst the most straightforward to contemplate, seems inappropriate. A long section of the coastline was included, as a precautionary measure, in the original designation. To retain all of the coastline as an Historic Site, when only a very small part of the coast contains relevant material, seems inappropriate.

Option 2 would overcome the above problem and ensure that only the immediate area surrounding the wreckage was included in the Historic Site.

Option 3 is subject to a value judgement, based on the perceived significance or importance of the material in question. However, it could be argued that given the unique nature of the wreckage (very few such wrecks are known in Antarctica and none have received any form of protection) and that it represents a significant period in the history of Antarctic exploration (and exploitation, i.e. the sealing era) retention of Historic Site status could be justified.

In the view of the UK, Options 2 and 3 appear to offer the most sensible way forward with a preference for Option 2. A draft Measure that would give effect to Option 2 is attached (Annex B).

The CEP is invited to consider the information presented here and, in preparing its advice for the 12th Special ATCM, to decide on the most appropriate course of action with regard to Historic Site number 74.

Conclusion.

On a more generic point, the UK believes that the process that has been followed with regard to the Elephant Island wreckage has demonstrated the effectiveness of using area protection as an environmental management tool. Rapid designation of the Elephant Island site on discovery of the wreck afforded initial and precautionary protection to a broad area of the coastline pending further investigation of the provenance of the material. On the basis of those investigations, Treaty Parties have now had the opportunity to review the status of (and the area covered by) the initial designation to ensure that Historic Site and Monument Status is being used appropriately with regard to this site.

The UK would recommend that such a review is carried out in respect of other sites and would draw particular attention to Historic Site and Monument number 25, which, we understand, no longer exists (XXII ATCM / IP41 refers).

Charles Shearer.

Although the identity of the wrecked vessel on Elephant Island remains unconfirmed, circumstantial evidence gleaned from the historical and dendrochronological data, suggests that it may be that of the *Charles Shearer*.

The date and site of construction of this vessel has not been determined, but it is thought to have been built in the early 1860's, and probably in or around the port of Stonington, USA. Published catalogues indicate that she made voyages to the South Shetland Islands in 1874-75 and the "South Atlantic" (probably South Georgia) in 1875-76. Captain Walter G. Cheseboro commanded both voyages.

On the 3rd July 1877 *Charles Shearer* sailed from Stonington under the command of James Appleton (or Appleman) again bound for Antarctica. She left a sealing gang on Islas Diego Ramirez in October 1877 and then continued South to the South Shetland Islands where she disappeared without trace. The sealing gang on Diego Ramirez was rescued six months later.

During the austral summer of 1879 – 80, two sealing voyages from Stonington searched, unsuccessfully, for *Charles Shearer* and any survivors. The *Express*, commanded by Thomas B. Lynch and the *Thomas Hunt* commanded by Andrew J. Eldred, searched the South Shetland Islands, South Orkney Islands and Trinity Peninsula, but to no avail.

Annex B.

Draft Measure .. (2000)

Antarctic Protected Areas System: Historic Site and Monument Number 74 – South-west Coast of Elephant Island, South Shetland Islands.

The Representatives,

Recalling Recommendations I-IX, VI-14, VII-9, XII-7, XIII-16 and XIV-8;

Noting that, as a precautionary measure, the original designation in Measure 2 (1998) of Historic Site number 74 covered a large area of the South-west coast of Elephant Island;

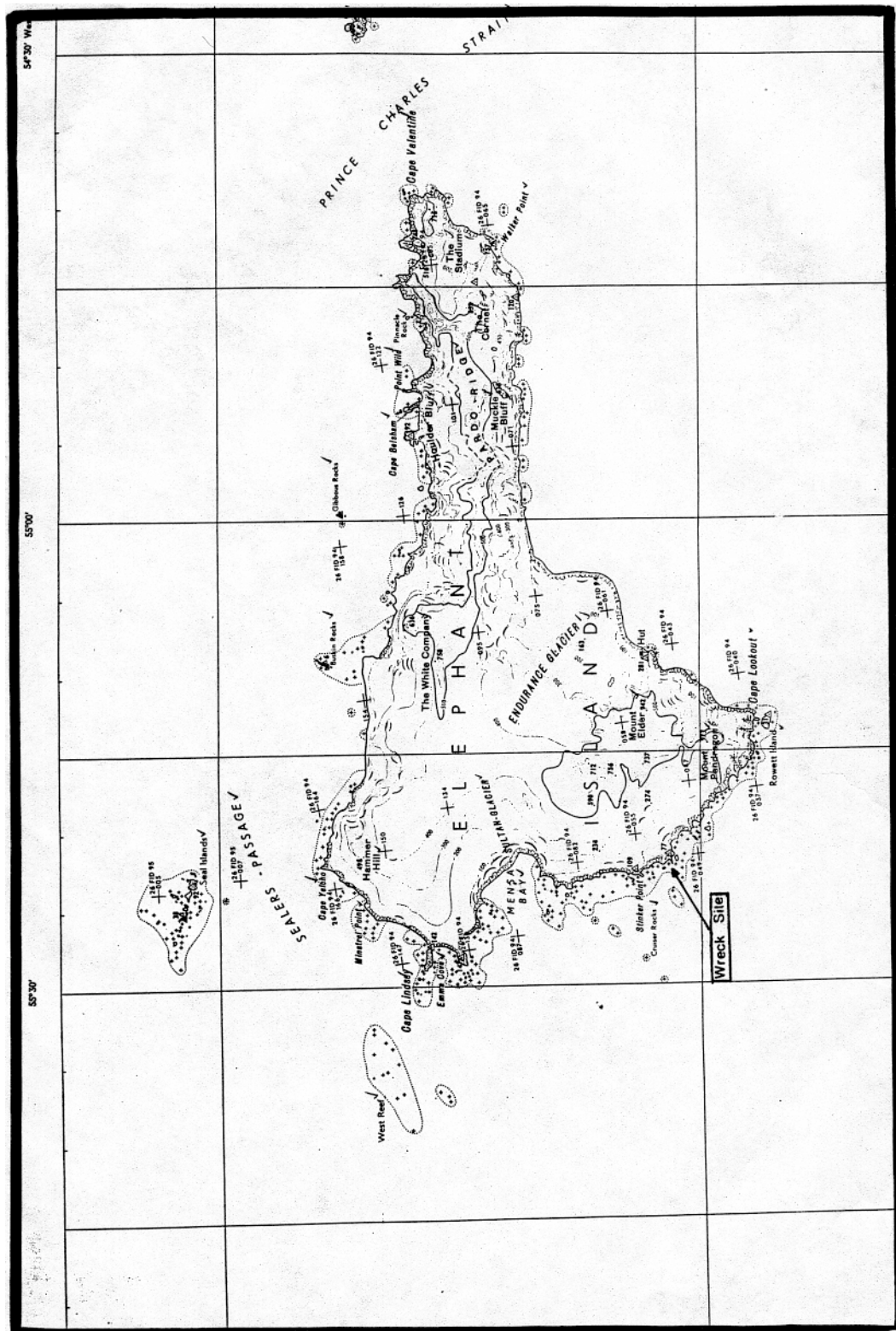
Considering that this status should be retained only for the single bay in which the wreckage has been identified;

Recommend to their Governments the following Measure for approval in accordance with paragraph 4 of Article IX of the Antarctic Treaty:

For Historic Site or Monument number 74, the original description included in Measure 2(1998) shall be replaced by:

The un-named cove on the South-west coast of Elephant Island (61°14'S, 55°23'W) as shown on the attached maps, including the foreshore and intertidal area, in which the wreckage of a large wooden sailing vessel is located.

Map A. Elephant Island and Wreck Site on the South-west Coast.



Map B. Positioning of wreckage within the cove.

