

Proposed ASPIRE White Paper – “Search for the USS BEAR”

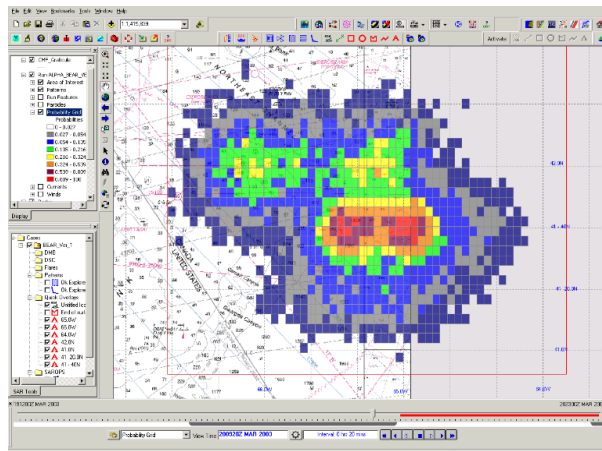
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<u>Willing to Attend Workshop</u>	Yes	
<u>Target Name</u>	Shipwreck of the US Revenue Cutter BEAR	
<u>Geographic Area of Interest</u>	Northwest Atlantic	
<u>Relevant Subject Area</u>	Maritime Archaeology	

Description of Topic or Region Recommended for Exploration

Brief Overview of the Feature: In the entire maritime history of the United States, few ships have been routinely identified as “iconic” and “legendary”, and none more historically-significant than the US Revenue Cutter BEAR. Largely associated with polar exploration, and particularly its Arctic service, the ship’s history is a series of compelling stories of bravery in the face of peril, dedication to duty, and legendary exploits. Built in Scotland originally as a sealer in 1874, for the first ten years of service, she operated as part of the commercial sealing fleet off Newfoundland. Purchased by the US Government, it was put into service by the US Navy as part of the rescue fleet for the Greely Expedition to the Arctic in 1884, and first came to world-wide acclaim as the vessel that rescued the few survivors of that disastrous expedition. In 1885, the BEAR was transferred from the Treasury Department for service in the Arctic as a Revenue Cutter, and for an unprecedented 41 years ably patrolled the Arctic, saving lives and dispensing justice in this remote and often challenging region. Between 1886-1895, the captain of the BEAR was the legendary "Hell Roaring Mike" Healy, the first person of African-American descent to command a ship of the US Government. The CGC HEALY, commissioned in 1999 and routinely operating in Alaska, was named in his honor. Particularly notable was the so-called “Overland Rescue of 1897.” Discovering that eight whaling ships were trapped in the ice off Barrow, the BEAR dispatched a small team from Nelson Island near the Bering Strait to drive a herd of 450 reindeer 1,600 miles in driving snow and perilous conditions to Barrow to provide food to the 275 men from the whaling ships stranded onshore. To this day, the US Coast Guard’s highest honor for bravery is named for the leader of that expedition, Lt. David Jarvis. She stayed in meritorious service in the Arctic until 1917, when she was transferred back to the Navy during WWI, and after the war remained on patrol in Arctic waters. The BEAR was decommissioned by the US Government in 1929, and given to the City of Oakland, California, where she was repurposed as a maritime museum, and used as the movie set for the film of Jack London’s “Sea Wolf.” However, she was not long idle, as Admiral Richard Byrd purchased the still stout ship for his Second Antarctic Expedition. She was refit and performed admirably for both this successful expedition, in 1933-1935, and later for the US Antarctic Expedition of 1939-1941. During WWII, she again went into service for the US Navy in the Greenland Patrol, and notably participated in the capture of a German spy vessel, the trawler BUSKOE. Ending her service as a commissioned vessel in 1944, the BEAR was sold in 1948 to a Canadian steamship company to be re-converted to her original purpose as a sealer, but poor market

conditions caused the company to abandon her on a beach in Nova Scotia. Saved from this fate by an entrepreneur from Pennsylvania, who purchased the ship in the early 1960's to become a museum and restaurant near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she was lost while being towed to her new berth in 1963, and her final resting place lies, according to the position recorded at the time of the sinking, some 260 miles off Boston, approximately 90 miles South of Cape Sable, Nova Scotia. Some might characterize this was an ignominious end to such a storied ship that served so long and had such an extraordinary career.

Brief Summary of the Current State of Knowledge: While the general location of where the BEAR was lost was documented by the tug, IRVING BIRCH, that was towing her to Philadelphia, the precise location of the wreck is still unknown. Research has been conducted to attempt to better define a more discrete search area, most recently using the Search and Rescue Optimal Planning System (SAROPS) tool (see inset image) and the potential locations of the wreck have



been narrowed down considerably since earlier work was conducted around 2010 related to a pre-proposal from the University of Connecticut to OER, which was ultimately not funded. There is an ongoing collaboration between OER and the USCG continuing the search for the BEAR, led by Bruce Buckley of the USCG Auxiliary with support from USCG Historian's Office and others. As part of this collaboration, work continues on refining potential search areas using existing data, as well as potentially employing the OKEANOS EXPLORER to visit

these identified high-probability targets on a "ship of opportunity" basis, which will certainly advance this knowledge even further.

Rationale for Future Exploration: Clearly, this storied and historically-significant vessel is of great interest to the maritime heritage community, NOAA/ONMS Maritime Heritage Program, the US Coast Guard, and the University of Connecticut, who all have been consulted in the preparation of this white paper. It would be of considerably greater interest to the general public with the opportunity provided by continuing the search for the BEAR to frame the recounting of its Polar exploits. The history of the BEAR is compelling, and such an exploration would not only offer the opportunity to tell these significant stories of the ship's heritage to a wider audience, but the discovery of the final resting place of the BEAR would empower relevant agencies in the US and Canada (should the BEAR lie outside US waters) to insure the wreck is appropriately protected, preserved, and commemorated. With such a meritorious and notable history of service to the United States and the world, the BEAR deserves no less.

Relevant Partnerships

US Coast Guard; NOAA/ONMS Maritime Heritage Program; University of Connecticut; Government of Canada (if found in Canadian Waters). CCOM/JHC at UNH may be contacted to seek assistance in seabed mapping data acquisition and interpretation.