Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail Fact Sheet

From a 'Top 25 American Dive Site' to Hidden Gems,
20 Shipwrecks Encourage a Journey Beyond the Beaches and Under the Sea

Offering memorable recreation options for saltwater enthusiasts, the Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail highlights 20 shipwrecks boasting artificial reefs and varieties of sea life for diving, snorkeling, and fishing along Pensacola, Destin, Panama City and Port St. Joe, Florida. Preserving the deep maritime history of Florida and inviting adventure seekers to explore beyond the sandy white shores of the Gulf, the Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail Passports are available from participating dive shops and dive charter operators. The Passport highlights discovered facts and historical data for each of the shipwrecks along the Trail, along with a log and official stickers to track each dive, encouraging water lovers to "take only pictures and leave only bubbles."

The 20 spectacular sunken ships of the Panhandle Shipwreck Trail include:

USS *ORISKANY*
City: Pensacola, Fla.
Claim to Fame: The largest artificial reef in the world, this wreck was named a Top 25 U.S. Dive Site in 2014 by *Scuba Diving* magazine.
Depth: 80-212 feet
Sink Date: May 17, 2006
Nicknamed the "Great Carrier Reef," the USS *Oriskany*, also known as the "Mighty O," was sunk after serving in the Pacific and earning battle stars for service in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Located 22 miles off the coast of Pensacola and submerged in more than 200 feet of water, this shipwreck offers exploration for divers of all skills and a myriad of pelagic and sedentary marine life.

YDT-14
City: Pensacola, Fla.
Claim to Fame: After years of training US Navy divers, this shipwreck is now a dive destination itself.
Depth: 90 feet
Sink Date: April 2000
Gulf storms have buried this diving tender to her decks, but the upper structure around 65 feet below sea level offers boundless exploration for divers.

SAN PABLO
City: Pensacola, Fla.
Claim to Fame: This ship is steeped in a history of foreign spies, espionage, and secret military operations.
Depth: 80 feet

Sink Date: August 11, 1944
Launched from Belfast, Ireland, in 1915, *San Pablo* started her life as a fruit transport running bananas from Central America to the United States. Early during World War II, she was sunk by a U-boat in Costa Rica and refloated. In August of 1944 amid rampant rumors of foreign spies and espionage, *San Pablo* exploded off Pensacola's coast, hence her local name "Russian Freighter."
Recently declassified documents reveal that *San Pablo* was actually destroyed in a top-secret U.S. military operation testing an experimental weapon system. American agents sank the freighter with a radio-controlled boat carrying over 3,000 lbs. of explosives. Her wreckage is scattered across the seafloor where divers can explore boilers, refrigeration coils and huge sections of twisted metal, all home to an impressive array of marine life.

Pete Tide II
City: Pensacola, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Three levels of decks offer boundless exploration in this upright underwater artificial reef.
Depth: 100 feet
Sink Date: 1993
An offshore oilfield supply vessel, this upright wreck boasts three levels of superstructure and an intact pilothouse making it home to mesmerizing schools of fish.

Three Coal Barges
City: Pensacola, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Shallow wreckage is ideal for beginning divers to practice.
Depth: 50 feet
Sink Date: 1974
Sunk in an emergency operation to avoid the barges running ashore, these three barges lie end-to-end in less than 50 feet of water, creating a thriving habitat for marine life and a shallow destination for diving and snorkeling.

Miss Louise
City: Destin, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Shallow waters make for an ideal dive training site.
Depth: 60 feet
Sink Date: 1997
A push tug, *Miss Louise* sits upright in 60 feet of water, brimming with marine life and serving as a great site for novice and intermediate divers.

M/V Janet
City: Destin, Fla.
Claim to Fame: This tug is also associated with a concrete artificial reef complex, Okaloosa Haven #6.
Depth: 93 feet
Sink Date: October 1, 1997
M/V *Janet*, an 85-foot steel tugboat, was deployed by the City of Destin on October 1st, 1997. Divers reported the wreck was covered with baitfish and kingfish in one day. It rests upright at 93 feet with 30 feet of relief; it is a great wreck dive for recreational and/or novice divers. Divers may see snapper, trigger fish, grouper, amberjack, and a resident Goliath Grouper.

Chepanoc
City: Destin, Fla.
Claim to Fame: This wreck is part of the larger Starfish Reef Complex.
Depth: 107 feet

Sink Date: December 1, 2005
Chepanoc was a steel-hulled, 129-foot-long tugboat sunk as an artificial reef by Okaloosa County on December 1st, 2005. Resting upright at 107 feet deep with the bow at 240°, there is plenty of relief for recreational divers to explore (28 feet worth). Divers can enjoy the pilothouse and watch French angelfish, barracuda, and other reef fish swim by. The vessel is also home to many resident sea urchins.

***Belize Queen*/Bob Reay Reef**
City: Destin, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Swarms of baitfish and reef fish dance around this wreck.
Depth: 112 feet
Sink Date: May 30, 2001
The Belize Queen, commonly known as Bob Reay Reef, consists of a steel 85-foot-long tugboat deployed as an artificial reef on May 30th, 2001. This 110-ton vessel has an intact pilot house and bridge. Visitors may have a chance to see a jellyfish or two as well. The vessel lays upright at 112 feet deep but offers 35 feet of relief to explore, as well as nearby artificial reef structures.

Mohawk Chief
City: Destin, Fla.
Claim to Fame: This 93-foot vessel sits upright on the seafloor at the center of Sand Dollar Complex #7.
Depth: 125 feet
Sink Date: June 23, 2003
Mohawk Chief is a tugboat that was sunk as an artificial reef on June 23rd, 2003. There is much to explore here with the vessel and associated reef structures. At 125 feet deep, this vessel harbors schooling baitfish, amber jack, a Goliath Grouper, and sand dollars scattered around the seafloor. Divers will enjoy the pilot house and can peep through various port holes.

Tugboat "Zuess"
City: Destin, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Compare this older tug to those nearby that were more recently sunk as artificial reefs.
Depth: 107 feet
Sink Date: June 29, 1992
Tugboat "Zuess" was a steel hulled vessel deployed by Okaloosa County as an artificial reef on June 29th, 1992. It is 107 feet deep but has 15 feet of relief to explore. This tug is one of the earlier deposited artificial reefs, which provides a great comparison to newer reefs and educates divers and scientists about how these vessels change over time in their watery environments.

Destin Liberty Ship/ *Thomas Hayward* Reef
City: Destin, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Home to a multitude of marine life including goliath grouper, barracuda, and the occasional loggerhead.
Depth: 90 feet
Sink Date: April 14, 1977
Thomas Hayward, known as the Destin Liberty Ship, was a 360-foot long steel Liberty Ship built by the Alabama Drydock Company in Mobile, Alabama in 1942. Liberty ships were a class of United States cargo ship that were cheaply mass-produced during World War II. This vessel served during the war by transporting allied troops from the United States to Europe. After its WWII and Korean War service, it was purchased by the Florida Department of Natural Resources and prepped for designation as an artificial reef. It was sunk south of Okaloosa Island pier on April 14th, 1977. One of the most popular dive sites in the area, the artificial reef is 90 feet deep and rises up to 25 feet off the seafloor, providing visitors with plenty of superstructure to explore.

BLACK BART
City: Panama City Beach, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Appliances {including the ship's toilet} remain intact in the Head and Galley, offering unique exploration for divers.
Depth: 85 feet
Sink Date: 1993
Sunk in memory of Navy Supervisor of Salvage Captain Charles "Black Bart" Bartholomew, this oilfield supply vessel remains largely intact with its wheelhouse {40 foot depth}, deck {66 foot depth} and open cargo holds {80 foot depth}.

FAMI TUGS
City: Panama City Beach, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Mother Nature rearranged this artificial reef, picking up one of the two tugs and situating it on top of the other for a most unique diving experience.
Depth: 100 feet
Sink Date: 2003
Once resting bow-to-bow and joined by a 30-foot tether, a storm picked up one of the sunken tugs and placed it directly atop the other, allowing divers to enjoy two shipwrecks at once and serving as a reminder to visitors of the power of the sea.

USS *ACCOKEEK*
City: Panama City Beach, Fla.
Claim to Fame: With more than 50 years of service around the world, this tug led an exciting career above water before her final destination to the ocean floor.
Depth: 100 feet
Sink Date: July 9, 2000
After an impressive global run serving as a fleet tug, the USS *Accokeek* was repeatedly sunk and refloated for salvage and ordinance training at the Navy Dive School in Panama City, Fla.

USS *STRENGTH*
City: Panama City Beach, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Another testament to the swirls of the sea, this ship originally laid on her side at the ocean's floor before being righted by a hurricane in 1995.
Depth: 80 feet
Sink Date: May 19, 1987
A World War II minesweeper that survived a midget submarine attack and a kamikaze raid, the USS Strength offers divers a fascinating tour of a large artificial reef, including an impressive goliath grouper.

USS *CHIPPEWA*
City: Panama City Beach, Fla.
Claim to Fame: This tugboat is known for breaking speed records during her U.S. Navy tenure.
Depth: 100 feet
Sink Date: February 8, 1990
Sunk as a Navy training platform for the Panama City Experimental Dive Unit in 1990, the *USS Chippewa* now sits upright on the bottom in 100 feet of water offering a great dive for spotting marine life.

El Dorado
City: Panama City Beach, Fla.
Claim to Fame: This large pleasure yacht boasts many decks for exploration.
Depth: 103 feet

Sink Date: May 3, 2019
El Dorado was deployed as an artificial reef in 2019. This 147-foot-long modern luxury cruise liner originally washed ashore in Panama City during Hurricane Ivan (2004). Marine salvor Lee Ingram, a Panama City native, purchased it and intended to restore the vessel and place it in service, but another hurricane, Michael in October 2018, carried it from its dock and deposited it on its side near the Florida State University Panama City property. Mr. Ingram donated the vessel as an artificial reef; it was deposited 12 nautical miles south of St. Andrew Bay Pass on May 3rd, 2019 in 103 feet of water. El Dorado provides a reminder of Florida's history with the destructive forces of hurricanes but also illustrates how an unfortunate situation can lead to opportunity and positive outcomes.

Empire Mica
City: Panama City Beach, Fla.
Claim to Fame: This 465-foot-long British tanker was in use during WWII and bombed by a German U-boat.
Depth: 110 feet
Sink Date: June 29, 1942
Built in 1941, it carried fuel for the Royal Air Force. On June 29th, 1942, it was torpedoed by a German U-boat and sank 21 miles due south of Florida's Cape San Blas in 110 feet of water. Today, the wreck is a shadow of the magnificent tanker it once represented after the Coast Guard bombed the stern and bridge to reduce threat to navigation. Much of the wreck is now a dilapidated conglomeration of iron silently crewed by snapper, grouper, barracudas, and bait fish.

VAMAR
City: Port St. Joe, Fla.
Claim to Fame: Made famous as a support ship for Admiral Richard Byrd's 1928 Antarctic expedition, *Vamar* sunk under mysterious circumstances.
Depth: 25 feet
Sink Date: March 21, 1942
Sunk under mysterious circumstances during a trip to carry lumber to Cuba in 1942, *Vamar* now lies in just 25 feet of water, offering a large steam engine, bilge keels and a wide variety of marine life for divers and snorkelers

The Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail was developed by the Florida Department of State's Underwater Archaeology Team, in partnership with Panhandle waterfront communities, to stimulate tourism and educate residents and visitors about Florida's maritime history. The Florida Panhandle Shipwreck Trail was funded in part through a grant agreement from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Florida Coastal Management Program, by a grant provided by the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

To explore beyond the beaches of Florida and dive deeper into its history, visit http://www.floridapanhandledivetrail.com/

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