

Diving the Frederick (or more commonly: The Musket Wreck)

This little known American schooner (sailing ship) of 149 tons was, in some journals, reported missing early in 1832, but there is also some evidence to suggest that it floundered on the rocks $\frac{3}{4}$ mile East of St. David's Head on 21st February 1833. The ship was on rout to West Africa having left Liverpool with a cargo of muskets and other small arms, and items used to trade with African nationals. There is not much evidence of a shipwreck left on this site apart from its cargo; there is however, a large lump of material, which was partly covered by metal strips resembling swords, but in reality they were merely strips of iron. The wreck's commonly adopted name: "The Musket Wreck" comes from divers having previously recovered whole flintlocks and musket parts. The items illustrated below were recovered by me during the summer of 1988. The muskets can be identified as 'Brown Bess' muskets commonly used by both foot soldiers and marine soldiers (marines) during the Napoleonic wars.

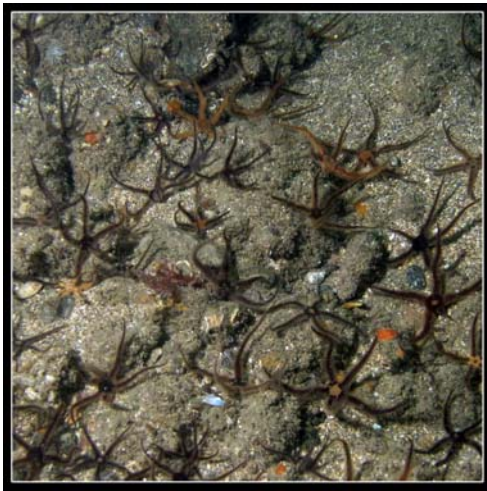


Other items shown are various gun parts including trigger guards and ram-rod ferrules. Clay pipes, handles for cut-throat razors and various blue and yellow beads.



The wreck, as described above lies at a depth of 22m at the top end of a gully that gradually slopes down to a depth of 26m where it flattens out. The gully itself is full of life and if you look very carefully (a torch will be handy) at about 24/26m you can still find small trading beads, clay pipe parts, musket parts (ram rod ferrules and trigger guards), flints and some pottery that the seabed gives up from time to time. The visibility here can be quite good; up 8m on a good day, but it's often dark hence investing in a torch will be most rewarding – the yellow and blue beads will show prominently under torch light. The wreck can be dived at any time; it lies just outside, sheltered by the small bay, the main tidal stream. The back eddies can prove to be useful in clearing away any sediment churned by diving activities maintaining good visibility throughout the dive. Be warned that divers can easily get 'carried away' in their search for artefacts that time can slip away and at 26/7m (depending upon the state of the tide) running into unplanned deco is often an unwelcome experience.

Amongst the boulders you will find numerous fan works and common sea urchins, whilst the sandy bottom is covered with brittle stars and dahlia anemones.



Getting to the site (use the same coordinates as for the Nimrod – 51:54:36N, 05:17:54W), the wreck is merely 50/60 metres further west. Using your depth/echo sounder to good effect, i.e. find the gully, drop a shot and if this lies in some sand – bingo! You've found it. Launching from Porthgain is easy, particularly on a neap tide. The wreck site is approximately 5Km in a South Westerly direction, look out for the

sledges (3 groups of rocks that show at half tide) the first of which can be found just outside Aberiddy bay, otherwise it's a clear run down.

For interest: The Brown Bess is the name for a long-serving series of flintlock smoothbore muskets that saw action with the British Army from the early 1700s through to the end of the Napoleonic Wars (early 1800s) and while traditionally associated with the campaigns in Portugal, Spain and Europe, also saw action in North America. The name 'Brown Bess' was used at the time as a term of poetic endearment, rather than a proper name, just as we might call a car an 'Old Banger'. While the exact origins of this nickname have been obscured over the years, it may have been due to the colour of the walnut stock as prior to this weapon, stocks were generally painted black. The widespread use of the name seems to have arisen in the mid-1800s when large numbers of flintlocks were retired from active service and bought by gun collectors who used the term as a generic name for a variety of weapons such as the long land, short land and the even shorter India pattern models. The primary differences between the Long Land and Short Land were, quite simply, the length of the barrel (42in versus 46in) and the metal ramrod as opposed to a wooden one. Even though production of the Long Land Pattern Flintlock Musket did not stop until 1790, the majority of muskets in use by the start of the Napoleonic Wars were of the Short Land variety.

During the mid-1790s, a third pattern of flintlock musket arrived, the India Pattern, which differed from the Short Land by being slightly lighter (just under 9lbs) and shorter (39in) as well as having no thumb plate and only three pipes for the ramrod. Over 3 million of these were built and the only major change was the replacement of the original swan-necked cock for a reinforced version in 1809. With so many being made, examples of this weapon were still in use by the British Army and the militia in 1850. Both the Royal Navy and Royal Marines had their own muskets which evolved in parallel to the weapons used by the British Army, although they had the common elements of being shorter, having two ramrod pipes and a flat butt-plate with a square-cornered butt. They came with either a bright finish or a blackened ('japanned') finish

Furniture (fittings): Brass;

Calibre of bore: .75in;

Calibre of projectile .71in;

Projectile: One ounce lead ball;

Maximum range: circa 250 yards;

Maximum effective range (100 round volley): 150 - 200 yards;

Effective maximum range (Single round): 100 - 150 yards;

Optimum range: 75 - 100 yards;

Weight: 9lbs, 11oz (Small Land);

Optimum effect: At 30 yards, will penetrate 3/8" of iron or 5 inches of oak;

Rate of fire (Optimum): 4 - 5 rounds per minute;

Rate of fire (actual): 2 - 3 rounds per minute;

Rate of misfire: 20 - 40%.