

CHECK YOUR BEARINGS: inspecting one of the massive prop shaft support bearings [main photo]; swimming along the prop shaft [inset]

THURLESTONE, DEVON

Where can you find a huge wreck in shallow water, accessible from shore? **Martin Davies** knows just the place

There are not many places I can think of in the UK where you can dive the remains of a 6,000-tonne wreck from the shore. The Devon village of Thurlestone can offer some great shore diving for any level of diver, plus the wreck of the Louis Sheid, a steamer that ran aground after escaping U-boat U-47 in December 1939.

Thurlestone Beach is situated right next to the golf course just south of the village and is easy to find. Turn into the golf course and park in the upper field; there is no charge and generally lots of room. From here, it is a short walk to the entrance to the beach. Two dives are generally done here: to the left, the wreck of the Louis Sheid lies just beyond the headland, and to the right is an undulating rocky reef. Both dives are excellent, although most will head for the Louis Sheid first.

From the beach, head due south towards the headland. After a short swim of around 200m, you should start to see debris, depending on the state of the tide and how much beach is exposed. If your navigation is good, this debris should be followed by three huge boilers in 8m of water. Your journey will have taken you from a sandy beach to rocky outcrops covered in kelp in 5m, and then finally down to 10m where the wreck lies. Underwater navigation can be challenging, but generally the visibility on the site is good to excellent. We had around 5m on the day of our dive, but it is more usual to expect 8m to 10m during settled periods and excellent water clarity.

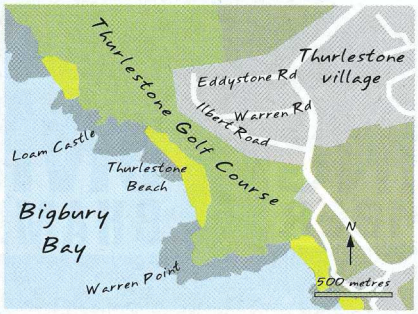
The wreck lies in 10m of water, lying roughly north–south. Over the years, the wreck has been salvaged, but a lot of the ship still remains to be seen. There is an abundance of marine life on and around the site – large ballan wrasse hide in sheltered areas of the wreck, while crabs and lobsters can be seen tucked in cracks and crevices.

The highlight of the dive has to be the engine and its component parts. The engine room and surrounding bulkheads have long since dissolved, making this an easy dive – no risky penetration is needed in order to see the engine. Three huge boilers still



stand proud of the sea bed; and the large steam engine block, although collapsed in half to the rear of them, can still be made out along with rods, crank shaft, steam valves, winches and pulleys. As you swim along the line of the ship, the length of the prop shaft seems to go on for ever and you wonder when it will end. It is still fully supported and stands more than a metre proud of the sea bed.

You finally arrive at the stern, which is recognisable though broken up. The propeller is long gone, but the large rudder and post can still be seen on the sandy bottom. With the wreck being so shallow, the light from the surface makes for some great photography when the visibility is good. Some local clubs also do a night dive on the site, although this must be only attempted when the best conditions allow it and when you have completed several previous dives in daylight to fully familiarise yourself with the site. It is best dived in the summer months when winds are light – a moderate wind from the south or southwest generates a swell that can make entry and exit from the beach difficult.



NEED TO KNOW

DIRECTIONS
Thurlestone can be reached from the A379. The address of the golf club is Ilbert Road, Thurlestone, Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 3NY.

ALTERNATE ACCESS
The site can be reached from the other side of the headland; it's a longer walk but shorter underwater navigation.

PARKING
There is ample free parking at the golf club, and an alternative car park at the top of the hill – a small charge may apply during the summer season.

FACILITIES
Facilities are limited. There are local shops in Thurlestone, and the post office and general store offer food and drinks. Public conveniences are located opposite the entrance to the golf club.

WRECK POSITION
Latitude: 50°15.658'N
Longitude: 003°51.831'W

AIR FILLS
There are no local filling stations, so head to Salcombe or Plymouth.

Aquanauts, Plymouth • 01752 228825 • **www.aquanauts.co.uk**

Phoenix Charters, Salcombe (air only) • 01548 842840 • **www.phoenixcharters.co.uk**

In Deep, Plymouth • 01752 405400 • **www.indeep.co.uk**

CLUBS
For a list of local branches, see **www.bsac.com**



BROKEN GEAR: a flywheel and gear cog from one of the steam winches now lie alongside the hull [right]