Submarine A1 Licensee report 2020

By

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Overview

This year has been an extremely unusual year, the impact of COVID 19 has been a major disruption to diving operations at the beginning of the season and has carried through to the rest of the year with numbers being limited to 4 diver's maximum on any given trip to maintain social distancing guidelines. The weather at the beginning of the season was superb and sadly we were unable to dive, not only were the conditions calm but the visibility in the area was unprecedented, with the water looking more like tropical in Portsmouth harbour than the normal green water. The wreck was eventually visited in July and I was made aware of some pots at the stern by one of the dive team. I had not seen them myself at that point as I was concentrating my dive at the bow with a marine biologist.

Diving

The wreck have been visited 5 time in total this season solely by members of Southsea Sub-Aqua Club. Dives organised by NAS we cancelled either due to weather or divers pulling out due to the COVID situation.

The site was first dived on the 27th July this year by SSAC. Visibility on the site was about 3m metres and some divers had difficulty in finding the site despite the shot line being near to the wreck. A report was made of a pile of pots at the stern, two ropes were entangled around the stern of the vessel and these lead to a group of 4/5 large pots.

The next visit took place on the 29th September, two dives were undertaken by SSAC on each of the tides. On dive 1 I made my way to the stern to investigate the pots that had been reported previously. On dive 2 the pots were photographed and videoed. Visibility was around 3-4m and the water quality reasonable.

The next visit was on the 19th October, the purpose of the visit was to collect more information about the pots. Visibility was poor about 0.5m and conditions very challenging, this was a large spring tide and there was a huge amount of turbidity in the water column, we had also had a lot of rain the previous week.

Condition of wreck

The majority of the wreck remains virtually the same as previous years, however there is now signs of damage to the outer hull plating where ropes are connected to the hull at the stern which lead to a group of fishing pots. The pots are identified as large metal rectangular cuttlefish pots around 1m x60cm x 60cm. There is no identification float attached near the group, it would appear to have been cut off and there is a large amount of rope now tangled

up in the group of pots. The pots are connected to the wreck by a heavy rope which appears to then return to the pots. The rope is connected to the submarine and is wrapped around and entangle around the rear stub of what was the connection for the communication wire, see figure 2 below. As the pots are damaged and the hull is physically damaged and the rope firmly entangled around the submarine, this looks like a recovery of the pots that has gone wrong. The rope is firm and well connected, any recovery will not be straight forward and will probably require it to be cut. It is not clear how the pots have got so close to the site, the wreck was last visited in September 2019 and there was no sign of the pots close to the wreck then. This incident has occurred between September 2019 and July 2020 and would appear to be a deliberate act of fishing within the exclusion zone. All pots appear to have collected a reasonable amount of marine growth and so it would appear that they have been underwater for several months. It is difficult to estimate but the group of pots would appear to be 4 to 5 but some are damaged and with a large amount of rope present in the pile it would be dangerous to disturb and there would be a risk of entanglement and entrapment. There is another rope that is connected to the large group and this connects to another single pot of the same type which is around 5m away, this pot is in good condition. See image below (figure 3) the rope then carries on for what is estimated about 30m and another pot is then found, also in reasonable condition. The rope appears to be trapped under



Figure 1- main group of pots, some are damaged and excess rope



Figure 2 – the rope from the pots id connected around the stern of A1

a couple of large stone blocks and again there is an excess of rope and chain that is connected to the pot but abandoned. This would appear to be the first or last pot in the string, there is no sign of a float, see figure 4.



Figure 3 - this pot is away from the main group



Figure 4 - the last pot in the string, rope appears to be trapped under large stone

The Pots and damage to the wreck was reported to Historic England on the 5th October 2020 and investigations are ongoing with Sussex IFCA.

Alison James who previously had discussions with Sussex IFCA has been in contact with then again and has reported the issue to them and also has had some discussion about identification of the owner of the pots. All licenced fishing pots now have to be tagged up with a special tag which is issued by IFCA. The tags should be attached to each and every pot

in the string along with marking on the floats. Since the floats are not present these is no chance of tracing the owner from the floats. After learning that the pots should be tagged individually a closer inspection of some of the previous photographs has revealed the presence of at least one tag on one of the pots (see figure 4).



Figure 5- Identification tag on fishing pot

Due to the second lock down the site has not been revisited and so the tag has not been interrogated or retrieved. Once there is a relaxing of lockdown and a suitable break in the weather, I will be visiting the site to get more details and forward the on to Historic England.

Damage to the wreck

The Wreck has sustained some damage in the stern hull area to what was an undamaged Historic wreck. The hull plating has been broken around the stern area where the remains of the communications mask once was, there are some large pieces about 12” long that are no longer attached to the wreck, this is fresh damage and you can clearly see where the pieces of metal have broken off and the metal id exposed where the concretion has also come off. There is evidence of damage on both Port and Starboard sides. The damage to the Port side does look greater see images below (figures 7 and 8. Figure 9 show the ropes traveling over the hull and you ca nee another piece of plate has begun to crack and will probably not to there on the next visit. A short video has also been made and sent to Historic England.



Figure 6- Damage to hull plating Starboard side



Figure 7- Damage to Port side Hull plating

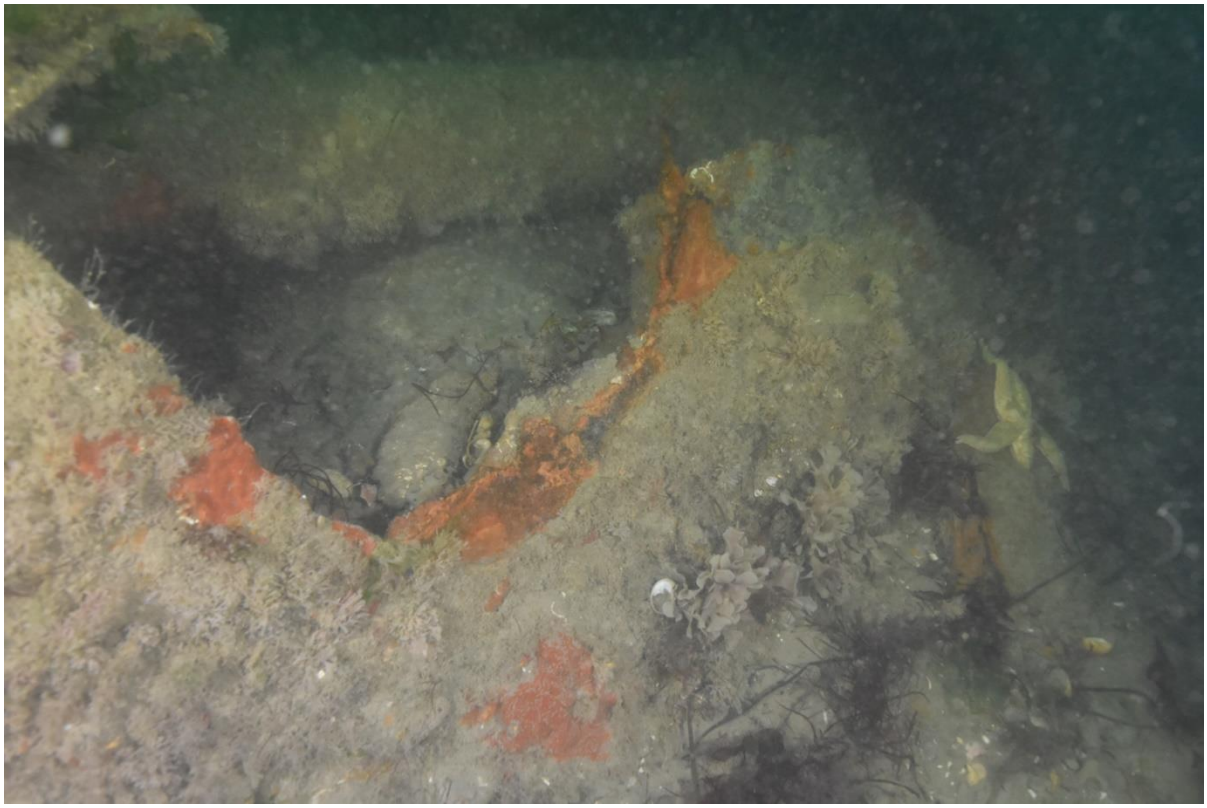


Figure 8- Damage to Port side hull showing damaged area now rusting



Figure 9- Ropes traveling over stern area, it can be clearly seen another piece of Hull is about to break off.

The mass of rope that lies within the group of pots now had become a possible entrapment hazard and divers should be advised to steer well clear of the pots.



Figure 10- Mass of abandoned rope now in cluster of damaged pots

The Side Scan image below (figure 11) highlights the cluster of pots at the stern of the wreck and also the single one that is 5m away can just be made out.

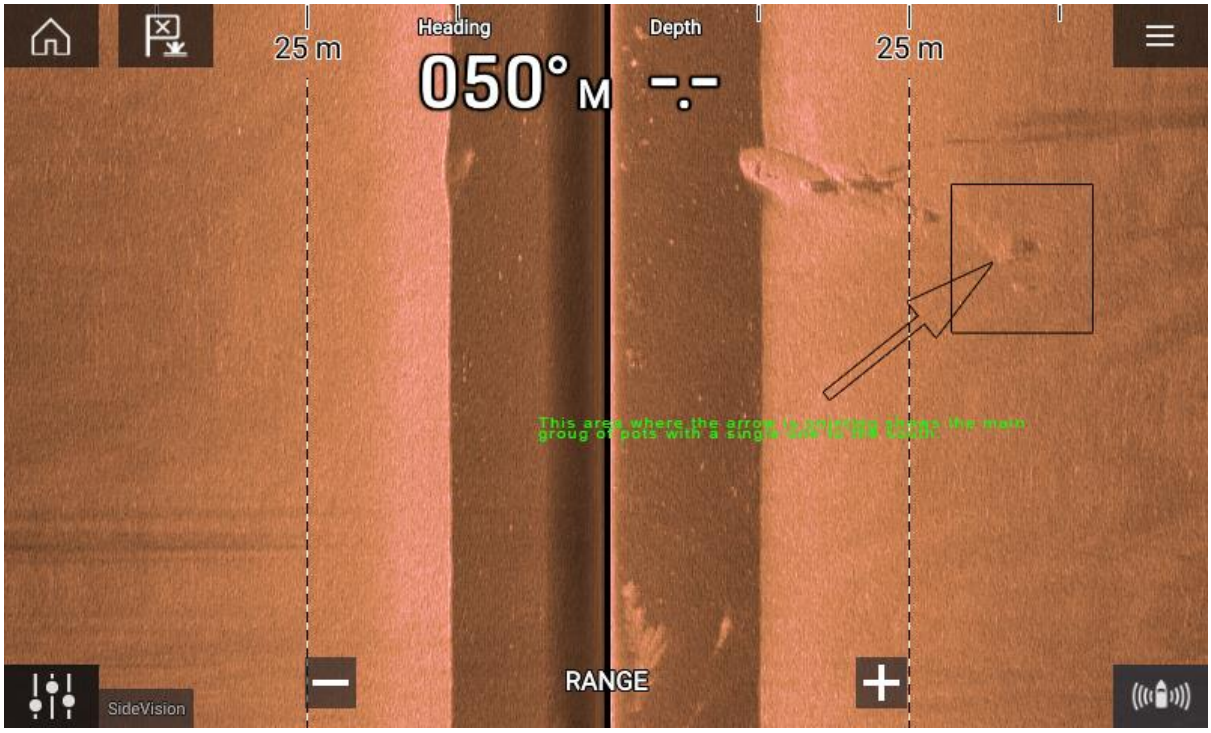


Figure 11- Side scan image ofA1 showing group of pots at the stern

Figure 12 below shows the pots in close proximity to the stern of the submarine.

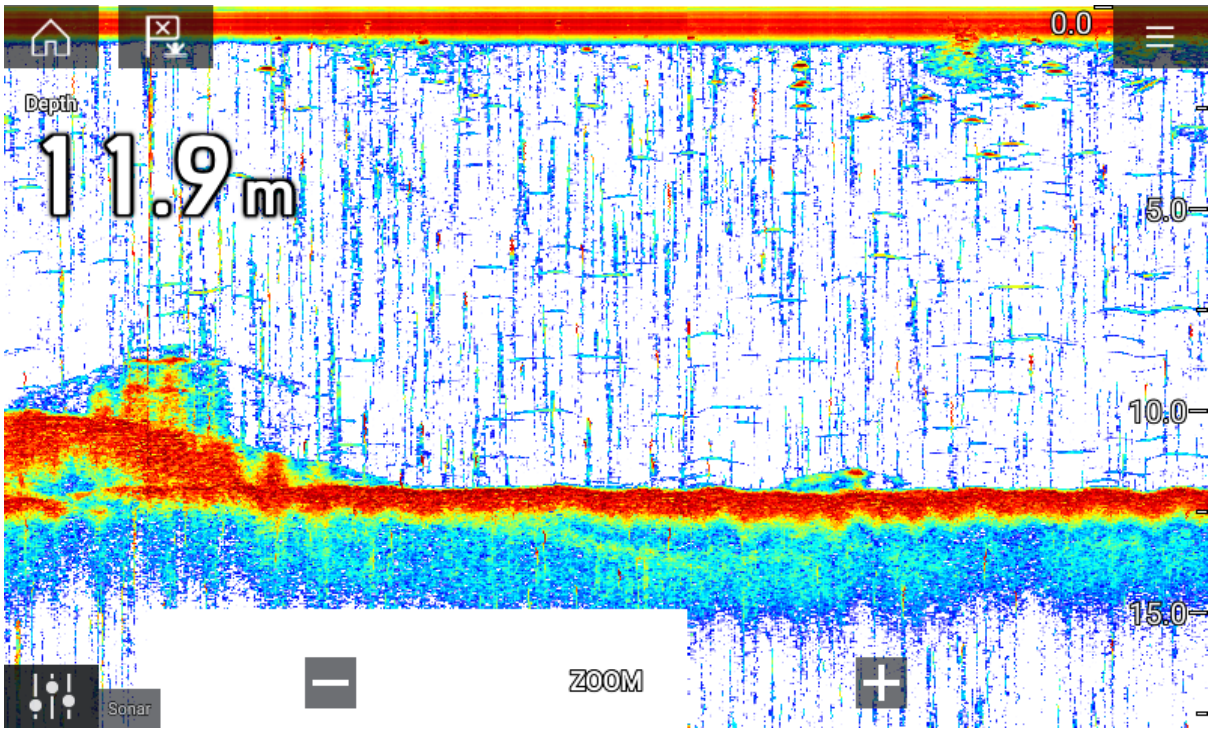


Figure 12 - The group of pots can be seen on this downvision image close to the wreck

Conclusion

Our Historic protected wrecks despite being protected in law are in a very vulnerable place and this season we see another example of how damaging commercial fishing can be and this reinforces the arguments regarding protection and exclusion zones. Whilst the majority of the wreck is in good condition and remains stable considering it has been under the water for 109 years, this action that has taken place demonstrates how fragile they are. A1 is a superb example of a Historic Protected wreck and has remained is amazing condition considering the duration she has been under the water. I would like to think that the perpetrators of this act shall be held responsible and accountable for this Heritage Crime. I am hopeful that an identification tag will be recovered and so action by Historic England can be taken along with an awareness campaign to local fishermen and commercial fishing operators who blatantly disregard the law in the pursuit of profit.