

HOW TO FIND

San Pedro

San Pedro is located in 18 feet of water, approximately 1.25 nautical miles south of Indian Key at latitude 24° 51.802' N, 80° 40.795' W. To avoid anchor damage to the shipwreck and to living corals, please use mooring buoys. Remember to display a “divers down” flag (also when snorkeling). A laminated underwater guide is available from local dive shops to orient divers on a self-guided tour of the preserve.



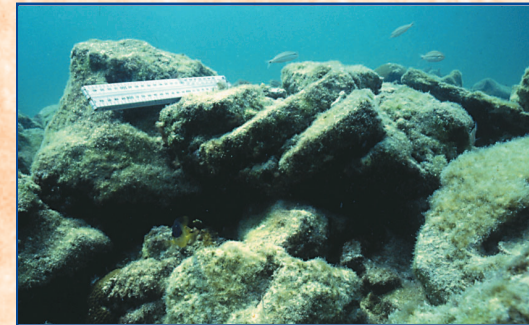
As with all other historical and archaeological sites on public uplands and submerged bottomlands, *San Pedro* is protected by Florida laws prohibiting unauthorized disturbance, excavation, or removal of artifacts. Please help keep the site intact for others.

“Take only photos and leave only bubbles.”



San Pedro Underwater Archaeological Preserve State Park

Today, *San Pedro* is among the most picturesque of the 1733 wreck sites due to her location in a white sand pocket surrounded by turtle grass and the prolific marine life that inhabits her grave. A large mound of ballast stones, 90 feet long and 30 feet wide, contains flat, red *ladrillo* bricks from the ship’s galley. This site is one of Florida’s oldest artificial reefs, host to a variety of sea creatures living amidst the ballast stones and coral heads, and offers a unique opportunity for visitors to appreciate the relationship between a shipwreck and the marine environment. The site supports at least 10 species of living corals, while holes and crevices offer protection for lobsters, crabs, and shrimp. Small fish, including gobies, drums, damselfish, and wrasses, also take advantage of the cover, coexisting with moray eels and grouper in the recesses of *San Pedro*. Hundreds of schooling fish surround the wreck and many species of mollusks hide among the ballast.



Interpretive displays of materials from the 1733 treasure fleet can be seen at the following location:

Museum of Florida History

R.A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough Street, Tallahassee 32399
850.245.6400

For more information call
850.245.6444
Or visit
museumsinthesea.com

Local contact Windley Key Geological State Park

305.664.2540
floridastateparks.org/sanpedro/default.cfm

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

305.852.7717
floridakeys.noaa.gov/wrecks/welcome.html

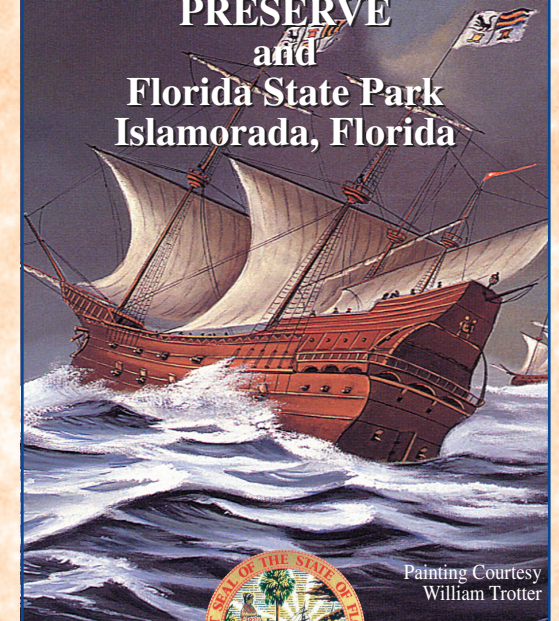


FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Division of Historical Resources
Bureau of Archaeological Research
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0250

San Pedro

UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL PRESERVE and

Florida State Park Islamorada, Florida



Painting Courtesy
William Trotter

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Division of Historical Resources
Bureau of Archaeological Research

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION
Division of Recreation and Parks



SAN PEDRO TRUST

San Pedro

With the Spanish conquests of Mexico and Peru in the early 16th century, increasing amounts of exotic New World commodities began to flow across the ocean to support Spain's colonial empire. Soon, armed corsairs of rival European countries began to lurk on both sides of the Atlantic to seize their share. To counter this threat, Spain devised a convoy system of armed escort galleons and merchantmen sailing to the Caribbean, where the fleet diverged to collect treasure and export goods from New World ports. The ships rejoined in Cuba before sailing back to Spain via the Straits of Florida through the treacherous reefs of the Florida Keys and the Bahama Banks. This armed convoy system protected the Spanish maritime lifeline from privateering; however, there were equally dangerous factors to consider, such as shoals and storms.



Such was the fate of the New Spain fleet that left Havana on Friday the 13th of July, 1733, bound for Spain. Commanded by Don Rodrigo de Torres aboard the *capitana* (flagship) *El Rubi Segundo*, the convoy consisted of three other armed galleons and eighteen merchant ships laden with tanned hides, rare spices, precious jewels, silver, and gold – all of which were needed for the economic survival of Spain. The fleet entered the Gulf Stream, and the next day, as passenger Don Alonso de Herrera Baragan later recalled:

... we discovered the land of the Keys of Florida. At 9:00 that night the wind began to rise out of the north. It continued to freshen to the point where we all knew a hurricane was imminent. We found ourselves close to the said Keys, with the wind and sea so strong we were unable to govern ourselves, and each new gust came upon us with renewed major force. On the 15th, signs were made [among the fleet vessels] to try to arrive back to the Havana, but we were unable to do so for the wind went around to the south without slacking its force or lessening the seas. By 10:30 that night we had all grounded in the said Keys at a distance of 28 leagues in length. This capitana grounded on one called Cayo Largo, two and one-half leagues from shore. I make assurance to Your Lordship that it was fortunate that we grounded for if the contrary had occurred we would all have drowned because the hold was full of water and we were unable to pump it out...

Scattered some eighty miles along the Florida Keys, the New Spain fleet had been swamped by the storm; only one lucky vessel safely returned to Havana. Meanwhile, survivors gathered in small groups on the low islands and built crude shelters from debris that washed ashore. Worried Spanish admiralty officials in Havana received reports of many large ships grounded near a place called “head of the martyrs,” and sent nine rescue vessels laden with supplies, divers, soldiers, and salvage equipment to the scene of the disaster.

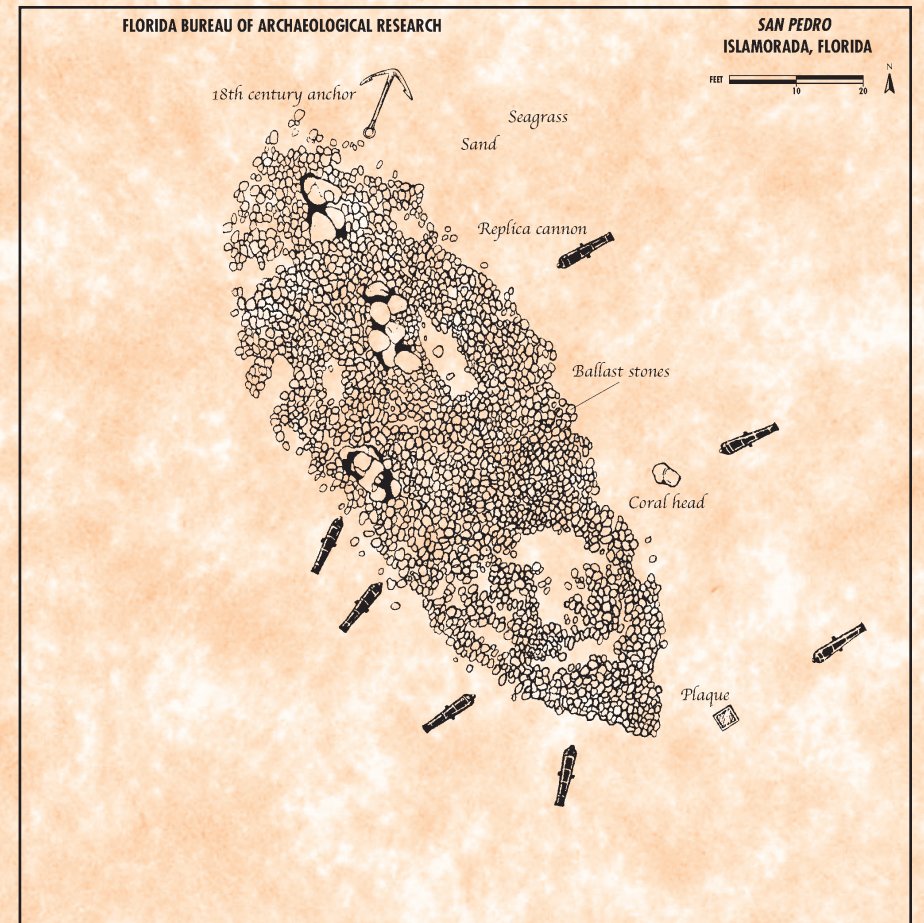
A thorough salvage of the ships was undertaken. Vessels that could not be refloated and towed back to Havana were burned to the waterline so that divers could descend into their holds and so that the wrecks would be concealed from freebooters. The work continued for years and locations of wrecks were charted on an official map. When a final calculation of salvaged materials was made, more gold and silver had been recovered than had been listed on the original manifests, a result of inevitable contraband.

The gravesites of Torres's fleet lay forgotten on the seabed for centuries. In 1937, a fisherman led professional helmet diver Art McKee to a ballast pile and cannons in 27 feet of water off Plantation Key where McKee found odd-shaped, coral-encrusted lumps with metal adhering to them which later were identified as sulphided silver coins. A gold coin stamped 1721 indicated that the ship had been lost sometime after that date. He wrote to the Archives of the Indies in Seville, Spain, for copies of documents describing the loss of Torres's fleet in 1733. Among the materials he received was a Spanish salvor's chart showing locations of the wrecks, one of which was the site known to McKee, *El Rubi*, the *capitana* of the fleet. McKee began taking tourists to the site in a glass-bottomed boat; in the days before scuba, he allowed some visitors to wear his diving helmet and, for 10 dollars, they could explore the wreck themselves. McKee realized the historical

and archaeological importance of his finds. In 1947, with a warehouse full of artifacts, he built and opened the first museum in the world devoted to shipwrecks and sunken treasure on Plantation Key, a few miles from the sunken *capitana*.

The wreck of *San Pedro*, one of the merchant vessels of the fleet, was discovered in the 1960s. The 287-ton, Dutch-built galleon was carrying 1,600 pesos in Mexican silver and numerous crates of Chinese porcelain when she wrecked almost a half-league from Indian Key. Her discovery in Hawk Channel under 18 feet of water led to the recovery of small silver coins dated between 1731 and 1733; cannons trapped under the ballast stones also were raised. Elements of the ship's rigging and hardware, as well as remnants of her cargo, were unearthed by salvors.

In 1988, the wreck of *San Pedro* was chosen to become Florida's second Underwater Archaeological Preserve and her remains were carefully mapped by state archaeologists and students from Florida State University



and Indiana University. Together with a bronze plaque, an anchor dating from the 1733 fleet disaster was placed on the wreck site, as were replica cement cannons to replace those removed by salvors. *San Pedro* is part of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Shipwreck Trail and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.

