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DIVER

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MARCH 2021

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A DAY IN ARRAN

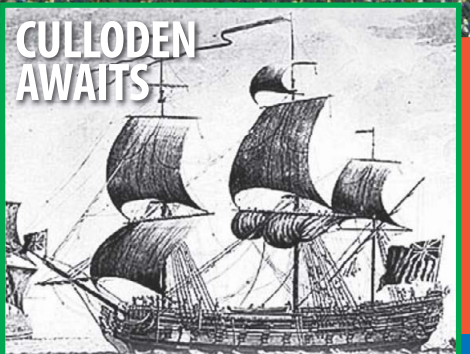
Where divers are making a difference

SO IS IT OCEAN ART?



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Shore-dive takeaways

I'VE LEARNT HARD LESSONS about shore-diving. Number one takeaway for me is that the floppy dive-boots I'm happy to wear on a dive-boat don't work out well on a rocky beach.

The pain when you find that so much sharp-edged stone lies between you and salvation, both on entry and exit, doesn't go away that quickly. It can really spoil the fun. Firm soles are a good investment.

I have also learnt that leaving vehicle keys cunningly concealed on a wheel-arch is not a great idea, because thieves aren't stupid.

On the other hand, I can't endorse the strategy of a beach-diver I came across who swore by burying his keys in sand marked by a "distinctive rock". The time it turned out that his chosen rock had not been *that* different from the rest caused him a sea of troubles.

Steve Warren tests a product this month that solves the problem by allowing you to take all your valuables along on your shore-dive. What could go wrong?

I have discovered that it's a good idea not to be so eager to embark on a shore-dive that you overlook your exit strategy. Whether conditions change or not while you're under water, you might find yourself unable to clamber out the same way you cheerfully strode in.

Spare yourself a battered body and a red face – I learnt that one quite early on, after a brutal wave- and cliff-slapping.

The combination of slippery stones or steps with lively surge can also cause loss of dignity while doing something as simple as putting on your fins. Doesn't happen from a boat. Then there's navigation. You dutifully select landmarks, take your bearings, but it's remarkable how time, tidal action and the distractions of a good dive can mislead...

TWO NURSES EXPERIENCED shore-diving pitfalls in separate incidents recently (see *News*), though I'm glad to say that both outings ended happily. Despite the various banana-skins I love shore-diving, especially in those parts of the world where you can drive around independently, dipping in and out of the sea as the fancy takes you.

We feature a fair bit of boatless diving this month, and I only hope that travel restrictions allow you to partake before too long.

Lisa Collins wrote last year about her joyous first dives when lockdown was lifted in Grand Cayman, where she is now based. She follows up with a colourful guide to one of the few parts of the world where many miles of shore-diving is possible direct from the capital city.

Ross McLaren shore-dives a lot, and this month joins the proactive divers of Arran. Mike Salvarezza and Christopher Weaver swim out to the historic *Culloden* wreck in New York state, where access to the beach meant rappelling down until a set of steps was built for divers.

I've sampled the excellent diving on Manta Diving's house-reef in Madeira, and was once lucky enough to see a monk seal in a cavern accessed from shore there. Daniel Brinckmann reports on this dive destination, which came into its own last year.

I've learnt something else about shore-dives. Great as all the classic boat-accessed sites might be, sometimes it's those long, unhurried experiences when you slip out to a house-reef with your camera that stick in the memory.

FIRST IN



STEVE WEINMAN,
EDITOR



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Suite B, 74 Oldfield Road, Hampton,
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Publisher & Editor-in-Chief
Nigel Eaton nigel@divermag.co.uk
Editor
Steve Weinman steve@divermag.co.uk
Production Manager
George Lanham george@divermag.co.uk
Technical Editor
Steve Warren mediadiversteve@gmail.com
Sales & Marketing Manager
Alex Khachadourian alex@divermag.co.uk
Advertising Consultant
Jenny Webb jenny@divermag.co.uk
Publishing Consultant
Tony Weston tony@divermag.co.uk
Webmaster
Mike Busuttilli webmaster@divernet.com
Subscriptions Manager
subscriptions@divermag.co.uk
Marketing, Sales & **DIVER** Bookshop
Dorothy Eaton dorothy@divermag.co.uk
uwp-mailshop@divermag.co.uk
Accounts
Julian Auty accounts@divermag.co.uk

EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS
Archaeology **Dave Parham**
Freediving **Marcus Greatwood**
Law **Prof Mike Williams**
Medicine **Dr Ian Sibley-Calder**
Photography **Saeed Rashid, Brian Pitkin**
Ships **Richard Larn**
Wrecks **Rex Cowan**

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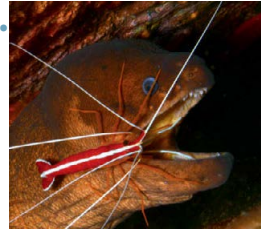
the magazine that's straight down the line...

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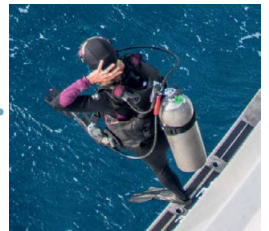
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COVER IMAGE: Grouper in Madeira,
by Daniel Brinckmann

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HMS CULLODEN

& THOSE REVOLTING AMERICANS



An intriguing piece of history lies in shallow but tricky waters off the New York

coast – text and photography by **MICHAEL SALVAREZZA** and **CHRISTOPHER WEAVER**

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY

War defined the beginnings of the independent USA and it was a struggle of historic proportions both on land and at sea. Throughout the colonies in North America, battles were fought and lives were lost.

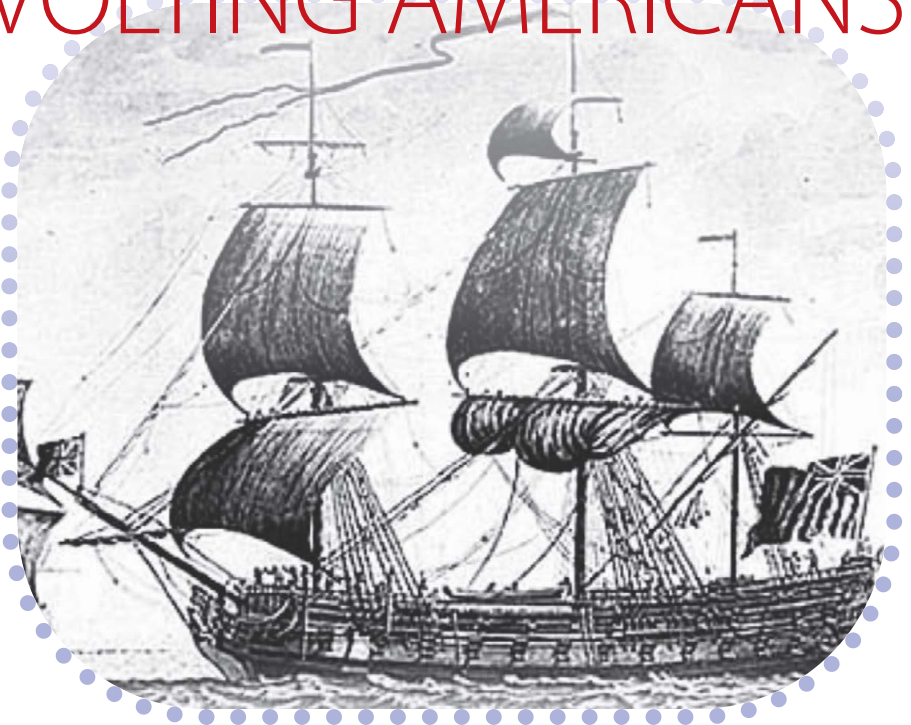
Long Island, New York, is home to numerous sites central to the fight for independence.

They might not be well-known in the UK today but the Battle of Brooklyn, the attack on Fort Mifflin and the Culper Spy Ring are all examples of how Long Island influenced the war, and the fight there extended to its surrounding waters.

In early July, 1780, a French fleet of 13 frigates and seven “ships-of-the-line” – equipped to fight in the line of battle – arrived in the harbour at Newport, Rhode Island to assist the American Patriot army in their battle with the British. Along with

the ships came artillery and 6000 troops.

That September, 14 British warships reached Long Island to reinforce a small fleet in Gardiner’s Bay, and HMS *Culloden* and three other vessels were stationed there the following month. 🇬🇧



Above: HMS *Culloden*.

Below: Exploring the *Culloden*’s hull





ROBERT AUTERI

They were to patrol the area between Montauk Point and the Nantucket Shoals and defend against any French ships trying to enter this area. Essentially, they formed a blockade.

Launched on 18 May, 1776, *Culloden* had a 52m gun-deck designed to carry 74 guns and a crew of 650 under the command of Captain George Balfour.

In her first years of service she had operated off Cape Finisterre in Spain, preying on enemy munition ships bound for the American colonies; and off the British coast, where she was ordered to intercept and destroy all merchant vessels found to be trading with the Americans' ally France.

She also saw action off Gibraltar, Mauritius and the Caribbean island of St Christopher (now St Kitts) before being sent to North America to fight the revolting Colonialists.

On 20 January, 1781, word was received that the French were preparing to leave Newport and run through the blockade. HMS *Culloden* and two other vessels set sail from Block Island Sound in pursuit.

On 23 January in a severe winter storm with blinding snow the ships became disorientated. Mountainous seas battered *Culloden* as her crew tried in vain to sail towards Rhode Island.



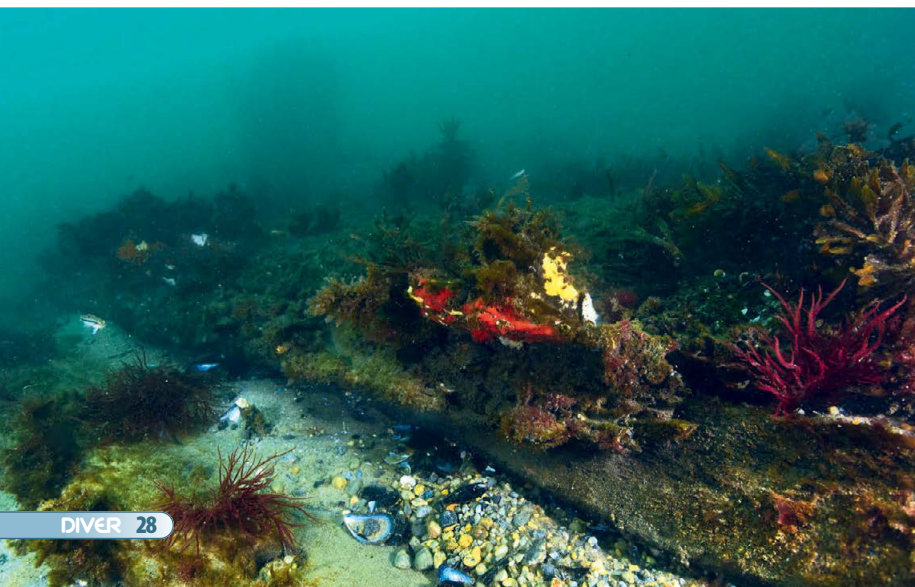
Above, clockwise from top left: The large boulder is the main landmark – the steps behind save what was once a tricky descent; rappelling was the only way to reach the beach before the steps were built; three cannon on the seabed.

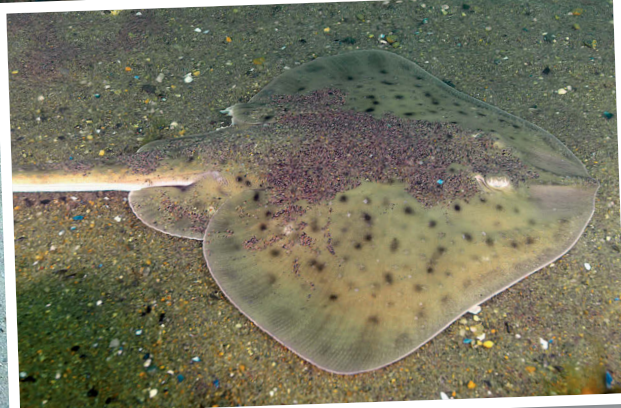
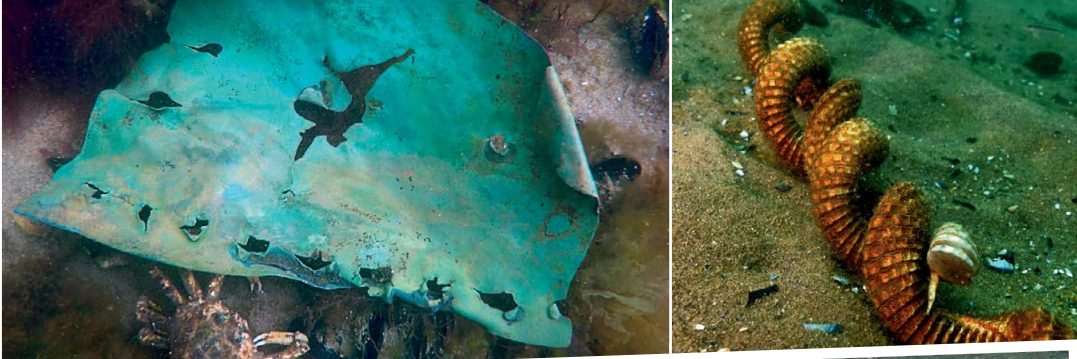
One of the look-outs shouted over the gale that land was close by but it was too late – *Culloden* had run aground.

The crew could barely make out the shoreline, but were convinced that they had hit Block Island. At daybreak they realised that they were actually off Will's Point on the south shore of Fort Pond Bay

in Montauk, Long Island. Not far from Gardiner's Bay, the ship had been blown back there by the storm.

Efforts to free the ship proved fruitless, and Captain Balfour ordered all valuable material to be removed. The *Culloden* was extensively salvaged over the following weeks, and finally came to rest in around





Once underway, you descend along a gradually sloping bottom to the required depth. The water could be clear or very murky, depending on the prevailing wave action. The gale that sank the *Culloden* is evidence of how strong such action can be in the area. Visibility can range from next to nothing to 6m.

Sometimes, after significant storms, the entire outline of the wreck can be found, and careful observation will reveal its shape as you swim over the decomposing timbers. Even at such times the exposed portions rarely rise more than a few inches from the sand. A small deviation from the compass heading can cause a diver to miss the site completely.

IT TAKES A KEEN EYE to spot some of the interesting artefacts. On the north side of the wreckage are five cannon, each one with the main body pointing down and buried in the sand.

The exposed piece, known as the cascable, is almost indistinguishable from a seaweed-covered rock but the distinctive knob betrays it to the trained eye.

Sharp-eyed divers can spot cannonball imprints beside the wreckage and imagine the fury of battle.

On one dive we came across remnants of copper sheathing, used to protect the wooden sides of the vessel, after a strong storm had disturbed the site.

The *Culloden* is a protected site on the National Register of Historic Places, so it is illegal to remove anything. It was Long Island's first underwater park.

Fort Pond Bay is heavily used by leisure boaters and anglers. Personal watercraft can also zoom by on summer days, so a diver's flag is a requirement.

Culloden's final resting place sounds an easy dive, but the difficult shore entry, sometimes marginal visibility and shifting sands make it a greater challenge than it would appear. But it's worth it.

This historic wreck connects us back over two centuries to when the British and upstart Americans fought a war that would eventually change the world. █

5m of water not far offshore.

Her companion ships had fared only marginally better. The *Bedford* was heavily damaged and de-masted, while the *America* was blown far off course and ended up off the Virginia Capes, taking almost two weeks to return to the area after the storm.

The French fleet suffered less because the ships had turned back to port before the storm could damage them.

Captain Balfour was honourably acquitted at the subsequent court-martial, and Will's Point was renamed Culloden Point.

AFTER THE WAR, the story of HMS *Culloden* disappeared into the pages of history, its remains lying in the shifting sands of Fort Pond Bay for more than 200 years. Often it's completely buried, and sometimes only a few timbers are left exposed.

Although shallow this is a difficult wreck to locate, but HMS *Culloden* remains one of Long Island's premier dive targets. In years past the first obstacle was being able to access the beach from the steep bluff overlooking it. Intrepid divers

would lower equipment on ropes and rappel the sheer wall to reach the shore.

Because of safety concerns, a straight staircase was constructed so that divers could easily reach the beach, but this was destroyed over the years by storms and hurricanes. Divers returned to rappelling the bluff wall.

Today a multi-level staircase with a landing halfway down giving divers a place to rest or stage gear makes access easy. It was installed in the summer of 2019 by the town of East Hampton and local advocacy group the Long Island Diver's Association.

Once down divers need to locate a large boulder at the waterline and take a compass heading of 330° to locate the wreck, which lies 46m out.

The shoreline is littered with seaweed-covered rocks and boulders, and scrambling over them in very shallow water in full dive-gear is strenuous and can also be treacherous.

Great care is needed before reaching water deep enough to begin the dive. Some divers refer to this as "walking over wet bowling balls", and for this reason it's a dive best done at high tide.

Above, clockwise from top left: Copper sheathing found on the wreck site; spiral egg-case of the northern moon snail; a rosette skate in the sand near the wreck; imprint from a cannonball.

Below, from far left: The exposed portion of the hull is overgrown with marine life; most of the wreck lies below the sand; the cascable is the visible portion of the cannon; Christopher Weaver photographs the *Culloden* remains.

