

References

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A further note on the *Belgica* project

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ABSTRACT. Further progress is reported concerning the preservation of *Belgica*, currently a wreck in Norwegian waters. A plan is currently being developed for furthering this aim.

In the previous issue of this journal, a report was presented concerning the *Belgica* Society, a body recently established with the aim of preserving the wreck of *Belgica*, and to examine the possibilities of the recovery and restoration of this famous vessel (Loy 2006).

A delegation from the society visited Norway in August 2006 in order to investigate the state of the wreck and to initiate discussions concerning the legal and administrative problems surrounding the possible recovery of the ship. As reported by Kjaer (2005), the vessel now lies in Norwegian territorial waters near Bruvik having been sunk in the Norwegian campaign of 1940. She still has on board the British explosives that she was then transporting. The wreck is protected under the Norwegian Cultural Heritage Act and official authorisation is required for any operations to take place on it. Through the Belgian Embassy in Oslo, the society established contacts with the Directorate of Cultural Heritage and with the Royal Norwegian Navy, which has responsibility for the clearance of mines and explosives in Norwegian waters.

During the course of discussion, it became clear that salvage would only be permitted if a comprehensive plan of action was submitted to, and approved by, the Directorate. This would require a detailed description of the relics, the possibilities of raising them and, very specifically, the best way in which to preserve them. Of particular importance is the proposed method of treating

the wooden structures. It would also require a financial plan in which there would be guarantees that the relics would be preserved for the future. No problems are anticipated relating to the removal of the explosives. Very great interest is being shown in this matter by the present owner of the vessel, Kristian Holst, whose family has owned it since 1918, and by the local community, especially the Harstad diving club, the participation of which has been invaluable.

A detailed description of the wreck with a full photographic record has been made. It is in very poor condition and a comparison with a film made by members of the diving club some ten years ago shows very rapid deterioration. Prompt action is therefore crucial. It is also clear that some metallic items (propellers, anchor, capstan, etc.) would be easy to recover, but little is known about the state of the remaining oak structures. How best to preserve the wood remains a major uncertainty.

At a meeting of the *Belgica* Society in October 2006, it was decided to present a two-tiered programme to the Directorate. The first part of the programme would comprise a more detailed archaeological examination of some parts of the vessel, the recovery of those parts that are directly accessible and that do not demand further evaluation for their preservation, and a more detailed study of, for example, the state of the oak ribs and the method of conservation.

The second part of the programme would depend on the results of the detailed study. A more difficult problem presents itself later. This relates to the question of where to store/exhibit the remains of *Belgica*, the possibilities including an already established museum or a new purpose-built one.

It is obvious that the close collaboration already established between Belgium and Norway is essential to the success of the salvage and conservation of these relics, which are a most important part of international polar history.

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