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Sharing Experiences On Improving Public Access to Shipwrecks

By James Spirek

This past January a former co-worker, Della Scott-Iretton of the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research, and I co-organized a symposium titled "Preserves, Parks, and Trails: Interpreting our Sunken Maritime Heritage," for the 2000 Society for Historical and Underwater Archaeology Conference in Québec City, Canada.

The concept under discussion at the symposium was the ways in which managers, avocationals, and preservation-minded organizations have joined forces to improve public access to interpreted underwater archaeological preserves, parks, and trails. The interpretation of these underwater attractions typically seeks to inform the visitor about the cultural significance, structural elements, and environmental setting of a historical shipwreck or other types of sites using illustrative guides, brochures, and ancillary land-based exhibits.

Important goals of this submerged cultural resource management (SCRM) concept are to foster in the visitor a sense of preservation through stewardship, as well as to provide economic benefits to the host community through historical, educational, and recreational tourism. The session brought together 15 graduate students,

professionals, and avocational archaeologists from the U. S., Canada, and Australia to present their work on improving public access to shipwrecks and other intertidal and submerged archaeological sites.

Our session discussant was Roger Smith, Florida State Underwater Archaeologist, who has many years of experience creating preserves in Florida. Smith was an ideal candidate to provide a summation of the session's presentations. Also, Della and I learned the ropes under Roger

tion-oriented organizations. The following nine papers provided practical examples from the United States that included state, federal, avocational, and private initiatives.

Lynn Harris and I, from SCIAA, presented a paper about providing access to divers and non-divers to the state's intertidal and submerged archaeological resources through two heritage trails on the Ashley and Cooper Rivers.

One of the sidelights while organizing this symposium was to make a list of programs that prac-



Shipwreck section recovered in Charleston Harbor by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. (SCIAA photo)

during our stints creating the *USS Massachusetts* and *SS Copenhagen* Underwater Archaeological Preserves in Florida in the early 1990s.

The first three papers in the session focused on ways to more fully interpret sites and to expand relationships with other preserva-

ticed improving access to interpreted and public accessible shipwrecks throughout the world. Based on our efforts to solicit information, we determined that other than in the US, Canada, Israel, and Australia, that this concept has not been implemented elsewhere in the world.