



news update

325 Years Later, Shipwreck Mystery May Be Solved

The depths of the Great Lakes are home to thousands of shipwrecks, most lost to history. Now, perhaps the most archaeologically significant of all, – **the 325-year old Griffon, built by the legendary French Explorer, Rene-Robert Cavalier, Sieur de La Salle** – may have been located by explorer Steve Libert and team, in northern Lake Michigan.

The Griffon (Griffin in English) was the first European-owned ship to sail the upper Great Lakes -- **and the first shipwreck in those waters**. On September 18, 1679, loaded with 6000 pounds of furs, the Griffon sailed from the Island of the Potawatomi, north of present day Door County, Wisconsin. From there the ship vanished, probably wrecked during a storm that began early on September 19, 1679.

Over the past three centuries many explorers, including La Salle himself, have sought the Griffon, without turning up so much as a splinter. But after 28 years of research, study and diving, Libert, president of Great Lakes Exploration, has reason to **believe he's located what may be the bowsprit of the Griffon** in northern Lake Michigan's icy waters.

Working with archaeologists from Chicago's Field Museum, Libert's preliminary attempts to verify the identity of the shipwreck appear promising. The location correlates well with the research of the late Dr. George Quimby, a former Field Museum curator who conducted extensive studies on the Griffon mystery in the mid-20th century. In addition, **"the location is consistent with historical accounts of the Griffon's voyage,"** says Scott Demel, PhD., of the Field Museum.

Further, initial **carbon-dating tests have been performed by Beta Analytic Laboratories of Miami, FL. and the University of Arizona**. "Unfortunately, dates in this period using this technique are somewhat ambiguous," says Demel. "However, the data from the C14 analysis doesn't preclude the possibility that what may be a bowsprit is of sufficient age to be the Griffon."

To conduct test excavations to conclusively identify the wreck, however, will require resolution of some outstanding legal issues. Libert emphasizes that if the vessel is indeed the Griffon, then France will have a strong claim to the wreck. In the meantime, the State of Michigan claims ownership of the bottomlands of Lake Michigan. **Great Lakes Exploration is seeking legal authorization to continue scientific study and exploration of the shipwreck.**

The U. S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan, in which both Great Lakes and the State of Michigan have filed briefs, is delaying issuing a custodial decision, allowing the parties time to work out an agreement. Libert and his partners are currently in negotiations with the State of Michigan to establish a cooperative relationship for exploration of the wreck. **"To best advance the careful study of this potentially unique find, we are striving to create one of the first truly public/private cooperative endeavors since passage of the Abandoned Shipwreck Act of 1987,"** says Richard Robol, attorney for Great Lakes Exploration.

"Great Lakes is committed to protecting the scientific and historical values of the shipwreck, and has asked the federal court to give due consideration to protecting the common heritage of the U.S. and France by allowing the scientific exploration of Great Lakes and the Field Museum to continue without interference," Robol concludes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT LASALLE-GRIFFON.ORG or
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