



Windjammer Wreck



Introduction

The Windjammer Wreck is one of the most important and complete wreck sites in the Dry Tortugas. In its prime the “Windjammer” was a majestic sailing ship, carrying cargoes to worldwide markets. This greyhound of the seas combined impressive size and speed to compete with rival shipping companies during the late nineteenth century. While attempting to sail around the Tortugas in 1907, a harsh winter gale drove the vessel onto the treacherous Loggerhead Reef. Within minutes the Windjammer was a complete loss. Today the wreck offers divers and snorkelers a haunting glimpse of a once-proud sailing ship. The wreck also provides a breathtaking backdrop for a wide variety of colorful reef fish, coral, and marine life.

Window to the Past

The Windjammer Wreck, located less than a mile southwest of Loggerhead Key, has gone by several names over its long history. Its association with the famous class of sailing vessels known as windjammers has led to its more popular, though less accurate name. The Norwegian ship was officially known as *Avanti* when it sank in 1907.

The *Avanti* is an important example of large sailing vessels built relatively late in the age of sail. It combined smooth, traditional architectural lines with newer, more durable building materials. The development of iron hulls in the mid-1850s offered

ship designers significant new possibilities. Iron hulls could be built much larger and cheaper, had greater capacity than wooden vessels of the same dimensions, and were far more durable. Importantly, the use of iron contributed to higher profits, a crucial factor in the highly competitive shipping industry of the late nineteenth century.

Even these structural breakthroughs could not postpone the inevitable. With the birth of steam propulsion, the age of sail was rapidly coming to a close. Large sailing vessels like the *Avanti* were some of the last tall ships built during the romantic age of sail.

Early History

Built in 1875 in Liverpool, England, the three-masted vessel was originally named *Killean*. Large for its day, the *Killean* had a length of 261.4 feet, a beam of 39.3 feet, and a draft of 17.5 feet. The *Killean* had a gross tonnage of 1,862 tons.

The *Killean* was sold in 1894 to the French shipping

company A.D. Bordes & Fils. Renamed *Antonin*, it became part of a large fleet of ships used in the shipment of nitrate fertilizers from Chile to European farmers. After seven years, the *Antonin* was sold for a final time. The new owners, Acties Avanti of Norway, renamed the vessel *Avanti*.

Death of a Ship

The aging *Avanti* was used in its final years as a tramp carrier seeking cargoes wherever available. While in Pensacola the *Avanti* was damaged and stranded during the October 28, 1906 hurricane. Three months later *Avanti* departed Pensacola bound for Uruguay carrying a cargo of lumber. It would prove to be *Avanti's* final voyage.

In the dark, early morning hours of January 21, 1907, heavy winter winds and waves buffeted the *Avanti*. A navigational error while attempting to pass the Dry Tortugas contributed to the crew's misfortune. At 6:44 a.m. the *Avanti* struck the Loggerhead Reef.

The iron hull, nearly as long as a football field, scraped along the jagged coral reef with a sickening

sound. Howling winds muffled the cries of the 19-man crew as they frantically tried to save their dying vessel. Losing the port anchor in an attempt to slow the ship's movement, the crew became desperate. Unsure of the holding power of the windlass, the anchor cable was brought out of the forecandle and wrapped around the starboard bitts.

Taking on water and slowly inching deeper into the rumbling seas, the remaining anchor was dropped to prevent the vessel from slipping off into deep water and sinking. Heavily damaged and stranded, the ship eventually broke apart. Though the crew was saved and much of the cargo later salvaged, the *Avanti* was a complete loss.

Exploring the Site

The *Avanti* is one of many wreck sites within Dry Tortugas National Park. These islands, shoals, and reefs, discovered by Ponce de León in 1513, have been the scene of nearly 300 shipwrecks. The proximity of these reefs to the nearby shipping lanes of the Gulf of Mexico has made them a natural “ship trap.”

The wreck site lies in approximately 18-21 feet of water. The site is in two main wreckage fields. The bow portion, approximately 110 feet in length, lies in a generally east-west direction. It includes the bow, midships, and foremast. The second field, also roughly 110 feet in length, lies in a generally north-south direction. This second field is composed of midships, stern, mizzen, and main mast structures.

The wreckage and its associated coral are fragile. Please do not touch! A mooring buoy is provided for anchoring. If you choose to drop anchor, pick a location that is a safe distance from the wreck site. Make sure that you anchor on a sandy bottom that is free of coral. Fishing is prohibited at the Windjammer Wreck site; you must be at least 100 yards away from the wreckage to fish.

Please remember that all shipwrecks, artifacts, and coral are protected within the park. You are the key to preserving this and other important sites. Only with your help will future generations be able to enjoy the park’s rich maritime heritage.

Windjammer (*Avanti*) Wreck Site

Lat 24 37.413'

Lon 82 56.548'

