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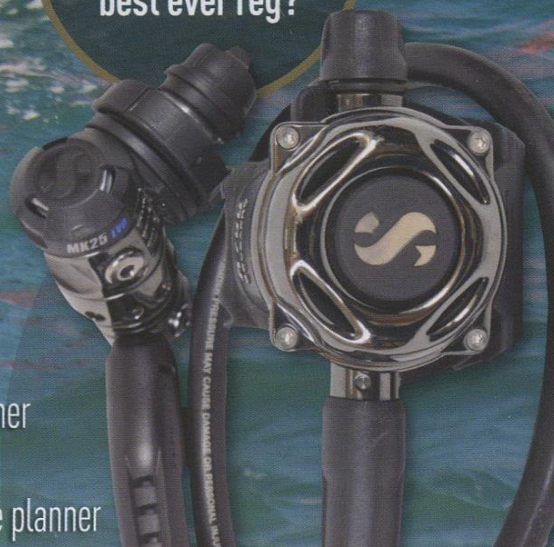


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SS Chadwick

📍 LOCATION: Skye, Scotland

🌊 DEPTH: 23m

👁 VISIBILITY: 10-20m

WRECKED!

📌 Main Image: The prop sticks up from the seabed and is covered in marine life

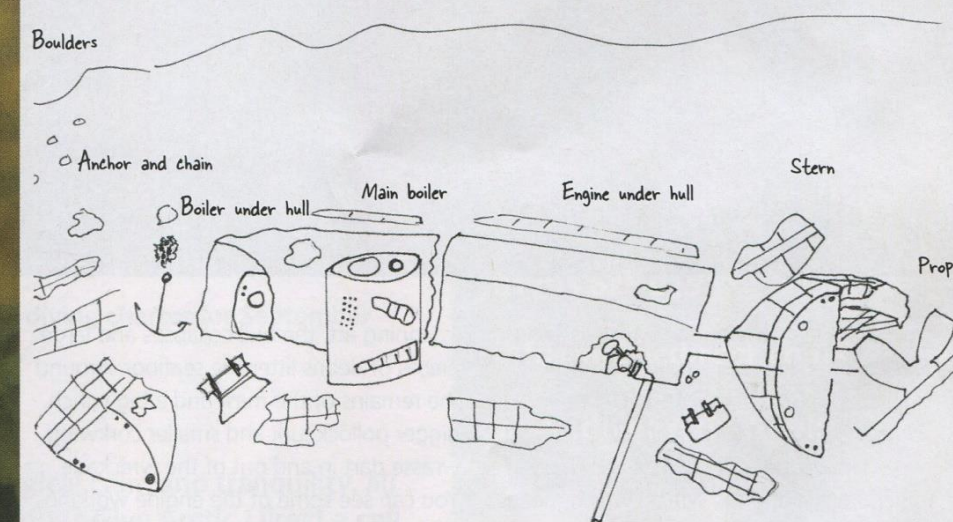
Underwater photographer **Mike Clark** visits the Chadwick – a strangely broken shipwreck that is home to a fantastic host of marine life

📌 Below: Mike Clark was initially baffled by the broken wreckage of the SS Chadwick



The wreck of the Chadwick lies below the huge cliffs of An Ceannaich at the north side of Oisgill Bay, in the north-west of the Isle of Skye. A boat journey here is an adventure in itself with amazing scenery and majestic sea cliffs. Close in to the cliffs, and using a distinctive rock on the shoreline you can see the wreck of the Chadwick on the sounder. You may have to wait for the tide to slacken before you can dive, but luckily this wreck lies in a hot spot for whale, dolphin and porpoise sightings, never mind the sea eagles. Even on neaps, the tide rages along this coast and slack water offers the only window to dive this site.

Dropping down the shot line into 23 metres, the viz can range from 10m to 20m. You'll need some help with initial orientation on the wreck as the way the Chadwick lies on the seafloor makes her one of the most confusing wrecks that I have ever dived.



At first, there is a large expanse of upturned hull. I was expecting a far more broken wreck to explore. I had no idea at first where I was on the wreck, so I chose a direction and finned along the hull side. After about 10m the hull eventually breaks and forms a large arch of steel. Inside the shadow of the hull a small boiler can be seen. The hull disappears somewhat after this and debris covers the seafloor. Passing a large anchor and chain and following the debris trail forward I eventually came to the remains of the bow lying on its side. Due to the strength of the tide there is a good covering of

debris trail back to the small boiler under the hull, but swimming across the wreck you will see the main boiler standing vertically outside the hull. It rises around 4m above the seafloor. It has broken open and this gives the diver a good view of the internal structure. Outside it is covered in anemones and soft corals, and the inside is home to some of the biggest ballan wrasse I have ever seen.

Below: The broken wreckage allows a glimpse into the engine room



plumose anemones on the wreckage and schools of pollock skirt around it.

Thanks to Dive and Sea the Hebrides skipper Gordon MacKay's pre-dive briefing, I now knew where to go. The bow has folded back along the wreck, which means that by finning at an angle off the bow you will fin back into the hull area around the main boiler and mast. It's not far and in good viz you'll see the way.

If in doubt you can always follow the

Finning aft, the hull collapses and large pieces of debris litter the seafloor. Around the remains of the mast and a big winch, bigger pollock lurk and smaller corkwing wrasse dart in and out of the wreckage. You can see some of the engine workings trapped under the hull. Lumps of coal cover the seafloor and it's most likely that this is the remains of the Chadwick's cargo.

Finning further aft following the broken hull, you'll find the prop shaft, covered in

Wrong turn

Swan Hunter of Newcastle laid down the hull of the steamship Chadwick in 1882. For 10 years her voyages as a collier were profitable and uneventful. Then, in July 1892 she ran onto a reef beneath the towering cliffs of An Ceannaich, on the north-west coast of the Isle of Skye.

The wind had strengthened to only a force 5, nothing to worry a 77-metre-long steamship of 1,463 gross tonnes. Heavy dark cloud and fading light reduced the visibility and a tired Captain Kemp seemingly made an error of judgement that would cost him his ship but thankfully no lives.

The nearby Neist point lighthouse didn't come into service until November 1909 – 17 years too late for Kemp and the Chadwick. Kemp had ordered a course change to the north-east. He thought he would be well past Skye and looked to navigate and gain some shelter in the Minch. Bad luck meant that the Chadwick struck the reef right on the point and the bow became stuck fast on the shore. Only a few metres further west and the Chadwick would most likely have sailed straight past and found shelter in Loch Pooltiel.

As it was, the hull was breached and water flooded the forward holds thwarting the crew's attempts to drag the ship off of the rocks. In the morning, at first light a mail steamer passed by the stranded Chadwick and rescued all 19 crew. The steamship also failed to pull the Chadwick off the rocks and a message was sent for a tug to be despatched to aid the stricken ship.

The Chadwick did not remain afloat long enough for the tug to arrive as the water in the holds pulled the Chadwick from the rocks when the tide dropped and she slipped to her resting place, becoming a total loss.

Her bows were still breaking the surface and it would take many storms before they disappeared and took up their current resting place as the ship broke up.

Devonshire cup corals. Following it past more broken hull and mooring bollards you'll come to the main section of stern, which rises up around 3m. Finning around the stern you'll see the wreck's most distinctive feature – the large four-bladed propeller. Two blades have sunk into the sand and the remaining two stick up into the tide. As a result they have an especially dense covering of vivid orange and white dead men's fingers. Looking closely at the prop blades you'll see that they are squared off at the blade tips. I wonder if this was a result of the ship running up on the rocks, or were they designed that way?

Moving around the other side of the stern, and following the prop shaft back to the main section of hull, you'll arrive back at the shot and with a max depth of around 23m there's plenty of time to explore further. If you missed it before, crossing over the hull here will take you to the main boiler and the inquisitive ballan wrasse. Alternatively, moving forward again to the trapped boiler and then following the line of the projected line of the wreck will take you shallower as the rocky seafloor gives way to large kelp-covered boulders. I watched a flatfish as it lay on one of these boulders while I completed my deco stops. It is worth exploring further, as another pair of divers on the trip found a wonderful jewel anemone-covered gully rising from 10m to 5m. Needless to say, this would be the perfect spot to finish off the dive.

If you are into scenic shipwrecks don't miss the Chadwick. Thanks to Dive and Sea the Hebrides and all the guests aboard the Elena C.



④ Above: A male cuckoo wrasse is one of the many fish which have taken up residence on the wreck

⑤ Right: The boiler from the SS Chadwick is slowly rusting away to reveal the inner pipes and tubes



Below: Soft corals and anemones cover much of the wreckage

Essentials

Depth range: 23 metres. The stern is the deeper section and the wreck shallows near the bow.

Finding the wreck: There is a large distinctive slab of rock on shore at the north side of Oisgill Bay and this is where the Chadwick ran aground. GPS supplied by Dive and Sea the Hebrides 57°27.72N 006°47.07W (WGS84)

Tidal information: Slack water (two hours after high water, and two hours after low water, at Ullapool) is essential to dive this wreck. This is said to be more predictable on spring tides and can vary on neaps.

Gas: Air fills can be found at Dive and Sea the Hebrides, in Stein. (See accommodation)

RIB launching: The slipway at Meanish Pier in Loch Pooltiel is just around the corner from the wreck. Follow the road to Glendale and then to Milovaig, where you will find the pier and a good slipway.

There is also a good slipway in Loch Bay beside the Dive and Sea the Hebrides Dive Centre.

Accommodation: I stayed at the Dive and Sea the Hebrides Dive Bunk house in Stein, which was basic but comfortable. Kitchen facilities were good with a large table for post-dive discussions and a good-sized lounge. Dunvegan camp site (www.kinloch-campsite.co.uk Tel: 01470 521 531) is ideal for camping or motor homes. Portree and Dunvegan have a range of hotels and B&Bs.

Eats and treats: Dive and Sea the Hebrides' bunkhouse is self-catering. The Stein Inn serves up good pub food, but even if you eat and drink here don't expect to get the password for the Wi-Fi. It's eight miles to Dunvegan, which has a couple of restaurants, or further to Portree where you will have a choice of Indian, Chinese, fish and chips.

Blown out: If diving with Dive and Sea the Hebrides you really shouldn't be blown out. The Pinnacles dive across the loch and Carnach Mor just up the road are both good sites, as I found out when visiting in stormy conditions. There are countless leeward shores to explore by RIB. If you are stuck ashore, visit the Old Man of Storr, the Fairy Pools, Portree and Dunvegan Castle. Skye has many scenic sites of interest, including beautiful beaches and large waterfalls – there are dinosaur fossils too.

Charter boats: The only local charter boat is the Elena C at Dive and Sea the Hebrides. Skipper Gordon MacKay has a vast knowledge of the area including the best dive sites and the local wildlife. The boat is a little small for 12 divers and there is no lift, so expect a workout on the ladder. The area is visited by liveaboards like the Halton (www.mvhalton.co.uk), which visit in Easter and tend to be based out of Oban.