

Storms uncover shipwreck on Minehead beach.

The recent storms have wreaked well-publicised havoc across much of the country and the South West in particular. However, one of the unexpected side-effects of the appalling weather has been the discovery of a number of archaeological remains. For example, prehistoric human and animal footprints were revealed in peat beds on Manorbier beach near Tenby where high winds had scoured the sand. The submerged Forest of Borth, a prehistoric forest of oak, pine, alder and birch stumps lying beneath the sands of Cardigan Bay was also revealed by the ferocious winds. Such is the extent of the archaeology revealed by the storms that the Museum of London is reported to have secured substantial Heritage Lottery funding to help record those sites uncovered. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a large number of shipwrecks are among the sites which have been revealed. These include at least one such wreck in Somerset, exposed on Minehead beach.



Photos courtesy Julia Race

These remains represent the lower part of a hull with articulated timbers still *in situ*, fastened by wooden tree nails. The remains are reported to extend approximately 70 feet across the beach. The wreck is believed to be the same as one recorded in a similar position following gales in January 1975. At that time a large number of timbers were exposed and the outline of a vessel was stated to be visible. The English Heritage report notes that “there are gaps between horizontal planks below which the vertical timbers appear jagged and eroded. This suggests the presence of more remains below” (NMR Number SS 94 NE 37). It seems that this year’s storms have exposed more of this vessel. The likely date range for the wreck has been identified as 1700-1900 and there are a number of candidates for its identity. At least 40 wooden wrecks are known to have stranded at Minehead during this time frame. Based on the location of the wreck, two of the most likely candidates have been suggested as the *Lamb* and the *America*. The *Lamb* was a British packet which stranded in 1736 while en route from Bristol to Waterford. It was carrying a cargo of troops and civilians of which 78 were lost, many of the bodies being washed ashore at Dunster. The *America* was a Norwegian barque which stranded at Warren Point in 1881 while carrying a cargo of salt. Of these two, the *Lamb* is perhaps the most likely since the hull of the *America* is reported to have been sold where she lay. If she was broken up *in situ*, it seems doubtful that so much well preserved timber would remain. At the time of writing, the wreck is still visible at low tide at an approximate grid reference of 97680 46783.