

## A.J. Goddard: 2010 Field Season

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When the steamer *Excelsior* puffed into San Francisco on 15 July 1897, the world received news of gold in the Yukon Territory, Canada. Before a year had passed, nearly 100,000 men and women attempted to reach the Klondike gold fields, located near Dawson City. Though it was possible to travel by land, a journey upon the Yukon River was often inevitable due to the terrain, and everything from hastily constructed rafts to fleets of steamers from San Francisco set out for the Klondike. Many of these ships and boats wrecked upon the Yukon River and its tributaries, or were abandoned on its shores. In 2008, Yukoner Doug Davidge and the Yukon River Survey team discovered the sternwheeler *A.J. Goddard* in Lake Laberge, Yukon Territory. Prefabricated in San Francisco and carried over the White Pass in segments, the *A.J. Goddard* is the only known surviving example of one of the small Yukon River sternwheelers. Sitting upright

on the lakebed as a result of a 1901 October storm, the ship and its cargo have not moved since the ship's abandonment over 100 years ago (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup>

Following a successful field season in 2009 during which the Yukon River Survey Project team created a basic site plan and preliminary artifact catalogue, the team returned to the *A.J. Goddard* site in June 2010. With the assistance of the Yukon Territorial Government, ProMare, CMAC, the Institute for Nautical Archaeology, Spiegel-TV, BlueView Technologies, OceanGate, and private donors, a 14-person team returned to the site for 10 days. The objectives of the 2010 field season were to complete the baseline survey of the wreck, to create a 3-D site plan using the Blue View BV5000 multibeam sonar, to locate and record all extant artifacts both on and around the ship, and to recover select artifacts for conservation and display at the Yukon Transportation Museum.

Using the 2009 site plan as a guide, the team focused on recording hull construction features, including the machinery, steering systems, and lines. Due to the vessel's small size and shallow draft, it was not possible to penetrate the hull to fully document the interior. However, it was possible to see inside of the vessel with the aid of a light and the accessibility provided by the 12 hatches. The majority of the interior of the vessel was recorded, although a layer of sediment four-inches deep inside the hull prohibited the accurate recording of the bottom. The steering system is still intact and was recorded, with the exception of the missing wheelhouse.

Through the donated support of BlueView Technologies and OceanGate, a tripod-mounted and diver-deployed multibeam

sonar (the BV 5000) was used to create a 3-D site plan. Over the course of two days, divers set the tripod in 18 different locations to create a detailed point cloud of the vessel's shape. While the sonar image of the ship is useful, particularly for a site with very limited visibility, the most valuable aspect of the sonar unit was its ability to see inside remote sections of the hull. Hull construction details that were otherwise inaccessible to divers, such as the spacing of deck beams, were visible and measurable on the computer screen within minutes of the scan. Though data processing is in the preliminary stages, it is possible that hull lines could be extracted from the scans of the hull interior. While it was possible to take partial lines of the hull exterior using a plumb bob and tape measure, the bottom was inaccessible due to sediment deposited around the exterior. Taking slices of the scanned data may allow the hull lines to be reconstructed from the 3-D model.

Though some artifacts lie on the deck, most are scattered around the vessel in a debris field extending at least ten meters in all directions. One hundred artifacts were recorded using trilateration and photography, though more are still scattered around the site. Divers recovered 28 artifacts for exhibit in Whitehorse, including some surprising finds (fig. 2). A record player and two and a half records were recovered, along with clothing, full bottles of ink and vanilla, and a prohibition era bottle that was tossed onto the site decades after the wrecking event.

The 2010 field season filled many gaps in our knowledge about the *A.J. Goddard* and the vessels of the Klondike Gold Rush. It has become evident that the hull of the *A.J. Goddard* possessed a simple construction design, possibly to facilitate its reassembly in the wilderness. The structural components are relatively uniform, with 2-inch angle-iron used for the framing, the stanchions, the deck beams, and the hatch coamings. Much of the machinery and other structural components of the ship, such as the deck plating, could be disassembled into small pieces to facilitate transport over mountain ranges. Many of the vessel's fixtures, from the utilitarian forge to the more luxurious record player, can be found in the 1897 issue of the Sears



**Figure 2: Team member Wayne Lusardi examines lantern.**  
Photo: Geoff Bell.

and Roebuck catalogue. Of the thousands of vessels that set out for the Yukon in the summer of 1898, the *A.J. Goddard* was one of the few that actually made it to Dawson in time for the gold rush. Its small size and the speed with which it was outfitted and transported to Dawson were the primary reasons for its success in reaching the gold fields so quickly.



**Figure 1: Goddard's bow in the murky depths.** Photo: Geoff Bell.

### Note

<sup>1</sup>“Str. *Goddard* Wrecked on Lake Laberge,” *The Daily Klondike Nugget*, 14 October 1901.

### Reference

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