



ABOVE (from top)

Lindsey H. Thomas

Lindsey hovering along side *A. J. Goddard*
PHOTO Donnie Reid

The INA team in the Yukon (from left) John Pollack, Jim Delgado, Lindsey Thomas, and Doug Davidge
PHOTO Donnie Reid

A Ghost of Our Past: *A.J. Goddard*

Four thousand miles north of the headquarters of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology on the campus of Texas A&M University is the Yukon wilderness. In the summer of 2009, an expedition led by the Institute of Nautical Archaeology and funded by National Geographic returned to the Yukon River. This year, the goal was big: to record the newly found sternwheel steamer *A.J. Goddard*. Twenty years of searching by dedicated local scientist Doug Davidge had finally paid off, as this virtually intact time capsule from the Klondike Gold Rush era was about to be revealed to the world.

As a graduate student in the Nautical Archaeology Program at Texas A&M, I was fortunate enough to be allowed to join the expedition team. I knew little about the history and importance of the steamers before I joined the six-person team that summer, though I would quickly learn. I knew only that there would still be ice on the water when I made my first dive, and that we would be sleeping on rocks with the ever-present threat of grizzly bears and bad weather—a fear relieved only by good Scotch and good company around the camp fire.

My desire to work in the Yukon is certainly not because of the fine living conditions, but rather because of the story of our past that is tied to the land there. Though the shipwrecks along the Yukon River are thousands of miles away from what most of us consider home, the history of the Klondike Gold Rush belongs to all of us. The men and women who traveled north at the end of the 19th century to find their fortune in the wilderness came from all over the world, and their perseverance and ingenuity is timeless.

Lindsey H. Thomas

Lindsey earned her B.A. in Anthropology with a focus in Underwater Archaeology from the Honor's Program at the University of Georgia. Her interests include New World, medieval, and post-medieval seafaring and maritime communities, an interest which stemmed from her work at the Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and Monitor National Marine Sanctuary.

Lindsey's thesis explores *A.J. Goddard*, a Klondike Gold Rush era sternwheeler in the Yukon Territory. Her previous work includes research into the site formation processes that affect shipwrecks in dynamic tropical and near-arctic environments, along with a survey of the Great Lakes schooner *Portland*.

These were the qualities that carried them over the Chilkoot pass, away from their family and friends, and into history. The bones of the steamships that carried these people along the rivers tell their stories, if someone is willing to look. Fortunately, Doug Davidge and John Pollack, two dedicated and skilled avocational archaeologists, have led the charge to rediscover these lost wrecks.

Though the focus of the Yukon River Survey is a period that is barely 100 years past, it was not until I was floating above the completely intact *A.J. Goddard* that I realized the power of relatively modern but intact shipwrecks such as these. Though I am fascinated by the mystery of the broken and scattered shipwrecks that have been the focus of much of my previous work, the power of an unbroken shipwreck is undeniable. An intact shipwreck with artifacts still aboard, lying in the same place they were abandoned, can make a person instantly feel the history that we often only hear about after slowly piecing it together from bits of wood and pottery. One can almost see the men and women on deck, leaving behind a coat, or an open boiler door, as they fled the sinking ship. A story that often takes months, if not years, to assemble, is visible in an instant.

Ships like these are vivid reminders of our past and the importance of preserving what we can. They are some of our most important assets in a time when one of the greatest battles facing archaeologists is engaging the public. The physical remnants of our past can only be preserved with the help of an engaged and participatory public, and images of ships like *A.J. Goddard* tell a story that is hard to resist.