

Maritime Heritage



Photo: Fort Ross Conservancy

A schooner loading at the slide or trough chute in Timber Cove. Lumber was slid down the chute using gravity to vessels moored under its end.



Photo: NOAA ONMS and California State Parks

Archaeologists record an iron pin on the rocks at Fort Ross with a GPS receiver and tape measure. These pins helped secure the lumber chutes to shore along with by a system of cables and bolts set in the cliffs.



Photo: NOAA ONMS and California State Parks

A maritime archaeologist records an anchor located in Gerstle Cove. Anchors like this were used to moor vessels at the doghole ports while loading or waiting to load.



Doghole port locations in Sonoma County investigated during 2016.

Doghole Ports Project: Exploring the Cultural Landscape of the Sonoma Coast

The rugged Sonoma, California coast was a difficult place to navigate, with fog shrouded rocks causing the loss of many vessels engaged in coastal and trans-Pacific trade. Recognition of the area's highly-valued timber resources in the 19th century led mariners and lumber mill operators to use small indentations in the coastal cliffs and headlands, known as doghole ports, to load redwood lumber and other timber products onto small schooners and steamers. Lumbermen rigged a system of chutes and wire cables extending from the bluffs down into small coves to move lumber to waiting ships. The jagged coast had few roads and no long distance railroads, so the most cost effective way to move lumber was by sea. Over a dozen doghole ports dotted the Sonoma coast became centers of economic activity and settlement in the region starting in the 1850s.

During 2016 and 2017, archaeologists and divers are exploring the terrestrial and submerged remains of the doghole ports' infrastructure and shipwrecks to illuminate the area's maritime cultural landscape along with connecting local residents and visitors alike to these stories to add another dimension to the coastal beauty and wilderness the doghole ports still have to offer. This survey is part of an ongoing partnership between California State Parks and the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries.

2016 Fieldwork Findings

In 2016 the Doghole Ports Project conducted 8 days of land survey and 5 days of simultaneous underwater work visiting 11 doghole ports. Additionally, several shipwrecks associated with the lumber trade or the area's larger maritime cultural landscape were investigated for site assessment and interpretation purposes.

The terrestrial team located lumber industry infrastructure at 10 of the 11 doghole ports visited. Archaeological features were recorded at Duncan's Landing, Russian Gulch Landing, Fort Ross Cove, Gerstle Cove, Fisk Mill Cove, Timber Cove, Stillwater Cove, Stewart's Point, Bihler's Landing, and Del Mar Landing. The remains located include iron eye bolts, pins, and wire rope along with cut outs in the cliffs and rocks used for the lumber chute legs and support timbers.

Divers conducted operations at 4 doghole ports and located submerged infrastructure at 2 of them, Fort Ross and Gerstle Cove. Maritime archaeologists also searched for several shipwrecks in the area, tentatively locating the remains of the steam schooner *Acme* in Kohlmer Gulch. Divers visited the National Register listed steamship *Pomona* in Fort Ross Cove and conducted exploratory dives focused on the schooner *J. Eppinger*, bark *Windermere*, and wrecking steamer *Whitelaw*. While the remains of those three shipwrecks were not found, the team confirmed the location of the ship *Joseph S. Spinney*.

Connecting Communities and Preserving Our Maritime Heritage

The Greater Farallones National Marine Sanctuary promotes stewardships of this nation's heritage through ongoing research and interpretive initiatives such as the Doghole Ports Project. The Redwood Coast's maritime legacy continues to live on in the tribes and coastal communities whose origins, place names and identity are tied closely with its lumbering history, the doghole ports, and ongoing connection to the sea. The archaeological resources present today along the seashore and underwater can tell the story of human's interaction with the environment. They also serve to illuminate how the coastal communities developed and continue to support commerce, tourism, and recreation.