



an agency of the
Department of Arts and Culture

COMMITTEE MEETING DATES:

GDRC: 30 November 2017
EXCO: 11 January 2018
HRM COM: 23 February 2018
COUNCIL: 29 March 2018

GRADING SUBMISSION

SUBMITTED BY: SAHRA Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage

DATE: 22 November 2017

FILE REF / SAHRIS SITE ID: Case #11121

SAHRIS SITE CATEGORY: Shipwreck

Significance Category (THEMES): History of Slavery

ENQUIRIES: Heidi Weldon/Lesa la Grange

ITEM: Nomination of Site for Grade I Site Status: Wreck of the Slave Ship *São José*; Clifton Beach, Cape Town, Western Cape

A1. BACKGROUND

- A1.1 The site of the wreck of the *São José* was nominated by SAHRA's Maritime and Underwater Cultural Heritage (MUCH) unit for Grade I status, with a view to declaring it a National Heritage Site, in May 2017.
- A1.2 The MUCH unit has spent the last five months gathering information on the site and the wrecking, and speaking to the Iziko Museums of South Africa, a key stakeholder and interested and affected party, about the proposed grading.
- A1.3 This grading submission was compiled over the last three months and will be submitted to the Grading and Declarations Review Committee (GDRC) at the meeting of 30 November 2017, for recommendation to the Executive Committee (EXCO).

A2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- A2.1 The *São José* was a Portuguese slave ship which sank near the Cape of Good Hope, off what is today known as Clifton beach, on the 27th of December 1794. At the time of wrecking she was carrying 500 Mozambican slaves destined for Brazil, during a time when the slave trade between the two countries was just emerging. Her voyage, although unsuccessful in its mission to bring slaves to Brazil, was an important precedent for the sourcing of slaves from East Africa, something which ultimately contributed to the establishment of the Atlantic Slave Trade.

- A2.2 More than half of the slaves on board at the time of wrecking were saved from drowning. They were not, however, truly saved, but were resold and taken elsewhere. More than 200 hundred slaves still shackled below deck were simply abandoned to the sea. The tragic story of wrecking of the *São José* is an example of the disregard for human life exemplified by the slave trade across the globe.
- A2.3 The site of the *São José* shipwreck was subjected to salvage operations in the 1980's. More recently, however, the Iziko Museums of South Africa's Slave Wrecks Project has begun a sensitive, scientific excavation of the site, in an effort to learn more about the slave trade and to bring previously untold stories to light.
- A2.4 The site is significant as a site associated with the history of slavery in South Africa. It is therefore recommended that it be assigned Grade I status with a view to declaring it a National Heritage Site, as part of an effort to acknowledge the loss of life in the wrecking and as the result of the slave trade in general.

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1. PURPOSE OF THE SUBMISSION

- 1.1. The submission is made to discuss and recommend the grading of the wreck of the slave ship *São José*, off Clifton Beach, Cape Town, Western Cape, as a Grade I site.

2. DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION OF THE SITE

- 2.1 The *São José* was an 18th Century wooden Portuguese sailing vessel (Figure 1). Items which can be found on site include pulley blocks, iron concretions and ballast blocks, copper fastenings and sheathing (Figure 2), shackles, Mozambican hardwood, structural timber carved from Mangrove, ceramics, and human remains¹.

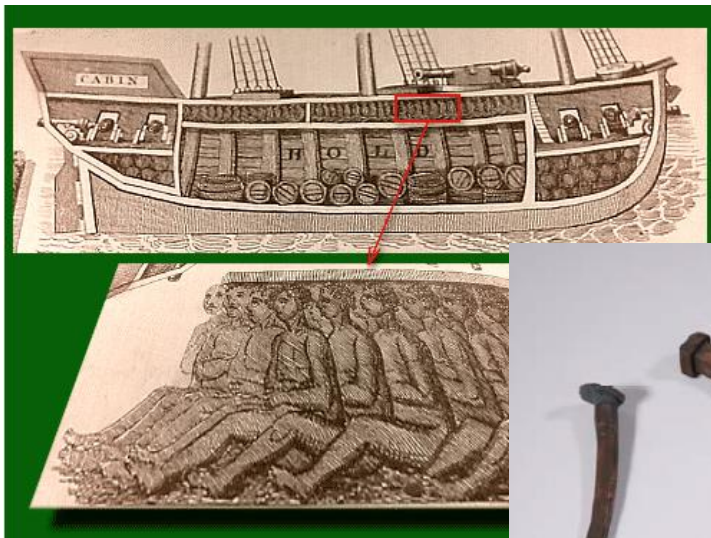


Figure 1: An example of a slave ship



Figure 2: Copper fastenings and sheathing

- 2.2 The wreck is situated about 125 meters west of the high water mark off Clifton Beach in Cape Town. The (decimal degrees) GPS coordinates for the site are -33.93711°, 18.37571° (Figure 3).
- 2.3 The Iziko Museums of South Africa Slave Wrecks Project team has been conducting research and scientific excavations at the site since 2014. The site plan shown in Figure 4, produced by Iziko, broadly describes the layout and location of artefacts on the site.

¹ Iziko interim permit report, 2015

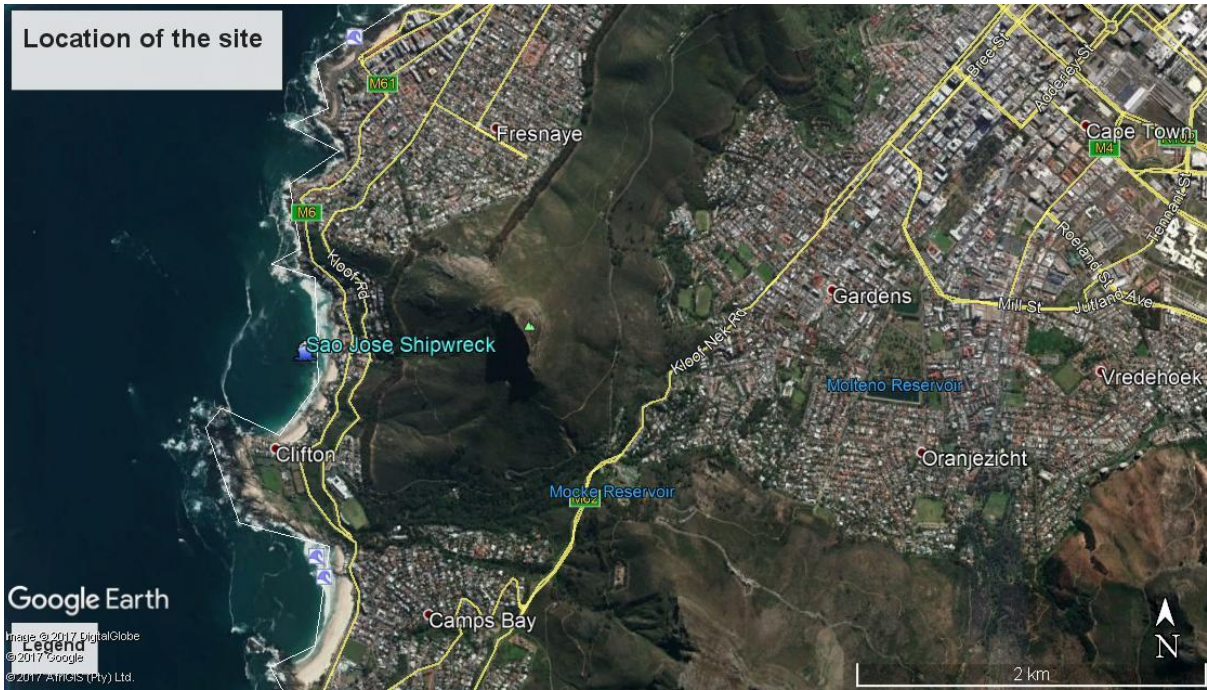


Figure 3: The location of the site

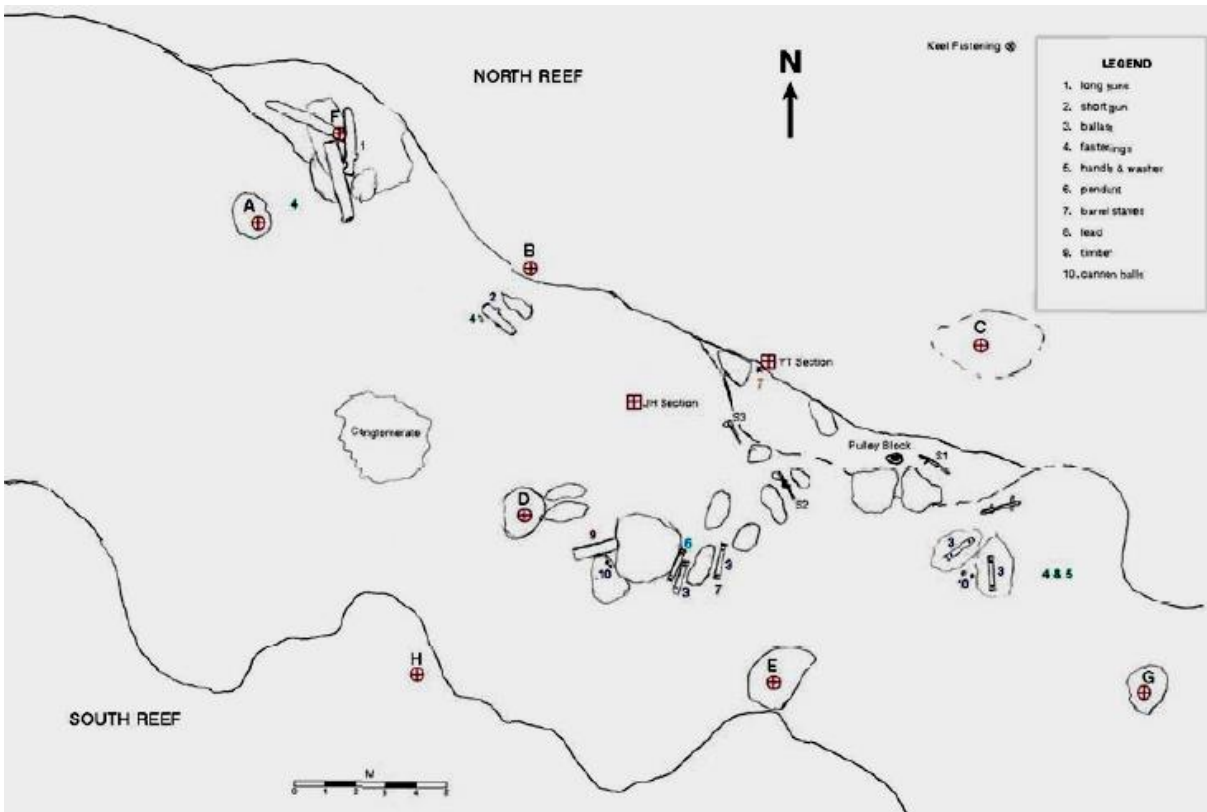


Figure 4: A plan view of the site

3. SHORT HISTORY OF THE SITE

- 3.1 At about 2 AM on the 27th of December 1794, the *São José*, having left Mozambique some three weeks earlier with a cargo of captive slaves from the interior of the country, came to grief in a storm off Clifton beach and ran into submerged rocks. Although a rescue was attempted, only the captain and crew were truly saved. 212 of the slaves, fewer than half the number on board, were rescued from the waves, but were promptly sold into slavery in Cape Town. The rest died on board the ship, many of them still shackled below deck.
- 3.2 The wreck lay undiscovered for about 200 years, and was found by local divers in the 1980s. The *São José* was initially misidentified as a Dutch merchant vessel, and it wasn't until 2015 that she was positively identified. The discovery of iron ballast blocks, which are used to balance the variable weight of human cargo, led to the conclusion that the wreck was that of a slave vessel, the *São José*. The *São José* is the only slave shipwreck to have been excavated and scientifically studied off the coast of South Africa.
- 3.3 When the site was salvaged in the 1980s, the salvors discovered human remains and handed them over to the police. Despite efforts by Iziko to discover the present-day whereabouts of those remains, they have not been successfully traced and nothing further is known about them. The excavation conducted by Iziko at the site is in sharp contrast to the salvage and looting that has occurred in the past, and all material recovered from the site during this excavation has been accessioned at the museum for long-term curation. At the time of writing this submission, SAHRA is not aware of the discovery of any additional human remains during the course of excavations.

4. SWOT SUMMARY

Strengths:

- Scientific value
- Monitored by Iziko on a regular basis
- The Slave Wrecks Project receives good funding for research, promotion, and conservation.

Weaknesses:

- Located in a dynamic and often harsh environment

Opportunities:

- Generation of opportunities for student research projects
- The opportunity to unpack painful untold stories and promote healing

Threats:

- Salvage/looting
- Vandalism

5. MOTIVATION FOR NATIONAL DECLARATION

5.1 Declaration is recommended for the following reasons:

- The site is unique as the only scientifically excavated slave shipwreck in Africa
- Declaration will help to regulate the use of the site, thereby affording it some protection
- Declaration will give due recognition to the site as the location of an event which led to massive and tragic loss of life

6. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

6.1. The wreck of the *São José* is significant because it is the site of the long-unacknowledged lives lost in the tragic wrecking. The site was only positively identified in 2015, and the people who died when she wrecked were therefore first commemorated at a ceremony thereafter (Figure 5). It had thus taken almost 221 years for the loss of life to receive due recognition. The site speaks to the NHS theme “sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa”.



Figure 5: Members of the Slave Wrecks Project scattering sands from Mozambique on the site during a public ceremony in 2015

6.2. The story of the wrecking makes this site particularly special because of the links it establishes between the slaves’ home country of Mozambique, the Portuguese origins of the ship, the ship’s intended destination of Brazil, and its final resting place off the South African south west coast.

7. INDICATION OF OWNER’S ATTITUDE

7.1 According to the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999 (NHRA), all archaeological material is the property of the South African State. SAHRA, acting

herein as the agent of the State for the protection of heritage material, supports the proposed grading.

- 7.2 The Iziko Museums of South Africa, being a key stakeholder and interested and affected party, is the approved curating authority for all material from the site. They also currently hold a permit to conduct excavations at the site. Iziko supports the proposed grading of the site, so long as it does not affect their ability to continue research thereon.

8. INDICATION OF CURRENT MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 8.1 The site does not currently have a formal management plan. It is, however, monitored from time to time by SAHRA's MUCH unit. Members of the Iziko Slave Wrecks project also frequently visit the site to conduct their research.
- 8.2 A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Iziko and SAHRA exists. This MoU seeks, *inter alia*, to formalise both parties' commitment to heritage protection in terms of the NHRA and other legislation. The MoU therefore binds Iziko to promote the conservation of South Africa's heritage resources and to cooperate with SAHRA to protect them. Being the sole permit-holder for the site, their presence involvement thus provides some guarantee that it will be managed in accordance with the provisions of a variety of standards and codes of practise.

9. DESCRIPTION OF SITE BOUNDARIES

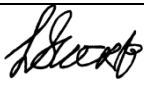
- 9.1. Exact site boundaries are difficult to describe because the site has not been accurately mapped in its full extent. Placing datum points on the site to capture its extent is a challenge due to the dynamic underwater environment on the site where wave action and tidal surges cause a lot of movement. It is also possible that, as a result of this dynamic environment, material associated with the site could be scattered quite far.
- 9.2. It is therefore proposed that a free-form octagonal area extending 200 meters from the centre of the site, which is located at - 33.93711°, 18.37571°, but bound by the high water mark on the eastern aspect, be considered the full extent of the site in the absence of any evidence to the contrary going forward (Table 1).

Point number	Latitude	Longitude
1	-33.937213°	18.377044°
2	-33.936134°	18.377356°
3	-33.935453°	18.376341°
4	-33.935591°	18.374761°
5	-33.936480°	18.373673°
6	-33.938110°	18.373864°
7	-33.938944°	18.375892°
8	-33.938270°	18.376495°

Table 1: Proposed coordinates of the site boundaries

10. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the wreck of the slave ship *São José* is approved by Council as a Grade I site.

Prepared By:		Supported By:	
Lesa la Grange Acting Manager: MUCH		Dumisani Sibayi EO: HCM	
Date: 22-11-17		Date:	

Recommendation supported by GDRC		Recommendation not supported by GDRC	
Name		Signature	
Chairperson: GDRC			
Date:			

Recommendation supported by EXCo		Recommendation not supported by EXCo	
Name		Signature	
Chairperson: EXCo			
Date:			

Recommendation supported by HRM Committee		Recommendation not supported by HRM Committee	
Name		Signature	
Chairperson: HRM Committee			
Date:			

Recommendation supported by Council		Recommendation not supported by Council	
Name		Signature	
Chairperson: Council			
Date:			