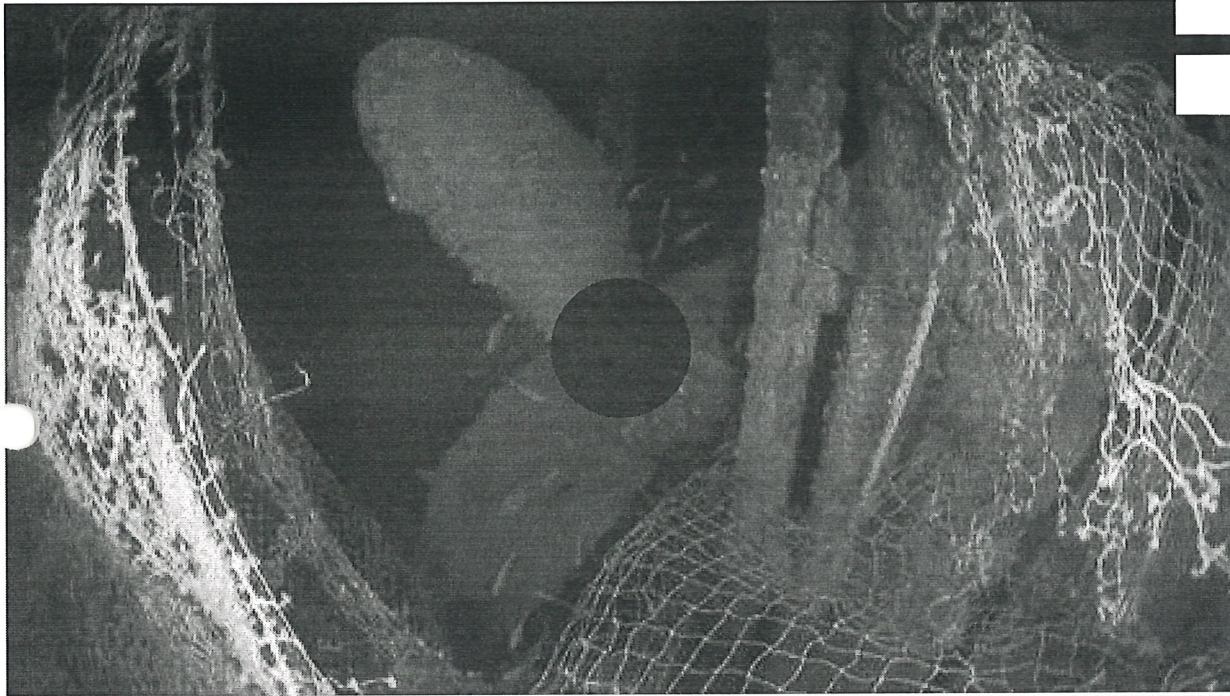




Patrice Dougan Patrice Dougan is the Herald's education re

112-year-old SS Ventnor shipwreck mystery revealed - Patrice Dougan, 2014a

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The mystery behind a ship that sank off the coast of the North Island more than 100 years ago has been revealed.

The SS Ventnor went down off the Hokianga coast in 1902 with the remains of 499 Chinese miners on board.

The Hong Kong bound vessel was on a repatriation mission to return the bodies to their families for burial, but sank just two days after setting sail from Wellington in October 1902.

The location of the ship had remained a mystery, even as some of the coffins washed up on shore.

Documentary producer and Ventnor Project Group leader John Albert spent three years searching for the wreck.

He roped in charter boat owners John and Linda Pattinson in Opononi and underwater explorer Keith Gordon to help with the search.

The group eventually discovered the wreck in December 2012, confirming it was the SS Ventnor on a dive in January 2013.

about 21km west of Hokianga Harbour, under 150 metres of water.

Following the discovery, there were then meetings between officials in China's Guangdong Province, where most of the miners were from, have been on-going.

"Finding the SS Ventnor highlights the significant ties between China and New Zealand," Mr Albert said.

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"It is important historically in terms of the early Chinese contribution to New Zealand and culturally in terms of the shared attitudes towards human remains. Since the time of the shipwreck, remains have drifted to shore. These have been interred and their graves cared for by local Maori."

The project group has now extended an invitation to Chinese president Xi Jinping to visit Hokianga the next time he travels to New Zealand. China's leader is currently on a three day state visit to the country following the G20 summit in Australia last week.

John Klaracich of the Hokianga iwi said: "We would like to give representatives of China the opportunity to personally visit the graves of their countrymen on land and at sea, and pay respects to those pioneers who had not only helped to build our country materially, but who brought their rich and ancient culture to our land as well."

The SS Ventnor was a British ship chartered by Dunedin businessman Choie Sew Hoy to transport the exhumed remains of Chinese men who had died in New Zealand back to their home country for reburial in a bid to follow Chinese tradition.

Mr Sew Hoy died before the ship set sail, and his body was among those lost at sea. The 13 crew on board also lost their lives when the vessel sank.

- NZME.

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