

Offshore Wight South West

Summary Description

This offshore zone is traversed by modern shipping both accessing the Solent and Poole Bay and in the south of the area vessels travelling through the English Channel. The density of shipping is represented in the high numbers of shipwrecks in the area. The previous nature of this area should not be forgotten as the area was once dry land during times of lower sea level, indicating the potential for submerged prehistoric landscapes to be present.

Sea Surface

This offshore area extends towards the median line with France. Activity on the sea surface is dominated by commercial shipping routes which cross through the area to reach Plymouth, Poole Harbour and other Western Solent ports. Commercial shipping traffic into the western Solent is not as dense as in the Eastern Solent due to the relatively more hazardous passage through the Needles approaches and western Solent. Frequent ferry traffic can be seen travelling to and from Poole. It is designated as a military practice area and was previously a licensed UK Deal area.

Seabed Surface

The seabed surface area contains more than 84 wrecks and a further 32 surveyed obstructions. These features are scattered throughout the area and form no distinct concentrations which could indicate patterning due to environmental factors.

A number of popular dive sites lies within the area. One example is the site of the *Coquetdale*, a British WW2 wreck, which is located 15 miles west off St Catherines Point at a depth of 35m (Pritchard and McDonald, 2001, pp40). It was lost on 8th August, 1940, the first day of the Battle of Britain as a result of a German air strike.

The seabed depth of this offshore area ranges from 30-100m.

Seabed Subsurface

There is nothing charted or recorded within the currently available marine datasets for the seabed subsurface. However, recent research into the development of the English Channel and Poole Bay is beginning to reveal evidence for the potential for survival of submerged prehistoric landscape deposits within the seabed.

Archaeological Potential

The archaeology of this area is dominated by the shipwreck resource. However, the potential for the survival of submerged prehistoric landscapes should be highlighted. Such deposits can reveal important evidence of sea level and climate change and the development of Britain as an island.

References

Pritchard, Martin and Kendall McDonald, 2001. *Dive Wight and Hampshire: A Diver Guide*: Middlesex, Underwater World Publishing Ltd.

Links

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/enviro/fcd/futurecoast.htm>. Shoreline Behaviour Study

<http://www.solentforum.hants.org.uk/forum/intro.html>: Solent Forum

<http://www.scopac.org.uk/> Sediment Transportation database

<http://www.hwtma.org.uk/> Hampshire and Wight Trust for Maritime Archaeology



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