

Underwater Photography Hints and Tips

The Maritime Archaeology Trust is interested in any photographs of shipwrecks and underwater sites. We are using photographs to help make sites accessible to the general public which otherwise are only seen by divers. If you are planning on visiting a site and taking a camera with you please consider sending us copies of your photos (they will be fully credited).

Some things to consider when photographing wrecks

Think about your subject

Underwater photography is inevitably impacted by the visibility and light on any individual site. This may dictate what type of photographs you are taking. If the visibility is good then shots showing large areas of the wreck and/or divers on the wreck may be possible. In lower visibility it may still be possible to take photographs of wreck features as a close up.

Be comfortable and stable under water

Make sure you are happy within the environment and have good control of your buoyancy and position. It is particularly important not to disturb the visibility.

Get the most out of your camera

There are two basic photography systems – the point and shoot in a waterproof case, or a digital single lens reflex (DSLR) camera in an underwater housing with external lighting capabilities. Both systems can be used to gather archaeological photographs. For circumstances where light levels are low, and/or there is particularly important detail to be gathered, then a DSLR system may be required.

Archaeological photography

The Nautical Archaeology Society publication 'Underwater Archaeology: the NAS Guide to Principles and Practice' has a few specific tips for archaeological photography underwater, these include:

- **Composition:** this is very important with respect to the type of shot – with and without a scale, with and without a diver. Try shots from different angles to obtain the best angles to show the subject. Distinguish between an artefact record and a public-relations shot, as each needs different treatment. Wait for the diver's bubbles to prove the shot was taken under water.
- **Aiming the flash:** the correct position of the flash is one of the most important factors for taking a successful underwater photograph. To avoid backscatter, move the flash further away from the camera, this avoids illuminating particulate matter between the lens and the subject. Hold the flash above the subject and to one side. Think of the flash as mimicking the sun.
- **Scales:** underwater scales are ideally yellow and black, although many are white and black. These are used for a variety of shots but mainly for photographs of artefacts or ship structure. Place scales carefully so as to avoid masking any detail and try to keep them parallel to the frame of composition and the artefact or feature. NB you quickly and cheaply make a photographic scale by using yellow and black insulating tape and a 50cm length of copper or plastic tubing to produce a scale like this:



