

USS *Huron* Historic Shipwreck Preserve

Nags Head, North Carolina — Between Mileposts 11 & 12.

Administered cooperatively by the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, Town of Nags Head, and the United States Navy.



The USS *Huron*

Built a decade after the Civil War, the USS *Huron* was constructed during a period of transition between the old and new navy. The *Huron* and her two sister ships were the last American naval vessels to be built of iron rather than steel and to be equipped with sails to supplement their steam engines.

During her brief career (1875-1877), the *Huron* visited ports in Mexico, Venezuela, Columbia, Key West, Mobile, Charleston, Norfolk, Boston, New York, and Washington, D.C. However, it was the tragedy of the *Huron's* sinking on November 24, 1877, that brought the ship to national attention.

Specifications:

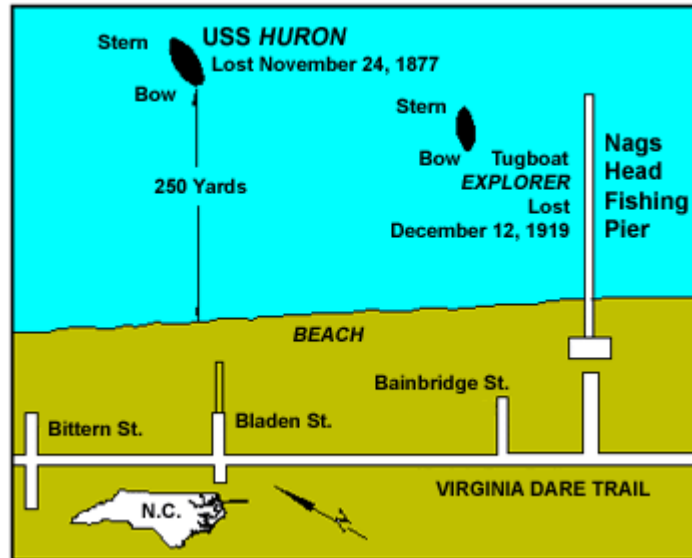
- Built: Chester, Pennsylvania, 1875
- Length: 175 feet
- Beam: 32 feet
- Draft: 13 feet
- Crew: 16 officers, 118 enlisted men
- Power: A compound steam engine with five coal-burning boilers and a 12-foot-diameter propeller. The *Huron* also had three masts equipped with sails.
- Armament:
 - 11-inch Dahlgren smoothbore cannon(1)
 - 9-inch Dahlgren smoothbore cannon (2)
 - 60-pounder Parrot rifle (1)
 - 12-pounder Dahlgren boat howitzer (1)
 - 50-caliber Gatling gun (1)

The Loss of the USS *Huron*

The *Huron* left Hampton Roads, Virginia, on Friday, November 23, 1877. She was headed for Havana, Cuba, to survey the surrounding coast.

On her first night out to sea, the ship encountered a heavy storm blowing from the southeast. The storm combined with a small error in the ship's compass to cause the *Huron* to run aground off Nags Head at 1:30 a.m., November 24, 1877. Even though the *Huron* was only 200 yards from the beach, the heavy surf, strong currents, and cold temperature prevented most of the crewmembers from attempting the swim to shore. Most of the crew tried to remain on the ship in the hope that help would arrive. However, no one came to the aid of the sailors: lifesaving stations had been closed until December. The elements eventually took their toll on the storm battered men. Many lost their strength and were washed overboard by waves. One huge wave swept at least twelve sailors away at one time. In all, ninety-eight men lost their lives during the night.

The federal government was severely criticized for its failure to provide adequate funding for the United States Lifesaving Service. Two months after the wreck of the *Huron*, the steamship *Metropolis* ran aground twenty-three miles to the north, with the loss of eighty-five lives. These two disasters prompted Congress to appropriate funding to build additional lifesaving stations along the North Carolina coast and increase their months of operation.



The USS *Huron* Today

The *Huron* site is located approximately 250 yards from the beach. During the summer months, buoys mark the bow and stern of the wreck. Divers and snorkelers who visit the site can see a wide variety of sea life as they swim over the remains of the historic warship. Many portions of the wreck hold points of interest such as boilers, cannonball storage racks, and the huge propeller and rudder.

The [wreck site map](#) depicts the wreck of the *Huron* as she exists today. During the 1870s, the ship's cannons and much of her machinery were salvaged. Over the years, time and the elements have eroded parts of the ship. The lower hull is well preserved, however, and portions of the bow remain intact up to the main deck level. A thick layer of concretion and marine growth now covers the site, hiding many structural features. Because the *Huron* is close to shore, shifting sands are constantly covering and uncovering various portions of the wreck..

Collecting artifacts from the wreck is prohibited. The USS *Huron* and other shipwreck sites in North Carolina waters are protected by state and federal law. It is illegal to remove artifacts or disturb a shipwreck site without a valid permit. If you observe an unusual or important artifact, please do not disturb it. Note the artifact's location and report it to the Underwater Archaeology Branch or local authorities.

All divers should follow safe scuba-diving practices. It is strongly recommended that visitors check on conditions with a lifeguard before swimming out to the wreck. No one should ever swim or dive alone!

The USS *Huron* is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. In 1991 the secretary of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources designated the site as North Carolina's first "Historic Shipwreck Preserve." The preserve program is designed to promote the preservation of historic shipwreck sites while making them more accessible to the general public.