May 2011 Expedition Summary

Overall the expedition to the *Queen Anne's Revenge* site in late May went according to plan and produced unprecedented attention from the media, thus raising awareness of North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources' goal to remove the remains of Blackbeard's historic shipwreck to the safety of the laboratory and ultimately to public display. Coming on the heels of the latest Pirates of the Caribbean movie, which features *Queen Anne's Revenge* and Blackbeard, the recovery of a large ship's anchor was received widespread coverage reaching an international audience. Timing of this media attention was fortunate also in that the major exhibition on *Queen Anne's Revenge* opened in early June at the North Carolina Maritime Museum in Beaufort.

There were many obstacles to overcome in planning the expedition, which ran from May 23rd to June 3rd: the project's primary research vessel, R/V *Shell Point* (NC Marine Fisheries) was not available, nor was housing at the Ft. Macon State Park, and weather is also a question in early summer. Success came from hiring support from top-notch state operations including UNCW's R/V *Cape Fear*, which was the primary research vessel, the recovery vessel R/V *Dan Moore* from Cape Fear Community College, and staging operations out of Duke Marine Laboratory. Funding came from the NOAA's National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and NC DCR funds identified by Secretary Carlisle.

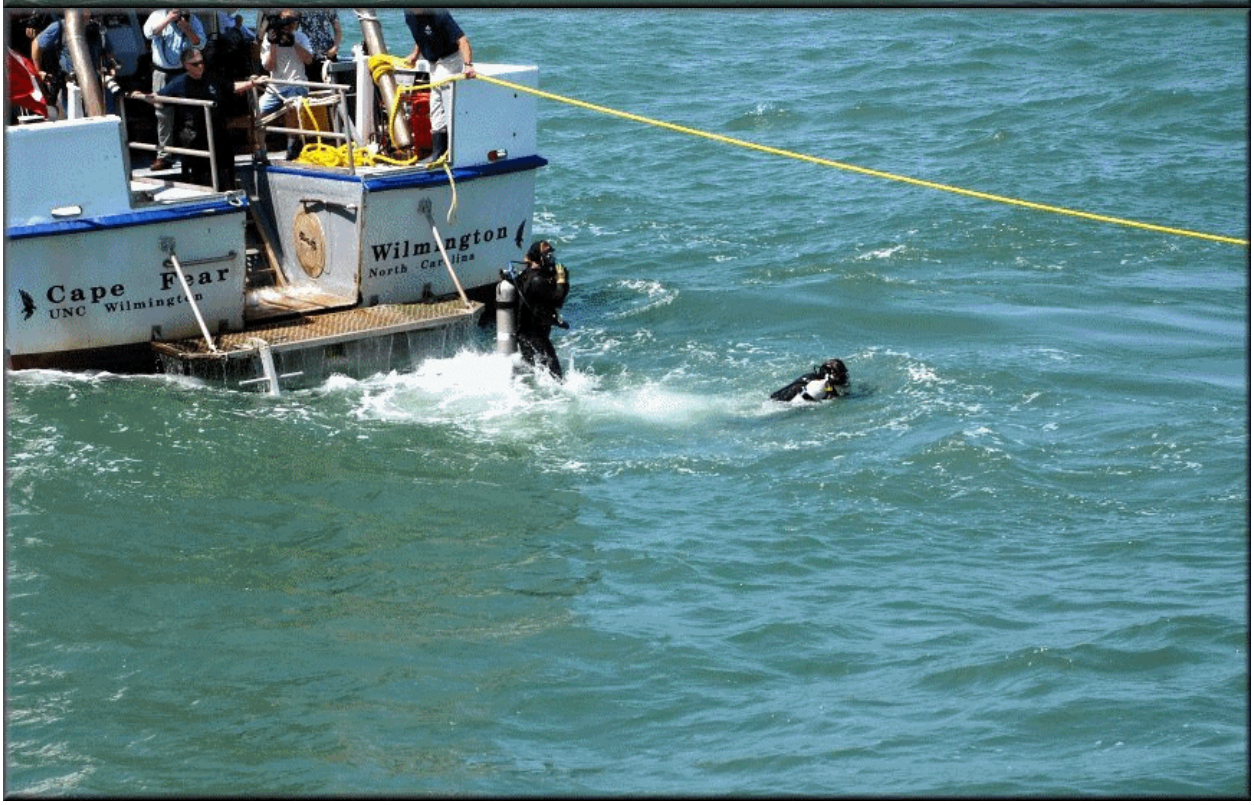
As expected the weather during the first week was generally unfavorable for detailed working as it blew onshore causing rough waters above and below at the shipwreck site. The staff of the NC Underwater Archaeology Branch, which has conducted operations at the site since 1997, was able to closely examine anchor A-2 at the end of day on Monday. They reported that its recovery was not feasible because it was too heavily fused to underlying cannon and other debris. This had serious implications since expectations had been raised that the "largest artifact" would be brought to the light of day during the expedition. To complicate matters, the winds blew even harder and the team was kept onshore on Tuesday.

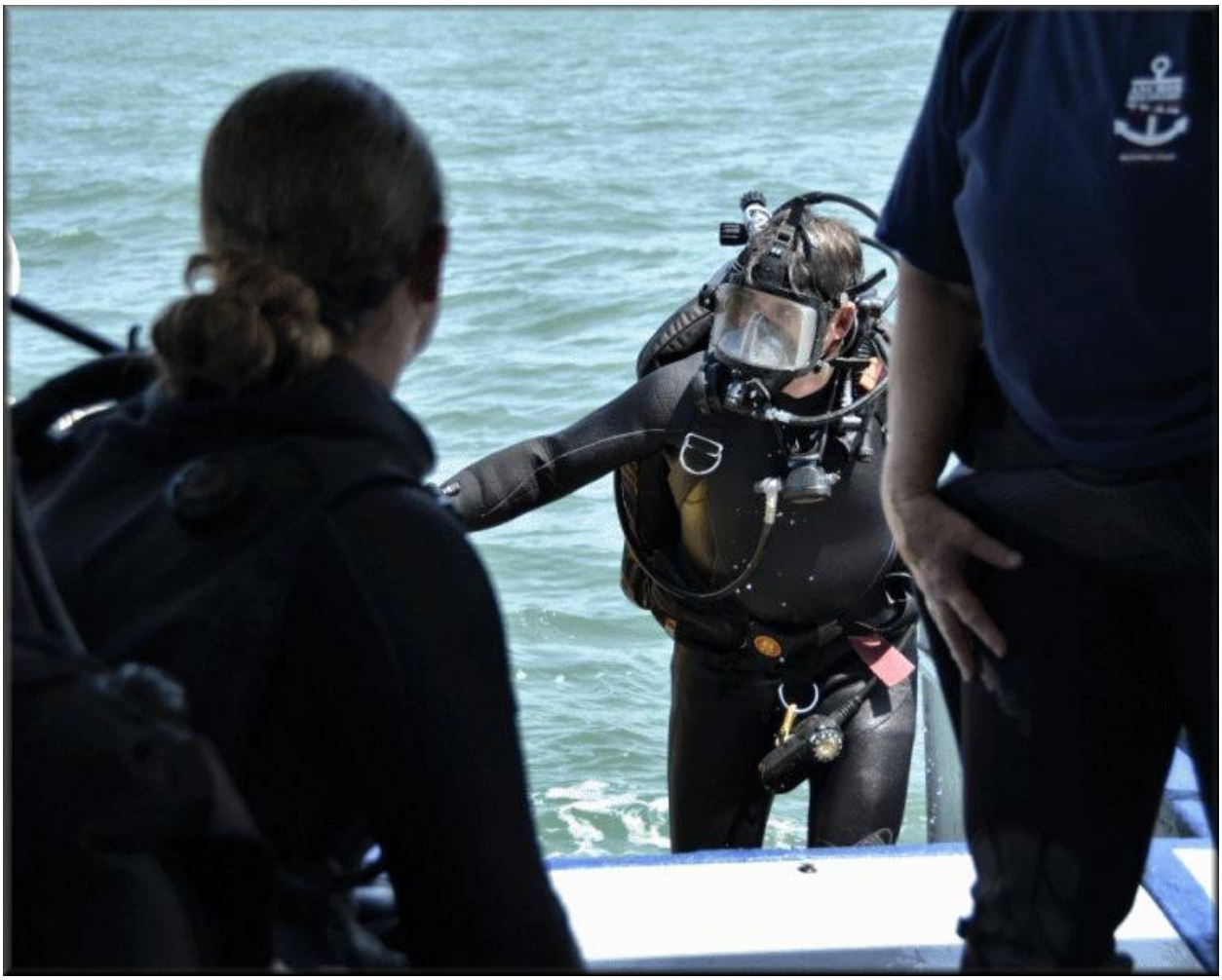
Early Wednesday morning R/V *Cape Fear* made it to the site and divers were able to enter the water. Their attention then turned to another anchor, A-1, which was also part of the main ballast pile. The examination found that A-1 was only attached a couple of points near its flukes and the ring at the end of it's nearly 12' shank. Archaeologists worked quickly and by the end of the day, A-1, had been raised to the surface using large airbags and then moved and put back on the sand in a nearby holding area awaiting the recovery vessel. Because of uncertainties earlier in the week, the arrival of R/V *Dan Moore* was delayed until Thursday evening and the lift planned for Friday May 27th. On the recovery day, the seas were still a bit agitated but the decision was to go for it and so a large contingency of media aboard both research vessels and others aboard two dive boats from Discovery Dive Company made it out by mid-morning. There was a delay getting *Dan Moore* in place and then difficulty running lines from the anchor and lift bags to the recovery vessel. The tensest moments came as the widely swinging anchor, weighing nearly a ton, was brought up over the side. With each swing it seemed destined to crash into the side of the vessel, but at just the right moment, a deft move by the crane operator settled the swing and sway, allowing him to gently bring it to rest on the deck. Then everything went smoothly, from the offloading at the Morehead City State Ports Facility onto a NC Marine Fisheries truck, a public viewing at the Crystal Coast Tourist Center, and a successful ride to the QAR lab on ECU's West Research Campus where it was swaddled in wet clothes and tarps until it could be immersed into a large swimming pool of water for interim storage and safekeeping.

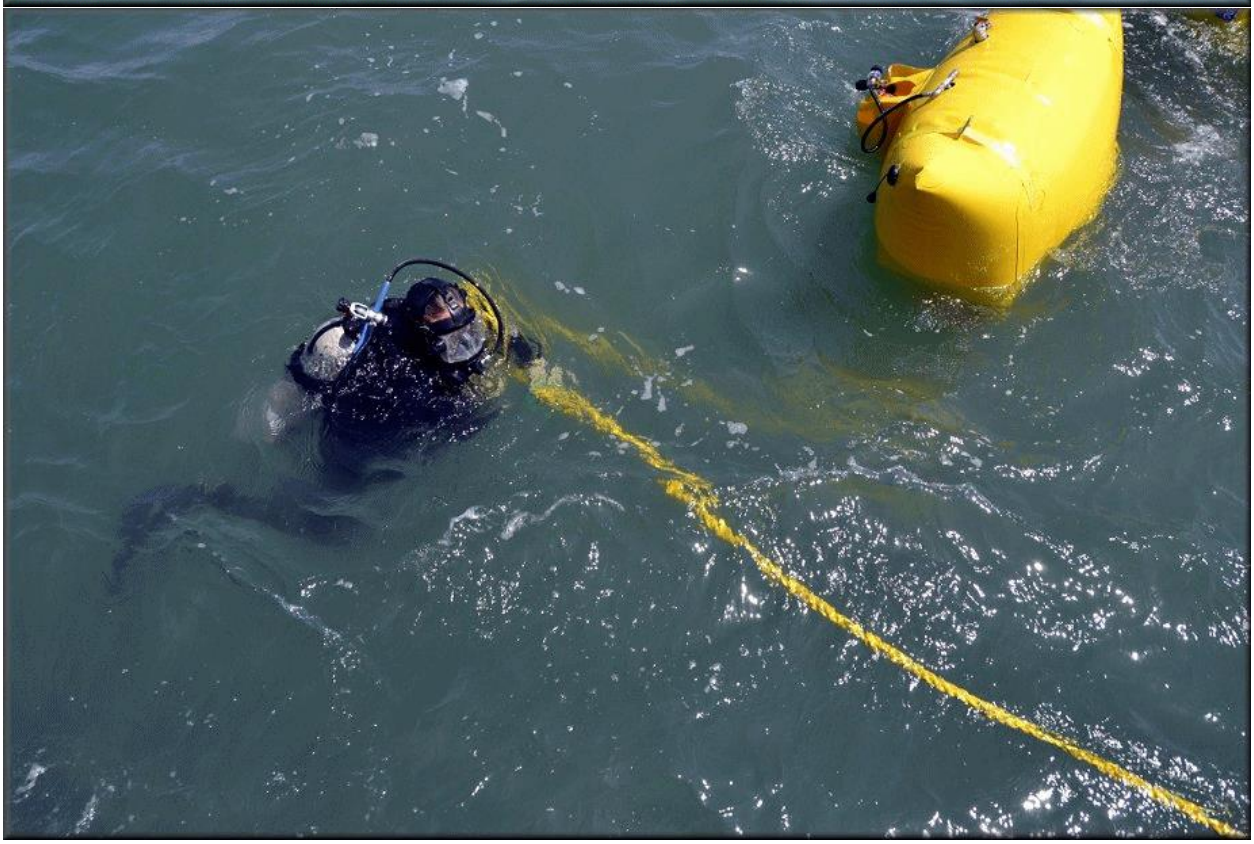
The following week, researchers were greeted with two days of the clearest water yet on the site. Divers could be seen swimming on the bottom 25’ below! This enabled the completion of most of the expedition goals. The main reference stations were bolstered, including adding a third station, and all of the mooring areas were relocated and marked in such a way that they will be readily available come next fall. Researchers also successfully took readings and installed anti-corrosion anodes on the two remaining ship’s anchors (A2 and A3) and three cannon (C1, C9, and C17). All in all, a most successful venture, indeed!

Raising Anchor A1


UNC Wilmington
Cape Fear
UNC Wilmington

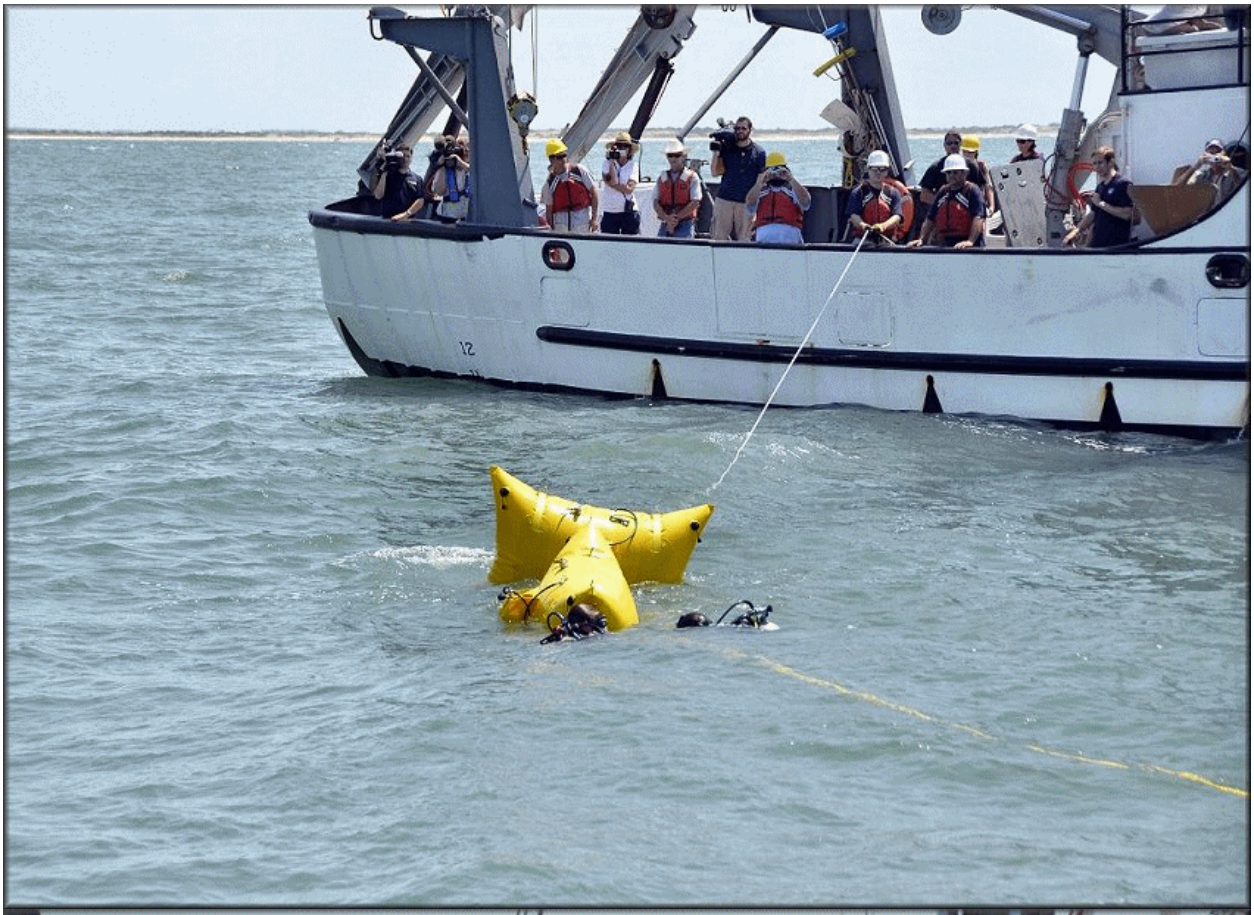

Cape Fear
UNC Wilmington



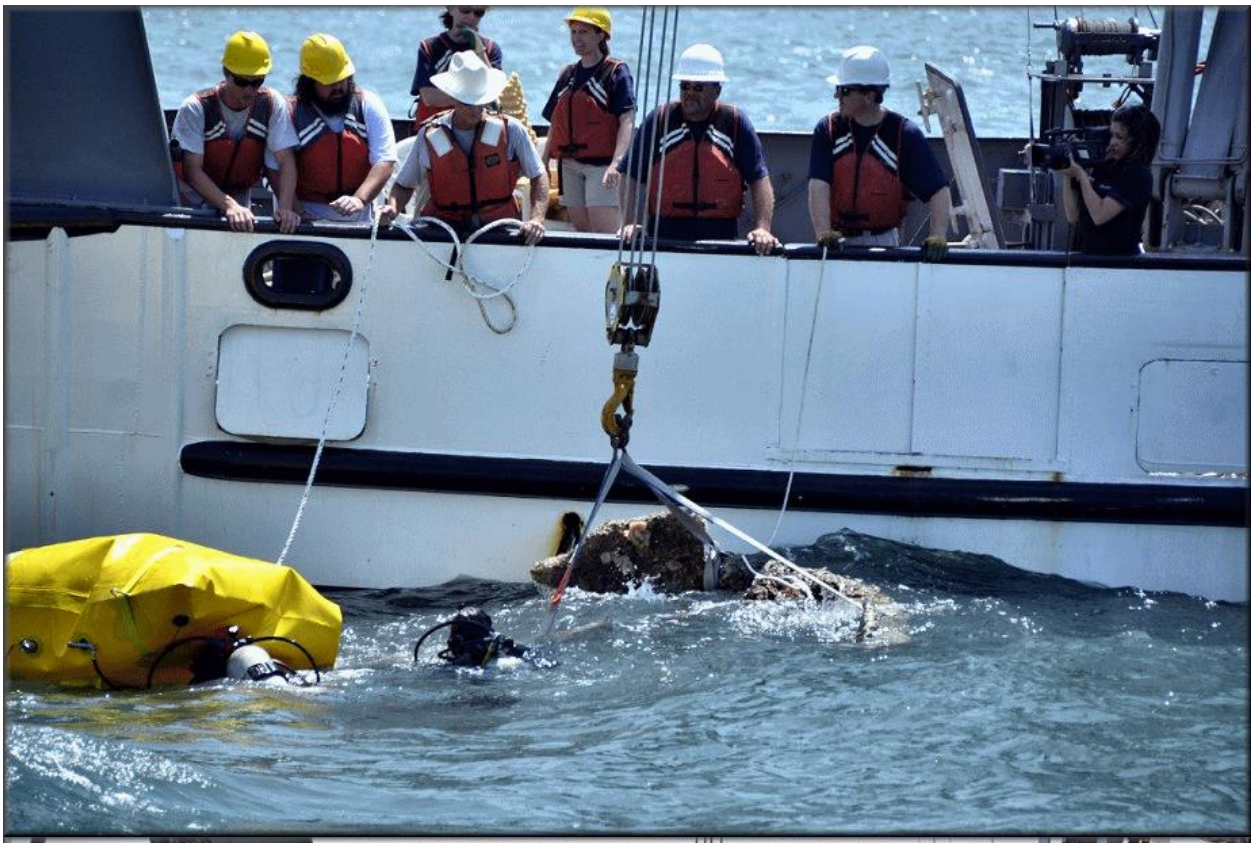


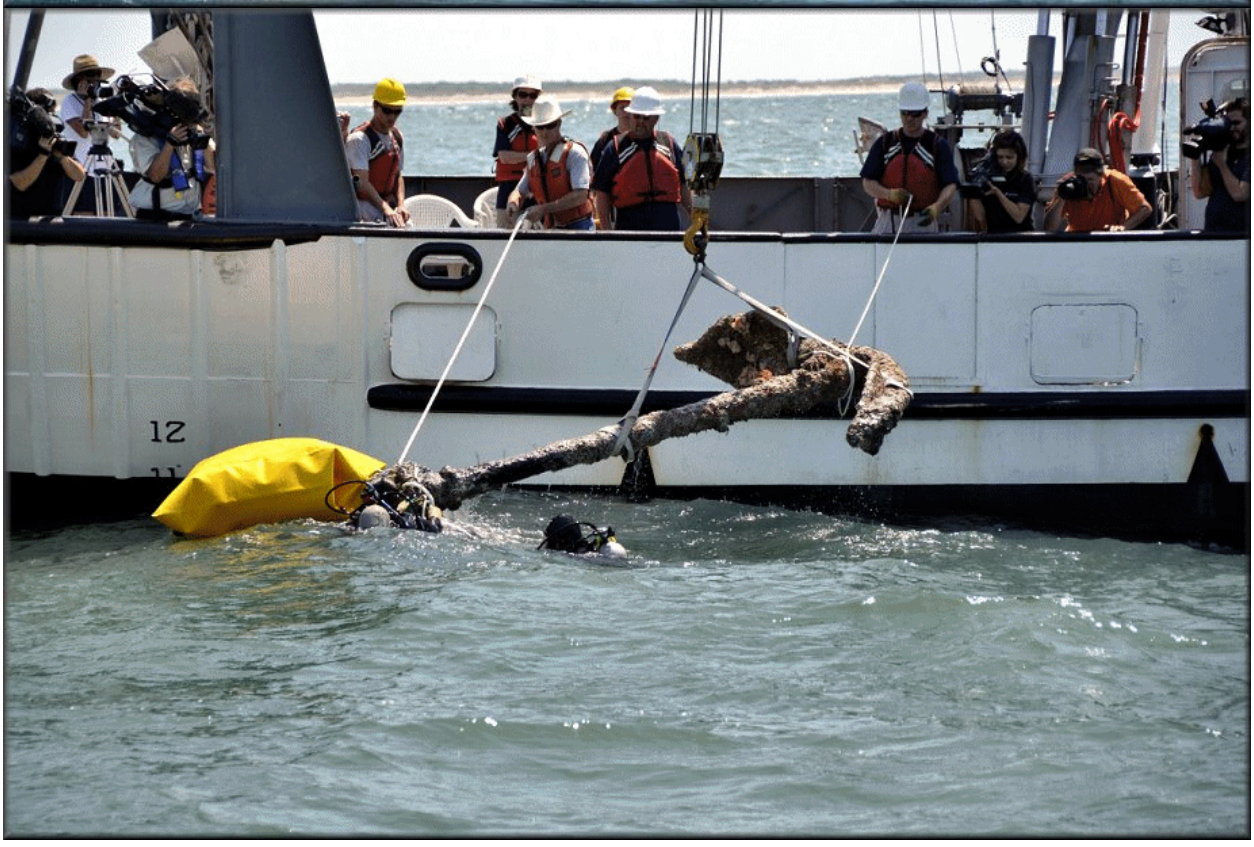

Blackbeard's
QUEEN ANNE'S
REVENGE
1718

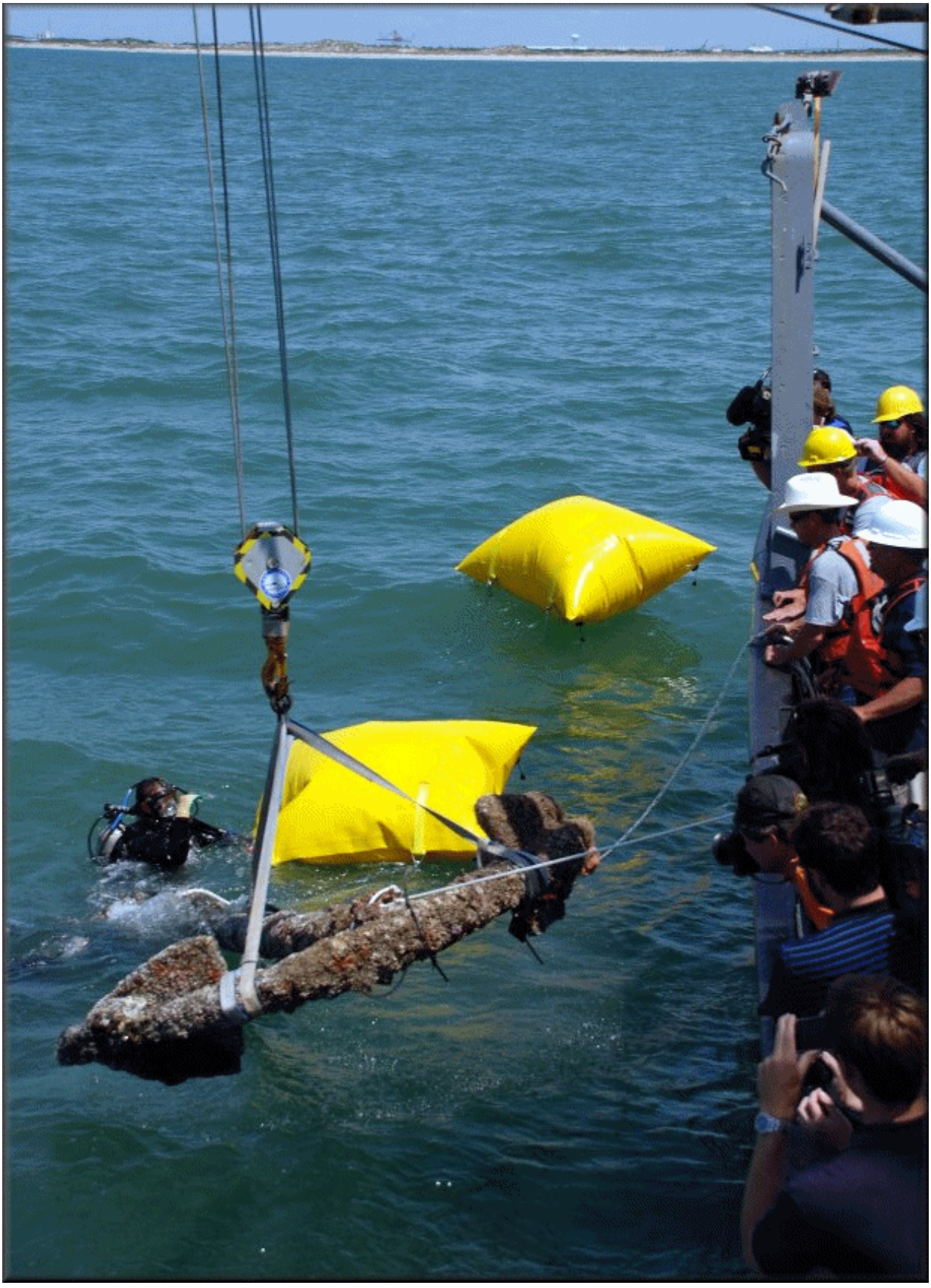

R/V DAN MOO

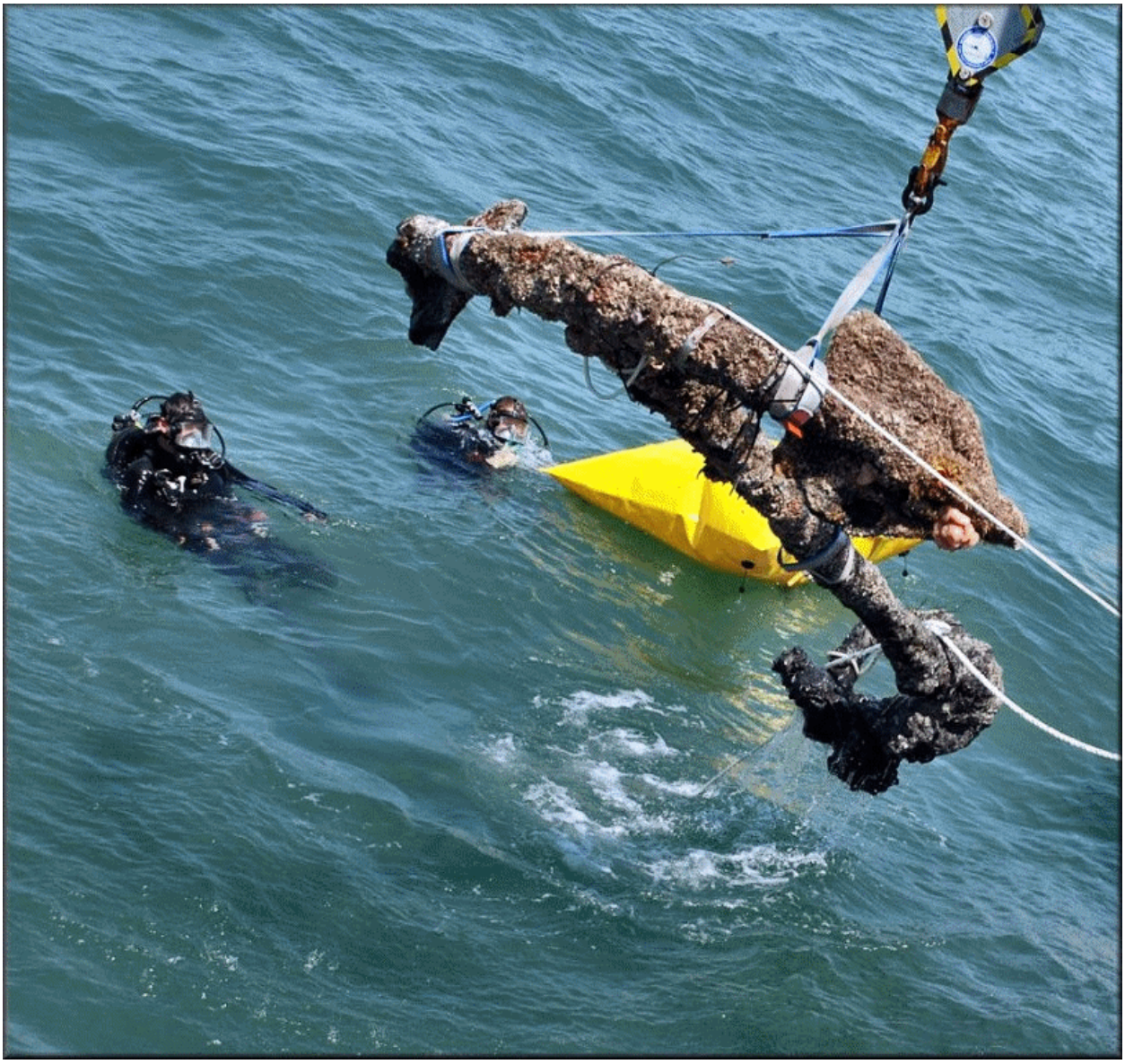


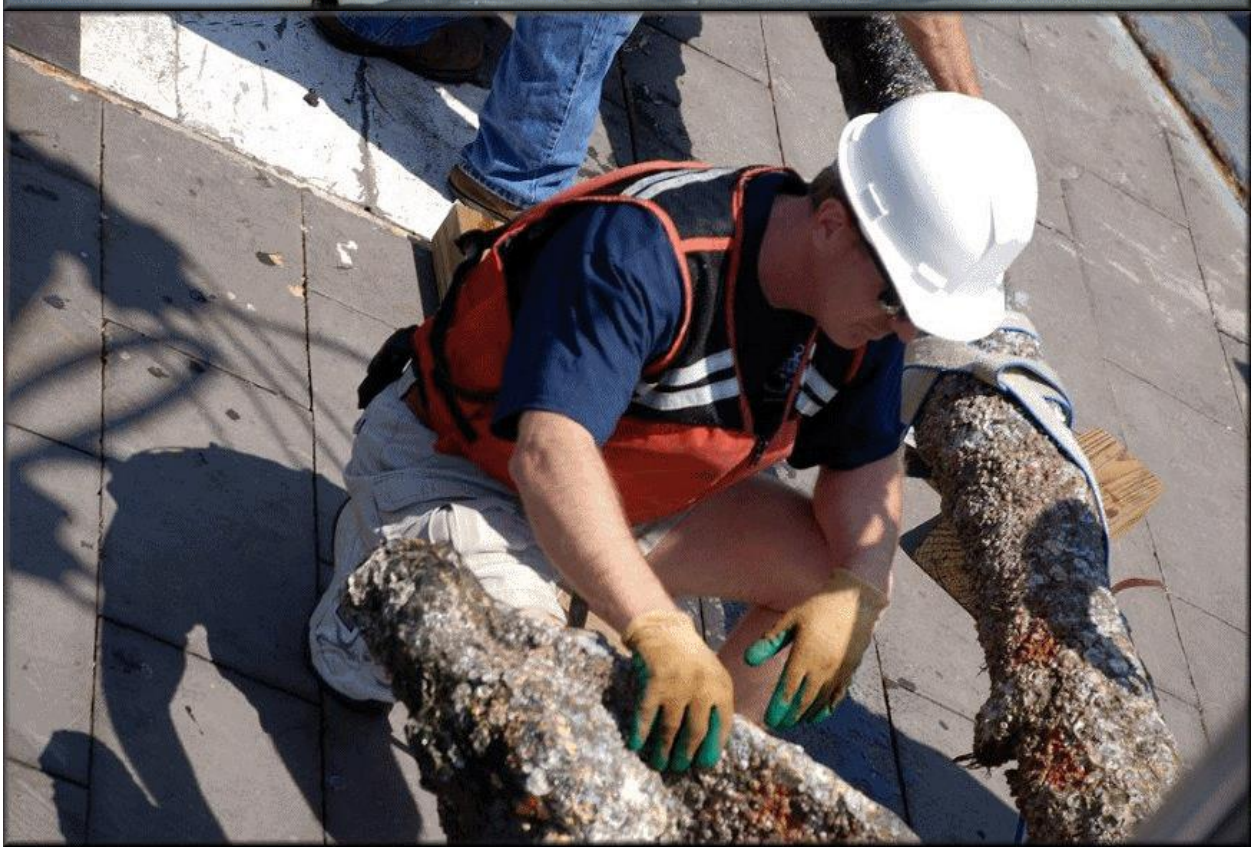

12

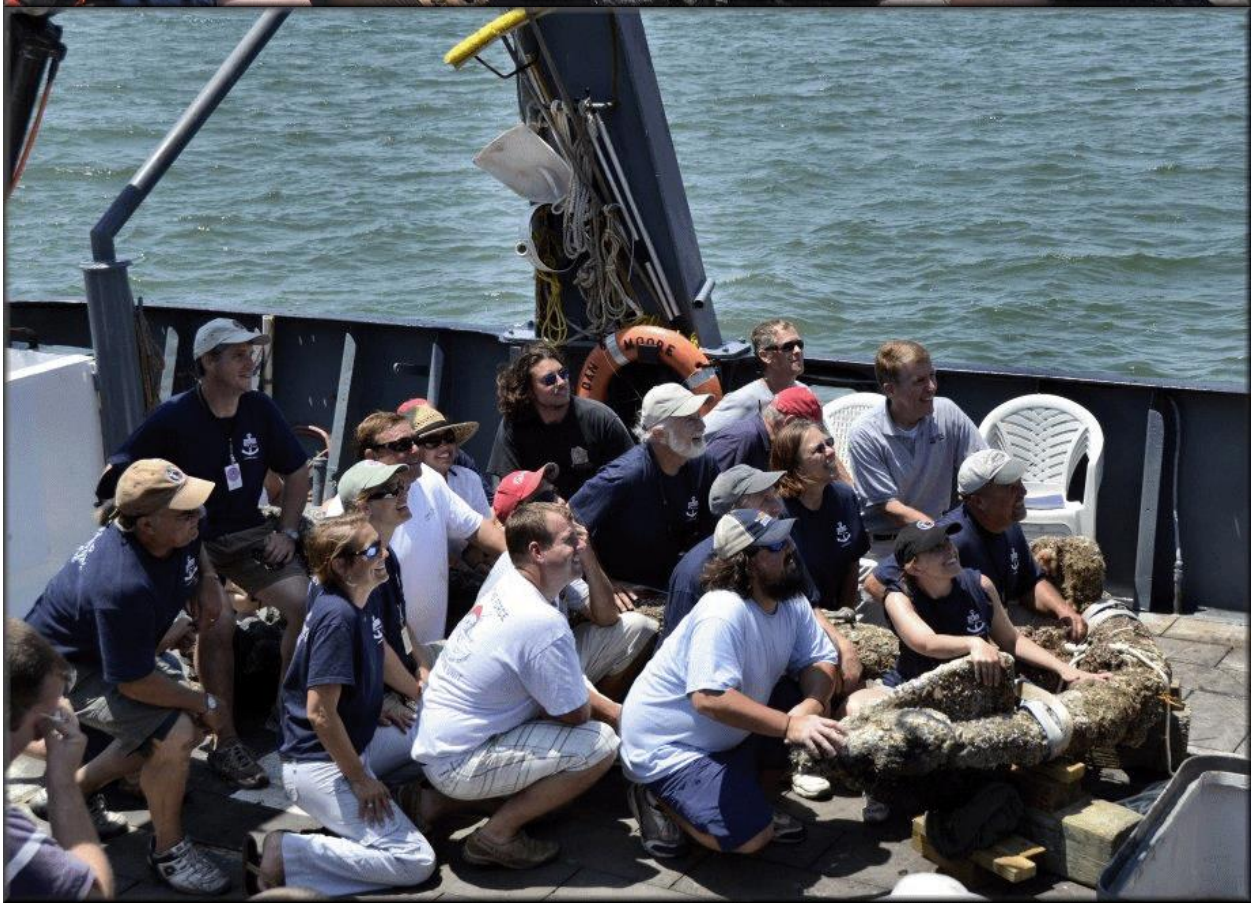













Cape Fear


4600