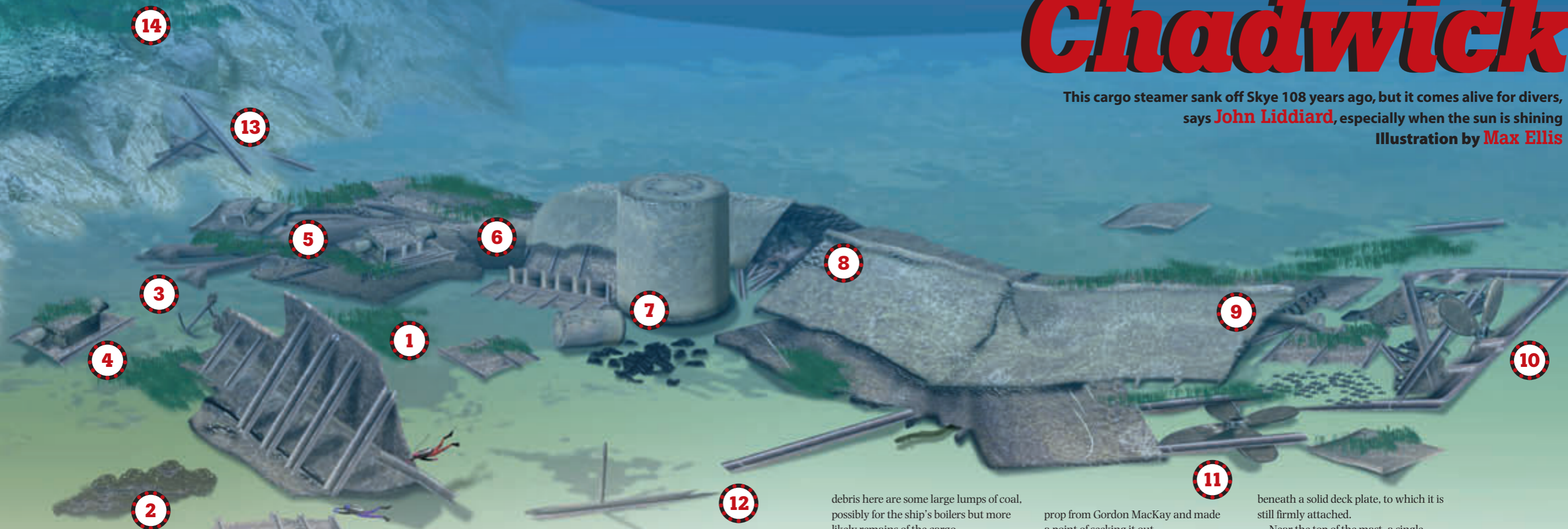


# The Chadwick

This cargo steamer sank off Skye 108 years ago, but it comes alive for divers, says **John Liddiard**, especially when the sun is shining  
Illustration by **Max Ellis**



## IMAGINE A SHIP RUNNING INTO THE ROCKS

hard enough to crack the bows open, then falling back into deeper water to rest on its port side, and slowly being flattened by the sea until it is almost a mound of steel on the seabed.

That is the *Chadwick*; not a particularly intact wreck, but what remains has enough structure to be a ship rather than a mere pile of twisted metal. With strong currents flowing along the west of Skye, there is some impressive marine life and, in bright sunshine, this is an incredibly pretty dive and superb for photographers.

The parts of the *Chadwick* that rise furthest from the seabed and show well on an echo-sounder are the bows and the boilers, the bows being about 10m

to the north-west of the boilers. For convenience, I will assume that we are starting our dive at the bows (1).

The bows have broken from the rest of the wreckage and are twisted back against the line of the wreck. The actual leading edge is lying flat against the seabed in about 2.2m, with a few plates from the port side sticking up 4m or so into the current.

This is the part of the wreck most exposed to the current, and the size of the soft corals shows it. Dead men's fingers? These are more like dead men's arms. With the 20m-plus visibility typical of this area, you might be able to see an upright boiler in the distance.

Behind the bows, a large pile of anchor chain lies among scraps of broken plates

(2). Moving in towards the shore, a large admiralty-pattern anchor encrusted in anemones lies propped across the wreckage (3), with the anchor winch still attached to a heavy section of deck plate nearby (4).

From here, a mast lies along the slope (5) between two more winches and some well-flattened plates of wreckage.

Following the line of the wreck away from the shore, you soon come to a more intact arch of hull (6), with plenty of room to swim inside. About 5m inside, the hull is supported by an intact boiler, which blocks the way further through.

There is also a small donkey boiler among the debris inside this section.

If you don't want to retrace your route to get out, you can dip down below the edge of these hull plates and pop out beside the second boiler, standing upright beside the hull (7). Among the

debris here are some large lumps of coal, possibly for the ship's boilers but more likely remains of the cargo.

The other end of the arched hull plates behind the boilers protects the remains of the engine (8).

From here towards the stern, the hull is a fairly featureless mound of steel until you get to a section of propshaft poking out from under the plates (9).

A few metres further on, a well-braced section of the stern rises a couple of metres above the seabed, with the iron propeller still attached (10). Two blades stick up into the current and the other two are buried in the sand.

Like the bows, these blades are covered in soft corals and anemones.

Moving forwards again, this time along the deck edge of the collapsed hull plates, the spare propeller lies trapped under some girders just a few metres from the stern (11).

Look carefully, because this is easy to miss. I had dived the *Chadwick* a couple of times before I heard about the spare

prop from Gordon MacKay and made a point of seeking it out.

Halfway back towards the boilers, a broken mast (12) stretches out across the seabed towards the bows. By the foot of this mast a winch lies upside-down

beneath a solid deck plate, to which it is still firmly attached.

Near the top of the mast, a single anemone-clad spar reaches a few metres vertically into the current. From here, you should easily be able to see the bows, should you want to cut across. ➤

## TIRED AND EMOTIONAL

Captain Kemp had no excuse. He said that he was tired. Of course he was – he had supervised loading the coal, brought his 1463-ton cargo steamer *Chadwick* down the Clyde from Glasgow, run south to round the Mull of Kintyre, turned north, kept clear of Islay and Tiree, and then headed for the Minch.

And on the night of 2 July, 1892, as the *Chadwick* approached the north-west of Skye, he was still only on the first leg of his long voyage to deliver his cargo to Russia's St Petersburg. He was not to make the second leg.

The *Chadwick* had been built by Swan Hunter of Newcastle in 1882. It was 250ft long, with a beam of 35ft and a draught of 18ft. The builder had put 150hp compound steam engines in her, and new owner R B Avery and Co registered her in London.

The wind from the west increased to a full force 5 as the night wore on, and the sea came up with it. Captain Kemp ordered a change of course to the north-east to enter the Minch, but he was far closer in than he thought.

Thick clouds made it so dark that the lookout could not distinguish sky from Skye. The *Chadwick* ran on to rocks at the foot of the tiny headland of An Ceannaich, at the northern end of Oisgill Bay. She stuck fast, despite running her engines full astern.

At first light a passing mail steamer rescued Captain Kemp and his crew of 18, and a tug was hired to pull the *Chadwick* off. It was too late. By the time it arrived, the steamer had slipped into 30m of water off the headland. Only the tip of her bow was still showing when she was declared a total wreck.

# The Chadwick

With no part of the wreck deeper than 22m, you could have plenty of no-stop time left in which to stray off across the seabed and search for odd bits and pieces that lie separated from the main body of the wreck. Another option is to go round it all again, especially if you are diving with a camera and have some film left.

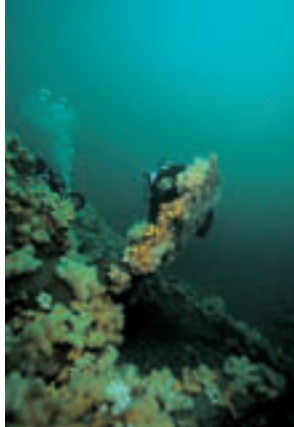
Time and air running low, ascent options are to find your way back to the shot or to work your way up a gentle slope from the northernmost parts of the wreck (13).

As you ascend the slope, there are occasional scraps of plates and girders scattered by the original wrecking.

At the top of the slope, a vertically sided rocky reef (14) reaches to just a few metres from the surface.

This makes a convenient location for decompression or a safety stop while you explore the jungle among the roots of the "killer kelp".

Right, from top: The four-bladed propeller stands clear of the seabed; entering the section of hull which is held up by one of the boilers. Below: Looking up the line of the bows, with the anchor in the background. Below right: A cargo winch lies upside-down, still attached to the deck plate which now covers it



**TIDES:** Slack water is 2 hours after high water and 2 hours after low water Ullapool.

**GETTING THERE:** From Fort William, take the A82 and A87 to Kyle of Lochalsh. Cross the bridge to Skye and take the A850 and A863 to Dunvegan. For the slip and pier at Meanish, turn onto an unclassified road to Glendale just before entering Dunvegan. Continue through Glendale and on to the end of the road at Meanish. For Lochbay, from Dunvegan continue off the A863 towards Edinbane, but after five miles turn onto the B886 to Waternish and Lochbay.

**DIVING AND AIR:** Dive-and-See-the-Hebrides at Lochbay near Dunvegan has a boat, compressor, accommodation, cylinders and weights. Call 01470 592219 or visit [www.dive-and-sea-the-hebrides.co.uk](http://www.dive-and-sea-the-hebrides.co.uk). Alternatively, dive the *Chadwick* from one of the many liveaboard boats that tour the west of Scotland.

**LAUNCHING:** The closest slip is at Meanish near Glendale.

**ACCOMMODATION:** Many hotels, B&Bs and hostels cater for the large number of backpackers who travel to Skye. Contact the Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board, tel 01997 421160, or go to [www.host.co.uk/skye/index.html](http://www.host.co.uk/skye/index.html).

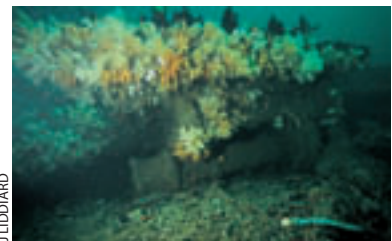
**QUALIFICATIONS:** The *Chadwick* is suitable for Sports Divers or equivalent.

**FURTHER INFORMATION:** Admiralty Chart 1795, *The Little Minch*. Ordnance Survey Map 23, *North Skye*. *Shipwrecks of the West of Scotland* by Bob Baird. *Dive Scotland Vol 2 - Dive North-west Scotland*, by Gordon Ridley. Highlands of Scotland Tourist Board, tel 01997 421160, or [www.host.co.uk/skye/index.html](http://www.host.co.uk/skye/index.html)

**PROS:** A colourful wreck in usually excellent visibility. Many alternative sites available if the weather is uncooperative.

**CONS:** Extortionate bridge tolls when you cross to Skye. Wreck site exposed to stormy weather.

Thanks to Alex Poole, Jonathan Peskett, Gordon MacKay and Aileen Robertson



Would your club or dive centre like to see its favourite wreck featured here? If you would like to help John Liddiard put together the information for a particular wreck, why not invite him to come and dive it with you? Write to John c/o Wreck Tour at DIVER.

**NEXT MONTH:**  
tour the  
*Bretagne*

## HOW TO FIND IT:

Co-ordinates: 57 27.08N 06 47.00W (degrees, minutes and decimals). The wreck is located at the north end of Oisgill Bay, beneath the cliffs at Rubha Ban. A shallow reef runs just off the shoreline at the north of the bay. The *Chadwick* lies at the bottom of the slope, 30m south from the point of the reef that extends furthest from the shore. A large grey boulder lies on the beach directly inshore from the *Chadwick*.

