



Recovered British Cannon on Display in Key Largo

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During a ceremony held on December 13, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and the Key Largo Chamber of Commerce unveiled an 18th century British cannon and a series of educational panels that will give visitors a deeper appreciation for the maritime history that lies beneath the waters of the Keys. NOAA manages the sanctuary in partnership with the state of Florida.

“We are delighted to have the cannon on display at the chamber’s visitor center,” said Jackie Harder, president of the Key Largo Chamber of Commerce. “We know our 71,000-plus annual visitors will enjoy it and, at the same time, learn more about the Keys’ fascinating maritime history.”

The cannon is one of 13 first documented near Carysfort Reef off North Key Largo in 1994 by volunteers from the sanctuary’s maritime heritage research inventory team. Little evidence of a shipwreck has been found, leading archaeologists to believe the cannons may have been heaved overboard in a successful attempt to free the vessel from the reef. The cast iron gun was manufactured between 1760 and 1780, weighs more than one thousand pounds, and was capable of firing a four-pound ball.

“Archaeological information and documentation indicates that the cannon has considerable historic significance,” said project archaeologist Duncan Mathewson. “The cannon may have been mounted for defense on a British privateer or naval ship at the time of the American revolution, when the colonies were at war with England and Florida was not yet a state.”

The sanctuary recovered the cannon in 2003. Working with sanctuary volunteers and staff from the National Undersea Research Center, sanctuary managers sought to learn more about the significance of the site through markings and construction details revealed as the conservation process removed centuries of limestone concretion from the gun.

Longtime volunteer Denis Trelewicz, whose research suggested the site dated to the 1700s, paid for the conservation of the cannon by Mel Fisher’s Motivation Inc. laboratory in Key West, and hired cannon expert Lawrence Campbell to construct a replica carriage mount. Trelewicz passed away just over a year ago.

“This Key Largo Chamber of Commerce display stands as a tribute to Denis Trelewicz and serves as an example of the many outstanding contributions made by our sanctuary volunteers,” commented Cmdr. Dave Score, sanctuary superintendent. “We are pleased that our partnership with the business community in the Upper Keys will allow us to reach so many visitors with the message of the importance of preserving our maritime heritage resources.

The cannon display is located at the Key Largo Chamber of Commerce visitor center, mile marker 106, open daily from 9:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m.



During a recent ceremony held at the Key Largo Chamber of Commerce visitor center, the 18th century British cannon recovered from Keys’ waters was unveiled. The following persons assisted with the unveiling (from left to right): U.S. Congresswoman Ros-Lehtinen’s representative Debbie Zimmerman, Sanctuary Superintendent Cmdr. Dave Score, Monroe County Commissioner Sylvia Murphy, Sanctuary Southeast Regional Director Billy Causey, former Chairman of the Board for the Key Largo Chamber of Commerce Jim Lupino. The current Chairman of the Board, Mike Shipley, also participated in the unveiling, but is hidden in this photograph.