

## The Salcombe Shipwreck

Around 3,000 years ago, a Bronze Age trading ship met its end in the treacherous waters off Salcombe, a coastal town in Devon, south-west England. The vessel was on a remarkable journey, carrying a valuable cargo of copper and tin ingots gathered from several different locations across Europe. These metals were essential in ancient times because, when smelted together, they form bronze — a strong alloy used to create weapons, tools and ornaments. The ship likely sank after striking one of the notorious reefs near the Salcombe estuary, just a short distance from the shore.

The site was first uncovered in 1977 when a recreational diver discovered a Bronze Age sword lying on the seabed. The discovery was significant, but it was the work of the South West Maritime Archaeological Group (SWMAG) — particularly from 2004 onwards — that transformed understanding of the site. In partnership with the British Museum and Oxford University, SWMAG recovered nearly 400 artefacts, including bronze swords, axes, copper and tin ingots, and an exceptional pair of gold bracelets crafted from intricately twisted gold wire.

This collection represents the largest discovery of Bronze Age metal ingots ever found in north-west Europe. Experts believe the cargo originated from various parts of the continent, providing powerful evidence that long-distance trade across the English Channel was well established over 3,000 years ago. Although the wooden hull has entirely decayed, scientists have estimated the ship was approximately 12 metres long, paddled by a crew of around 15 men.

## Questions

1. Where did the Bronze Age ship sink?
2. Approximately how long ago did the ship sink?
3. What metals was the ship carrying, and where had they come from?
4. What alloy is produced by combining copper and tin?
5. Who first discovered the site, and what did they find?
6. What does SWMAG stand for?
7. Which two major institutions worked with SWMAG on the investigation?
8. How many artefacts were recovered, and why is this collection particularly significant in Europe?
9. What can scientists tell us about the ship itself, even though the hull has rotted away?
10. The cargo was made up of metals gathered from several different places across Europe. What does this suggest about the traders and their way of life?



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