

# currents

APRIL 2008  
NOTES, NEWS  
AND STUFF  
YOU CAN USE

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NEW WRECK

# Vandenberg Set to Sink

Mark your calendars. The long-awaited sink date is May 15.

KEY WEST'S soon-to-be artificial reef, the USS *Vandenberg*, is scheduled to make the trip to Key West in March and hang out for a couple of months before her scheduled sink date of May 15. And since there ain't no party like a Key West party, you can bet the Rum Runners are gonna flow when the ship goes down. "I can envision 1,000 boats out there watching when it happens," says Sheri Lohr, a project volunteer and board member for the Artificial Reefs of the Keys organization. Lohr is especially excited because she's using her years of maritime research to organize a temporary exhibit of the ship's colorful history at Key West's "Little White House" museum—on show while the ship is docked in town.



The *Vandenberg* is towed in the James River.

The Florida Keys Community College is getting in on the action as well. College students and staff will take charge of pre- and post-sinking diver monitoring to find out how effective the ship's presence is at lightening the diver load on area reefs. Also, during the months the ship is docked in town, students from the school's port-security program will patrol the near-shore waters, keeping their

eyes and sonar screens open for unusual activity. And once it sinks, those port-security divers will make the first dives on the ship to make sure it's sitting properly on the seafloor, that there were no major shifts onboard and that all the blast charges went off as planned.

Truly a twenty-first century fox of an artificial reef, the *Vandenberg* has also attracted a unique side project. Scientists from the Center for Maritime Sys-

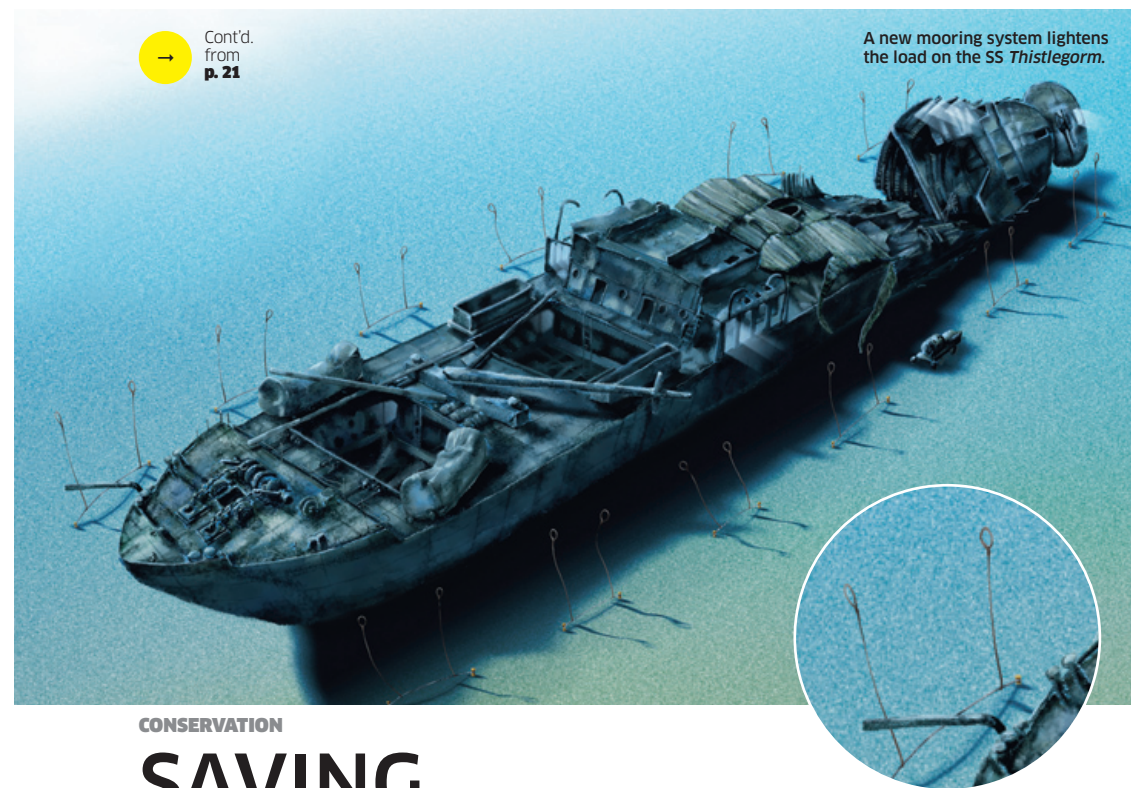
tems at the Stevens Institute of Technology (SIT) plan to install an internet-based ocean-observation system around the ship once it goes down. "We'll get information—everything from currents, temperature, salinity, all the way to streaming video—from the wreck and into classrooms," says SIT professor Michael Bruno. He explains that solar/wind-powered batteries in a marker buoy turned transmitter platform will fuel electric and data cables running to web cameras mounted on the ship, marine sensors, which, from the very beginning, will check the ship's influence on the surrounding environment, and



Key West  
"X" marks the Vandenberg spot

motion sensors that will measure any shifting of the vessel itself, especially during heavy storms or hurricanes. See more at [bigshipwrecks.com](http://bigshipwrecks.com).

DAVID SULLENGER



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A new mooring system lightens the load on the SS *Thistlegorm*.

CONSERVATION

## SAVING RED SEA WRECKS

DIVING THE SS *Thistlegorm* off the southern tip of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula has a hint of the Wild West to it. The site—undoubtedly the most famous wreck in the Red Sea—is unmarked, largely unregulated and visited daily by a swarm of dive boats. Until recently, when one of these boats arrived, a divemaster would bounce-dive to the wreck and tie a rope off to any solid structure that would hold, putting constant strain on this beautiful but eroding World War II casualty, still packed to the gills with her photogenic cargo of Bedford trucks, motorcycles and live ammunition.

"There has been a vast increase in the number of divers and dive boats here in the Red Sea over the last few years without any consideration for the carrying capacity of the resources here," says Amr Ali, the managing director of Hurghada Environmental Protection

and Conservation Association (HEPCA). Ali's nonprofit conservation group closed the *Thistlegorm* to all divers for a month in December 2007, installed a mooring system in the ground surrounding the ship and drilled air exhaust vents in the decks, releasing the air pockets left behind by the tens of thousands of divers who penetrate the hull every year.

The *Thistlegorm* is just the first step in HEPCA's "Saving the Red Sea's Wrecks" campaign, which addresses similarly unsustainable practices throughout the Egyptian Red Sea. Next in line for HEPCA's mooring treatment is the *Rosalie Moller*, another stunning World War II cargo ship that recently lost one of its signature masts to careless boat mooring procedures. And the group is working diligently to spread awareness and education about sustainable tourism. "The whole diving industry needs a strong shake-up and awareness-raising project like this," Ali says. "We need to bring back their environmental consciousness." Visit [hepca.com](http://hepca.com) to find out more. —TRAVIS MARSHALL

BIG SHIPS

## Does Size Matter?

Here's a side-by-side look at five big-name, intentionally sunk wrecks in the U.S.

**HMCS Yukon**  
Location: San Diego, Calif.  
Length: 366 ft.  
Depth range: 60 to 100 ft.



**USTS Texas Clipper**  
Location: South Padre Island, Texas  
Length: 473 ft.  
Depth range: 56 to 134 ft.



**USS Spiegel Grove**  
Location: Key Largo, Fla.  
Length: 510 ft.  
Depth range: 60 to 134 ft.



**USS Vandenberg**  
Location: Key West, Fla.  
Length: 520 ft.  
Depth range (planned): 40 to 140 ft.



Coming Soon

**USS Oriskany**  
Location: Pensacola, Fla.  
Length: 910 ft.  
Depth range: 70 to 212 ft.

