The EXPLORERS CLUB

Report of Expedition

FLAG # 97
Xlendi Project

2007 Season Supported
By
AURORA TRUST and HERITAGE MALTA

Craig Mullen
Ian G. Koblick
**Introduction**

Explorer’s Club Flag number 97 was issued to Craig Mullen and Ian Koblick for the Xlendi Project in Malta. The expedition consisted of an archaeological survey of the approaches to an ancient Punic and Roman harbor off the coast of Gozo, Malta. It was organized in the ambit of an MOU signed between Aurora Trust and the Maltese Government Agency Heritage Malta and carried out during the summer of 2007.

**Malta**

Malta is a small independent country about 60 miles south of Sicily and has been a centre of civilization for more than 5,500 years as exemplified by its early Neolithic temples which date back to circa 2,000 years before the Egyptian pyramids. It has been a major trading port since Phoenician times and home to the Knights of St John between 1530 and 1798.

Adjacent to the main island of Malta is the island of Gozo, a small and quiet place which is off the beaten path. However, in ancient times it was an active trading centre used first by the Carthaginians and then by the Romans. Goods were stored in warehouses for re-transport and redistribution throughout North Africa, Italy and beyond.

**The Site**

The ancient port of Xlendi was much larger than it is today. Situated at the mouth of a dry river valley, much of the original port has been silted over.

Its approaches are bordered by high sheer cliffs that measure over 150 meters with a very shallow reef in the center of the narrow harbour entrance. Consequently, over the years numerous ships never made it into the harbour and their cargos of amphorae lie strewn on the seabed across hundreds of meters in front of the cliffs. The underwater site explored in 2007 is situated in depths varying between 115 to 150 meters. It consists mainly of a sandy seabed punctuated by numerous rocky outcrops. The area is exposed to the prevailing north-westerly wind which, combined with the peculiar
currents present created an environment of difficult sailing conditions and potential disaster.

Over the past five decades, many objects have been brought up from the shallower areas off the coast of Xlendi. Amphorae, anchors, urns and numerous other artefacts were raised by various diving expeditions and are now housed in the Gozo museum of archaeology. A quick glance at the objects visible on the seafloor suggests the presence of multiple shipwrecks. These vary in date from circa 300 BC to approximately 500 AD.

**Objectives of Survey**
The objectives the 2007 field operations carried out as part of the AURORA Trust/Heritage Malta Project were:

* To obtain high resolution bathymetric data of the area.
* To carry out a side scan sonar survey aimed at creating a high resolution geo-referenced topographical map of the seabed which would detect and map targets within the survey area.
* To carry out a visual survey of the areas using a remote operated vehicle (ROV).

The project was planned for and executed during the months of May and June 2007.

**Survey and Results**
Aurora used their purpose built research vessel, MV ISIS, a small but very well-equipped workboat, for the execution of the side scan and ROV surveys. Numerous exploratory survey lines were run to identify specific areas of interest. One particular zone revealed a large flat area of seabed measuring several hundred square meters covered with amphorae of different typologies dating back to approximately 300BC. Additionally, an articulated and intact shipwreck was located in deep waters off the main shipwreck zone.
A mosaic consisting of high resolution sonar data was created to facilitate a better understanding of the site and its surrounding topography. Many objects were photographed in situ so as to facilitate the identification of objects. It is clear that the site is one of major significance that deserved further study and investigation. To this end, Aurora plans to return to Gozo in the late summer/fall of 2008 in order to carry out further remote sensing surveys of what can certainly be referred to as “a graveyard of ancient shipwrecks”.
Appendix A
Images from the 2007 Xlendi Project

THE XLENDI EXPEDITION TEAM (L- R) – CRAIG MULLEN – IAN KOBLOCK - DR TIMMY GAMBIN
ENTIRE AREA OF SURVEY FOR THE 2007 PROJECT RECORDED WITH A KLEIN SYSTEM 3000 SIDE SCAN SONAR
LOOSE AMPHORAE SPREAD ACROSS THE SEABED RECORDED WITH KLEIN SYSTEM 3000 SIDE SCAN SONAR.