Science & Technology

# Tree Rings Solve Mystery of 19th-Century Shipwreck

Columbia scientists formally identify the *Dolphin*, a lost Rhode Island whaler from the 1850s.

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Scientists inspect the remnants of a wooden ship near Puerto Madryn, in Patagonia. (Mónica Grosso)

**Columbia scientists** say that a shipwreck whose origins have been debated since its discovery off the eastern coast of Argentina nearly two decades ago is almost certainly the *Dolphin*, a whaler built in Warren, Rhode Island, in 1850. While historical accounts of the *Dolphin*'s sinking in 1859 had previously led scholars to suspect that the remnants of a hull found near Puerto Madryn belonged to the ship, researchers from Columbia's Tree Ring Laboratory were able to confirm the wreck's

origins by analyzing growth rings in the hull’s ribs. The dendrochronologists determined that the lumber derived from Massachusetts white oaks felled just a few months before the ship was constructed. “It’s fascinating that people built this ship in a New England town so long ago, and it turned up on the other side of the world,” says Columbia scientist Mukund Rao ’20GSAS, a coauthor of the study.



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