

Combined Mexican and Spanish Search Expedition for Sunken Galleon



Researchers from Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History and Spain's National Museum of Underwater Archaeology will try to find the wreckage of a Spanish galleon which went down carrying gold, silver and precious gems worth billions. Both countries have agreed to join forces to search for the legendary *Nuestra Señora del Juncal*, which sank in a storm nearly 400 years ago. It disappeared to the bottom of the ocean in October 1631 after setting sail with its fleet from Veracruz, on the east coast of Mexico, bound for Spain.

Many sailors feared the galleon was already doomed as its commander died just 24 hours before it was due to set sail. It then left dock even though reports from the time reveal it was already taking on gallons of water. One witness said the vessel was so damaged she

'spit bolts' and survivors later said that she sank in the time it takes to say a prayer. After battling a fortnight's storms, cutting the main mast and tossing cannons overboard in a desperate bid to lighten the ship, the crew could do no more. Of the 300 crew, just 39 survived by climbing into a small launch as the galleon disappeared beneath the waves.

Underwater Archaeologists

In 2014, Spain and Mexico signed a memorandum of understanding on their shared underwater cultural heritages to avoid conflict over more than 300 wrecks of Spanish ships lying in Mexican waters. In May, underwater archaeologists will begin a 10-day search for the *Nuestra Señora del Juncal*, which was carrying a haul of loot which had evaded pirates for decades. Its multi-billion pound treasure was destined for Spain to help to cover the expense of the Dutch War of Independence. The so-called 80 Years War was a costly conflict, a revolt of the Seven Provinces, parts of what are today the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg, against Spain.

The *Juncal* was one of the two flagships of the Spanish treasure fleet transporting the riches of America to the South-Spanish town of Seville during the reign of Philip IV. She was loaded with more than a million pieces of gold, silver and precious stones, much of it taken as tax, amounting to between 120 and 150 tonnes.

Photo: Researchers from the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico in the place where the 'Juncal' shipwreck is believed to have sunk. (Rodrigo Del Río Lozano - [Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia de México](http://www.inah.mx))