

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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