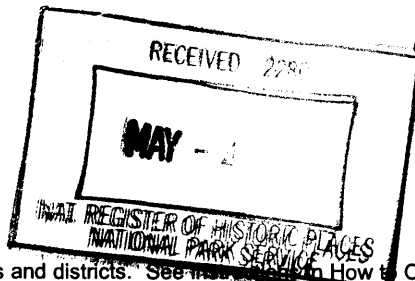


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions on How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name El Rubi Shipwreck Site

other names/site number Capitana/MO00146

2. Location

street & number four miles offshore Plantation Key n/a  not for publication

city or town Tavernier  vicinity

state Florida code FL county Monroe code 087 zip code n/a

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Barbara C. Mattick, DSHPO 5-2-06  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

for Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
Donika K. Martin Seibert 6/15/06

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

**Name of related multiple property listings**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

1733 Spanish Plate Fleet

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: Water-related (ship)

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Transportation: Water-related (shipwreck)

Landscape: Underwater (underwater site)

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

18<sup>th</sup> - Century Galleon

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation (hull) wood

walls

roof

other wood

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Archeology: Historic -- Non-aboriginal

**Period of Significance**

1733

**Significant Dates**

1733

**Significant Person**

n/a

**Cultural Affiliation**

First Spanish Period(1513-1763)

**Architect/Builder**

unknown

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository

# \_\_\_\_\_

El Rubi Shipwreck Site  
Name of Property

Monroe Co., FL  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** Less than one acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	7	5	4	8	9	6	0	2	7	5	6	5	6	0
	Zone		Easting						Northing						
2															

3															
	Zone		Easting						Northing						
4															

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Della Scott-Ireton, Archaeologist III & Barbara E. Mattick, DSHPO

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date April 2006

street & number R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough Street telephone 850 245-6333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name State of Florida

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1 **EL RUBI SHIPWRECK SITE**  
**Monroe County, Florida**

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**SUMMARY**

*El Rubi* (8MO00146) is the site of a wooden-hulled sailing ship that was the royal flagship, or *capitana*, of the Spanish Plate Fleet destroyed in a hurricane on 15 July 1733. The wrecksite is in 19 feet of water on the northeast side of Matacumbe Key in Monroe County, Florida. The wreck, located within the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary, lies on submerged lands belonging to the State of Florida. The site includes scattered ballast stones and a few displaced timber fragments that generally are covered with sand and marine vegetation.

**SETTING**

The site of *El Rubi* is on hard bottom at the northeastern side of Matacumbe Key. Scattered ballast stones and a few displaced timber fragments are buried under a white sand bottom with small patches of sea grass. The site is characterized by blower depressions in the sand. Water depth is 19 feet over the wrecksite with excellent visibility. The bottom is hardpan with a thin veneer of coarse quartz sand; the site supports a variety of marine life.

**DESCRIPTION**

The ballast mound that marks *El Rubi* is dispersed over an area approximately 44 meters long by 80 meters wide, with a small portion of ballast marking the center of the site. The long axis of the shipwreck is oriented north to south. Scattered ballast stones and a few displaced timber fragments are evidence of modern salvage activities including propwash excavation. No non-contribution resources are associated with the site.

Elements of the ship's hull likely are scattered and buried under the ballast and sand. Remaining hull timbers likely consist of the keel, frames, keelson, ceiling planking, and exterior planking as well as fasteners. The protective layer of ballast stones and sand conceals the ship's architecture and, possibly, rigging elements which may include deadeyes, chainplates, blocks, etc. Based on past recoveries from other 1733 shipwrecks, ship-related artifacts such as fasteners and ceramic sherds may also be present. Over the intervening years, some shipwreck material has been dispersed by wave and current action away from the primary area of timbers and ballast. This material forms the "wreck scatter" common to sites in a high-energy environment in shallow water near shore; the site boundaries are intended to encompass the area of wreck scatter. While displaced from their original context, scattered artifacts may still be linked to the shipwreck and can provide important information about site formation processes.

*El Rubi* grounded in shallow water, enabling the Spanish to salvage her cargo. The flagship, badly leaking before she ran aground, became totally submerged, rolling on her starboard side, facing seaward during the storm. Divers from Havana managed to recover a majority of the cargo including silver coins, Cuban copper, cochineal, and indigo. Over the centuries the remains of her hull not covered with ballast and sand were carried away by waves and storms; shipworms (*Teredo navalis*) that thrive in the warm water ate any exposed

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Section number 7 Page 2 **EL RUBI SHIPWRECK SITE**  
**Monroe County, Florida**

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wood. The shipwreck seen today, if left undisturbed, has reached a state of equilibrium with the marine environment and has stabilized.

**SITE INVESTIGATIONS**

The Spanish began salvage activities soon after the fleet disaster. *El Rubi* had been leaking badly before she ran aground and no one aboard expected to survive but her only casualties were two men that were flung into the sea.

As survivors gathered ashore on *Cayo Tavanos* (Tavernier Key), General Torres ordered naval captain Don Nicolas Alvarez de Losada to construct two forts, each defended with four cannon, to guard the King's treasure to be salvaged from *El Rubi*. (The depressions for the salvage camp wells can still be seen on land occupied today by the Island Christian School.) Meanwhile, divers from Havana reached the wreck of the flagship on July 20th and began salvage of her cargo on July 23rd. They managed to recover 1,923 boxes of silver coins, but could not find the remaining seven boxes of coins. They also recovered 550 of the 592 slabs of Cuban copper, and some of the cochineal and indigo was saved. The salvage tally included 5,270,167 *pesos*, 4 *reales* in silver coins, gold coins and silver bars, 729,970 *pesos*, 5 *reales* in silver bars, 4,145 *arrobas* and 23 *libras* of cochineal, 995 *arrobas*, 4 *libras* of *anil* (indigo).

The remains of *El Rubi* were the first of the 1733 wrecks to be rediscovered in modern times. Commercial fisherman Reggie Roberts had seen several wrecks with cannons and ballast during his days on the waters of the Florida Keys. In 1938 Roberts invited Homestead city manager and chief lifeguard Arthur McKee to go fishing with him. McKee also was a hardhat diver and part-time scrap metal salvor. Roberts took McKee to a wrecksite in 27 feet of water 3½ miles off Tavernier Key; the large ballast mound was 125 feet long, 60 feet wide, and six feet above the bottom. Remnants of ship's frames protruded from the pile, on which several encrusted cannon were lying. McKee examined the wreck site and brought up several badly sulfided silver coins and a gold *escudo* dated 1721. After correspondence with the Archive of the Indies in Spain, he received copies of documents describing the lost fleet and a photograph of an old chart depicting the locations of the salvaged wrecks, one of which was the site he had been investigating. For more than a decade, McKee and several associates worked on the massive mound of ballast, timbers, and debris, recovering over twenty cannons of various sizes, more than 1,000 silver coins, statues and religious medals, small arms and edged weapons, jewelry, navigational instruments, ship's gear, and galley wares.

Realizing the historical importance of the many items salvaged from the wreck, McKee built in 1949 one of the world's first museums devoted to shipwreck materials at Tavernier. He also shared the wrecksite with thousands of tourists by taking them out to its location in a glass-bottom boat, allowing many to dive with his hard hat. Several television films were made at the wrecksite; this publicity and the increased popularity of skin diving prompted McKee to apply to the State of Florida for a ten-year lease covering about 75 square miles of the seabed from Molasses Reef Light south to Alligator Reef Light from low water mark, seaward to edge of the Gulf Stream. This lease was the first of many that the State would issue for shipwreck salvage. Mendel

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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Section number 7 Page 3 **EL RUBI SHIPWRECK SITE**  
**Monroe County, Florida**

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Peterson of Smithsonian Institution and underwater explorer Edwin Link visited McKee at the *El Rubi* site first in 1953, and returned several times over the next three years.

McKee placed a large sign on *Capitana's* ballast that read "Keep Off, Private Property of Art McKee." Inevitable confrontation ensued with other treasure hunters intent on salvaging *Capitana's* remains, and McKee eventually found he could not rely on the protection of the state, since the wrecksite actually was beyond its jurisdiction. Consequently, the site was intermittently worked over the years by weekend wreck explorers, including Tim Watkins, Olin Frick, Martin Meylach, Don Thomas, Jim Conway, and Jack Haskins. Methods employed included the use of airlifts, water jets, and dynamite to remove ballast and sand to enable salvors to gain access to the deeper portions of the wrecksite. By the 1970s, the rummaged wrecksite had begun to sink into the sand, and by the late 1980s had become completely buried.

In 1988 a second survey of *El Rubi* was conducted by the Florida Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Archaeological Research with participation from Florida State University and Indiana University during an underwater archaeology field school. The purpose of the survey was to locate a candidate for Florida's second Underwater Archaeological Preserve from among the known sites of the 1733 fleet. Eleven wrecks of the 1733 fleet were surveyed and a system was developed to rank sites for various criteria, including accessibility, archaeological integrity, biological features, and research and park potential.

In 1993, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary granted a research and recovery permit to Caribbean Shipwreck Research Institute, Inc. to continue work on *El Rubi*. Between 1993 and 2001, the *Capitana* Project employed eight different vessels with propwash deflectors to excavate an area of some 256,000 square meters of seabed to recover more than 1,600 tagged artifacts. Some iron artifacts were reburied after being tagged and recorded. Others were conserved in a laboratory at the Maritime Museum of the Florida Keys. The disposition of these artifacts is uncertain.

In 2004, the Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research resurveyed the wrecks of the 1733 fleet as part of a grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coastal Management Program. The purpose of the grant was to obtain archaeological and historical information about the 1733 fleet disaster in order to create a maritime heritage attraction for historical, recreational, and educational tourism. All of the sites of the 1733 shipwrecks, including *El Rubi*, were surveyed using an azimuth and measuring tape to record the ballast mounds using distance and bearing. Ballast, timbers, areas of disturbance, and large biological features such as coral heads were recorded on individual site plans for each shipwreck. The sites also were recorded with video and photography.

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Section number 8 Page 1 **EL RUBI SHIPWRECK SITE**  
**Monroe County, Florida**

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**SUMMARY**

*El Rubi* is significant at the national level under **Criterion D** in the area of **Archaeology: Historic-Non-Aboriginal**.

Under **Criterion D** this shipwreck is significant as one of the shipwrecks of the 1733 Spanish Plate Fleet disaster. *El Rubi* is one of very few positively identified examples of the galleon ship type that was heavily used for commerce in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and that transported treasure and goods between Spain and the Americas in the *Carrera de Indias*. As a part of Florida's and the nation's history, *El Rubi* represents an element of the early maritime commerce that skirted, and occasionally wrecked upon, the shores of today's state and that was the impetus for the Spanish colonization and occupation of what is today the state of Florida. The shipwreck has stabilized in the marine environment and can, through future archaeological investigation, provide additional information about 18<sup>th</sup>-century merchant vessels, the galleon ship type in particular, the Spanish *flota* system, and trans-Atlantic maritime culture.

**HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE: *El Rubi***

This royal ship was flagship of the 1733 fleet, carrying the King's treasure and commanded by General Rodrigo de Torres. Her master was Don Balthesar de la Torre. According to the manifest, she carried 1,940 boxes of silver coins, 104 *castellanos* in worked gold, 3,200 *pesos* in gold coins, 6,099 *marcos* in worked silver, 4,913 *arrobos* of cochineal, 97 *arrobos* of wild cochineal, 9,230 *arrobos* of anil (indigo), 36,000 *arrobos* of vanilla, 10 boxes of chocolate, 592 slabs of Cuban copper; extra spaces below deck may have been filled with tobacco.

During the hurricane the flagship, which had been leaking badly before she ran aground, became totally submerged, rolling on her starboard side, facing seaward. As survivors gathered ashore on *Cayo Tavano*s (Tavernier Key), General Torres ordered naval captain Don Nicolas Alvares de Losada to construct two forts, each defended with four cannon, to guard the King's treasure to be salvaged from *El Rubi*. (The depressions for the salvage camp wells can still be seen on land occupied today by the Island Christian School.) Meanwhile, divers from Havana reached the wreck of the flagship on July 20th and began salvage of her cargo on July 23rd. They managed to recover 1,923 boxes of silver coins, but could not find the remaining seven boxes of coins. They also recovered 550 of the 592 slabs of Cuban copper, and some of the cochineal and indigo was saved. The salvage tally included 5,270,167 *pesos*, 4 *reales* in silver coins, gold coins and silver bars, 729,970 *pesos*, 5 *reales* in silver bars, 4,145 *arrobos* and 23 *libras* of cochineal, 995 *arrobos*, 4 *libras* of anil (indigo).

Once the cargo was recovered, the Spanish left the wreck to the sea to become home to generations of marine life.



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Section number 10 Page 1 **EL RUBI SHIPWRECK SITE**  
**Monroe County, Florida**

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### BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The site boundary of the *El Rubi* is defined as a circle of 1,000 yards radius around the geographical coordinates Latitude 24° 55.491' N, Longitude 80° 30.891' W, lying offshore and below the mean low water mark of the Atlantic Ocean and encompassing the ballast mound and associated hull structure and artifacts.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The *El Rubi* site boundary is based on boundaries determined for another 1733 plate fleet wreck, *San Pedro*, that was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. The purpose of the 1,000 yards radius around the site is to encompass the scatter of material culture relating to the shipwreck that has dispersed with wave and current action away from the primary area of timbers and ballast.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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**EL RUBI SHIPWRECK SITE  
Monroe County, Florida**

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**PHOTOGRAPHS**

- 1.a) *El Rubi*
  - b) Monroe County, Florida
  - c) Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research
  - d) August 2004
  - e) Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research
  - f) Ballast pile looking SSW
  - g) 1 of 2
  
- 2.a) *El Rubi*
  - b) Monroe County, Florida
  - c) Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research
  - d) August 2004
  - e) Florida Bureau of Archaeological Research
  - f) Timber
  - g) 2 of 2



COWPENS ANCHORAGE

Plantation Pt

Treasure Harbor

H A N N E L L

Plantation Key Quad

Capitana

(El Rubi)

FLORIDA



El Rubi  
Capitana  
2004

