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Video delves into Titanic deterioration

Video offers absorbing look at Titanic

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Overfishing in the north Atlantic might be contributing to a quickening of the rate the Titanic wreckage is deteriorating on the ocean floor.

Researcher David Bright, a biologist who has studied the remains of the luxury liner for more than 30 years, believes a decline in the number of cod, pollack, haddock and even whales in the waters above Titanic is contributing to a huge increase in plankton, the tiny organisms on which those fish and sea mammals feed.

The plankton rains down on the wreckage of the famed ship, which struck an iceberg and sank in April 1912, causing the deaths of more than 1,500 passengers and crew.

"At times, the plankton comes down quite thick, and we call it 'sea snow,'" Bright said.

The plankton, in turn, seem to be stimulating billions of deep-sea microbes, which are feeding on Titanic's steel and iron skeleton. The microbes eventually become visible in the form of "rusticles," a term coined because of their resemblance to rust-covered icicles.

"We are starting to see a symbiotic relationship between the amount of plankton and the excited nature of the microbes," said Bright, who visited the Titanic wreckage site in 2003 and again this year aboard a Russian deep-sea submersible. "We are trying to gain an understanding of how that relationship works."

Bright, a Penn State graduate with degrees in biology and physiology, will discuss some of the latest findings about and images of Titanic during a special one-hour video presentation at Whitaker Center tomorrow.

He promises an enjoyable "virtual reality experience" for visitors as he unveils digitally filmed images of the famous luxury liner.

Dr. Jonathan Elias, director of exhibits and programs at Whitaker, said Bright is a world leader in shipwreck research and will offer guests the best look at the current state of Titanic "short of making the voyage themselves."

Bright's presentation, titled "Titanic -- The Ultimate Shipwreck," is in conjunction with the Harrisburg center's on-going exhibit of about 100 Titanic artifacts, which has drawn more than 30,000 visitors since it opened in June.

Whitaker officials announced last week that "Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition" has been extended by two weeks and is now scheduled to close Sept. 18.

Bright is president of Nautical Research Group, a New Jersey-based company that is involved in the

discovery, exploration, research and analysis of shipwreck disasters throughout the world.

Research at the Titanic site might help scientists better understand the complex interactions that lead to the deterioration of sunken ships. The information could be useful in shipwreck preservation efforts, as well as shedding light on the natural forces at work in the deep ocean and how surface activity such as overfishing can affect the equation.

Bright said those forces seem to be accelerating at the Titanic site.

"One of the things we need to determine is whether the process is linear or exponential," he said. "We believe that the rate of deterioration is accelerating, but it will take many years and special experiments to establish that."

Even under the best circumstances, Bright said, the ocean floor is an inhospitable environment.

"There are a lot of naturally occurring things that are going on at Titanic that are independent of this," he said. "Saltwater and steel have never been good friends."

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