

WORLD'S OLDEST MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE DISCOVERED IN A GIN BOTTLE

TEXT

The oldest message in a bottle ever discovered has washed up on a shore in Western Australia. Only this wasn't sent by a castaway as an S.O.S. message – rather, it's a vestige of an old German experiment thrown into the ocean 132 years ago.

A woman named Tonya Illman discovered the 19th-century Dutch gin bottle while walking along a beach north of Wedge Island. She originally picked it up because she thought it looked pretty and wanted to place it on her bookcase. But then her son's girlfriend found a note inside that was written in German and dated June 12, 1886.

When they got home, Tonya's husband, Kym, put the message in the oven for a few minutes to dry it off, according to The Guardian. Using his basic knowledge of German, he then determined that the message was asking whomever found the bottle to write down the date and time of discovery, and then mail the bottle's original message with this information to an address in Germany or the nearest German Consulate.

After doing some research online, Kym hypothesized that the bottle was part of a 69-year-old study of global ocean currents by the German Naval Observatory. To see if this theory was correct, the couple took the bottle to the Western Australian Museum, which investigated its origins with the help of researchers in Germany. And it turns out, Kym was right.

"From 1864 until 1933, thousands of bottles were thrown into the world's oceans from German ships, each containing a form on which the captain would write the date it was jettisoned, the exact coordinates at the time, the name of the ship, its home port and travel route," reported the Western Australian Museum, where the bottle is currently on display. "On the back, it asked the finder to write when and where the bottle had been found and return it.

The message in the recently discovered bottle says it was thrown into the Indian Ocean from the deck of the German ship *Paula* on its journey from Cardiff, Wales, to Makassar, in modern-day Indonesia. Researchers in Germany corroborated the information on the note with the ship captain's Meteorological Journal, which recorded the jettisoning of a bottle on the same date and at the same coordinates as was listed on the bottle's message.

"A handwriting comparison of the bottle message signed by the captain and Paula's Meteorological Journal, shows the handwriting is identical," says Dr. Ross Anderson, assistant curator of maritime archaeology at the museum, according to the press release.

After being thrown overboard, the bottle most likely washed up in Australia within a year and became covered with wet sand that helped preserve and conceal it for over a century, until a storm blew it away. It's the first bottle and note recovered from this experiment since 1934, though many of the others were not returned.

This new discovery beats out the previous 108-year record for a lost message in a bottle. In that case, a German woman had discovered the bottle that the U.K. Marine Biological Association had thrown into the ocean in November 1906.

So the next time you spy a glass bottle on the beach, check to see if there's a message inside. If you're lucky, you might find one that's even older.