

Specialist Firms Are Cashing in on the Treasure That Lies Below

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For the past 150 years, the world's oceans have been crisscrossed by hundreds of thousands of kilometers of cabling. Specialist firms are cashing in on abandoned cables.



Treasure deep below the sea - a massive web of undersea cables

([Newswire.net](#) -- January 14, 2017) -- When thinking about the ocean, treasure and adventure, the first things that often come to mind are pirates, swashbuckling heroes and buried hoards of gold on some remote desert island. Most of these elements belong on the pages of a storybook or on the silver screen. Today, a buried treasure of a different sort can be found at sea – not on a distant island, but at the bottom of the ocean. It's not gold, but to some, it's something just as valuable.

For the past 150 years, the world's oceans have been crisscrossed by hundreds of thousands of kilometres of cabling. From the first undersea telegraph cables of the 1840s and '50s, to the modern fibre optic telecommunications cables to the massive underwater power cables throughout the globe, the world's largest water bodies have been meshed together into a massive web of undersea cables.

Over the years, some of these cables cease to function either because of obsolete technology, damage to the cable itself or because of financial troubles facing the managing company. What happens to this extensive infrastructure once it can no longer be used? If a cable cannot be upgraded, repurposed or reused, then the only other option, other than leaving it be, is to recycle it for raw material for the industry.

Unfortunately 94% of unused undersea cables are still lying abandoned on the seabed along with 72,000 pieces of hardware such as signal repeaters, according to [CRS Holland](#), a cable recovery firm, and this number continues to grow.

Although the diameter of some of these cables may only be a few centimetres, the sheer length of them yields massive amounts of raw materials. [Marine and offshore cables](#) are fabricated from multiple constituents, most of which are used to provide the cable with strength and protection in the harsh undersea environment. These include copper, aluminium, steel and plastic, all of which are readily recyclable and reusable.

So these cables are a precious resource that can yield valuable raw materials for re-use. To get an idea of the kind of value that can be obtained, one of CRS Holland's ships has reeled in almost 20,000 kilometres of cabling since 2009 that is estimated to be worth over £22 million.

CRS Holland isn't the only company that has been recovering cable over the past few years. Many others have come into to the game and are taking advantage of this relatively new source of business.

There are some critics of this activity however, and most have environmental concerns. Keith Schofield, general manager of the [International Cable Protection Committee](#) says that studies have shown that the disturbance of the seabed by the removal of cabling, especially in shallow waters may cause environmental harm. Brian Bett, a deep-sea biologist from the [National Oceanography Centre](#), adds that the impact of cables on the sea floor may be negligible to deep ocean life. "But," he says, "there could be a carbon footprint assessment of the diesel fuel used to recover them."

Source: <http://newswire.net/newsroom/blog-post/00094794-specialist-firms-are-cashing-in-on-the-treasure-that-lies-below.html>