

'Ictineo II

(a reconstructed field recording –
first steam-powered run on 14 December 1867)
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A 30 minute atmospheric 'reconstructed' field recording of an underwater test run of the worlds first steam-powered submarine, the Ictineo II, on 14 December 1867 in Barcelona Spain.

The cramped interior of the Ictineo II, crafted from wooden barrels which once held wine, oil and milk, slowly makes its way out of the Barcelona harbor then later submerges 30 meters placing a strain on the already creaking hull.

A faint drone of shifting harmonics emanates from the soul of the machine, the ethereal sound of chemical reaction bounces around the reverberant interior.

Large copper ballasts, sloshing with water, surround the inner hull. Long copper pipes run throughout the ship supplying air and water for buoyancy and human survival.

A long shaft turns the propeller in its wobbly mechanical support. Brass pistons churn in place. In the background, a crude ventilator pumps oxygen to the men operating the vessel.

An early prototype of a 'hydroscope' (a stethoscope type device for listening underwater) is affixed to the outer hull of the ship, the operator sits listening while scribbling into a notebook, transcribing an alien sound environment never heard before. At one point the ship passes through a dense kelp forest, the fronds lap at the ship as it makes its way back to harbor after a successful journey.

The captain and inventor Narcis Monturiol forbade any verbal communication among the crew, ordering everyone to communicate in sign language throughout the voyage in order for his guest hydroscopist to listen without distraction.

Little did anyone on board the Ictineo II know that this would be its last voyage. Shortly after this successful test run, Narcis Monturiol lost all financial support for his visionary project and the Ictineo II was dismantled and sold for scrap.