

Sealand: the one acre nation

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A nation is often thought of as a vast, sweeping region of land and water inhabited by a substantial group of individuals who are governed by a formal party or leader. Such restrictions do not apply to the self-proclaimed country The Principality of Sealand. This miniscule micronation does not govern over any land at all; instead, Sealand only reigns over a man-made island fortress which is smaller than a standard football field.

Founded by the operator of an illegal radio station in 1967, Sealand has since been in a constant struggle to be recognized as an independent state. In the meantime, the royal family of the nation has battled off pirate attacks, survived British opposition, and grappled with the loss of their founding father and mother. The story of Sealand is one of the most unique and bizarre tales in history due to its peculiar location and interesting founding family, early battles with governments and pirates, steadfast determination to meet the requirements of a country, and modern relevance and battle to remain independent. The Principality of Sealand set itself apart from the world through its strange location on Rough's Tower and intriguing founding family who remained admirably dedicated to protecting their country. The origins of Sealand begin all the way back in the Second World War, when the British government commissioned the construction of six island fortresses to protect against German adversaries. The islands were constructed of concrete and steel, and were simply a platform of steel suspended on two hollow cylindrical steel pillars.

One of these islands was the infamous Rough's Tower, an antiaircraft weaponry station measuring 43, 060 square feet and located nearly seven miles off the coast of Suffolk, England. This distance meant that the island

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was illegally situated in international waters during a time of world crisis. The island was consequentially abandoned after the war concluded (“About us”). This neglect of the island by the British left the door open for a man by the name of Roy Bates, the operator of a “pirate” radio station. Bates had previously operated on a different tower called “Knock John”, playing pop music and comedy entertainers who were never heard on the only legal radio station in England, BBC.

Upon being forced from his tower due to its location under Britain jurisdiction, Bates moved to Rough’s Tower, which the British legally could not interfere with. Before he set up his radio station once again, a new vision popped in Bates’s head, why not declare the tower his own independent state? On September 2, 1967, Bates was joined by his family and friends as he declared Rough’s Tower to be The Principality of Sealand. The Bates family hoisted a newly designed flag, and “Prince Roy” gave his wife a very original birthday gift, declaring her Princess Joan (“About Us”). The Bates’ seemed set up to live the ocean dream in their very own country; however, the dream would not come without challenges. Upon the founding of Sealand, both the British government and greedy pirates were quick to assault the new nation. The British government quickly responded by ordering the destruction of all the remaining towers off the coast.

Helicopters dropped explosives which mangled and ravaged the steel structures. When a government vessel cruised past Sealand threatening its inhabitants, Roy’s son Michael fired warning shots across the ship, sending the crew barreling away at full speed. The Bateses were not left alone for long; however, as they were called to court for firing at a government ship.

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The British judge shocked the entire court by decreeing that England had no jurisdiction over Rough's Tower. The Bateses considered this judge's decision the first recognition of Sealand as an independent state ("About Us").

Trouble brewed again when Roy went to negotiate with a German group who wanted to turn the tower into a casino. While Roy was away, the Germans sent a helicopter packed with cutthroat mercenaries to Sealand, who took over the island and captured Michael as a hostage. Michael was eventually released to the British mainland, where he rejoined his father. Instead of giving in, the Bateses decided to launch a courageous counterattack. A family friend who owned a helicopter delivered Roy and Michael to their island, where they then descended cautiously down ropes onto the tower.

A simple warning shot was all it took to catch the mercenaries off guard and retake the island (Smith). The Bateses had survived the two most threatening attacks on their country; nonetheless, they had yet to convince the world of their legitimacy. The royal family of Sealand used the four guidelines of a state presented at the Montevideo Convention in 1933 to justify their nation-hood. Only one country in the world has ever recognized Sealand as a country, and ironically that one nation is Germany. Despite being ignored worldwide, the Bateses insisted that recognition by other countries is not what defines a state, rather, if a region meets the guidelines presented at the Montevideo Convention, they qualify as an independent state. The four requirements that the Bateses spoke of are a permanent population, a government, a defined territory, and the ability to enter relations with other states.

Sealand does contain a permanent population, though it has often been below a measly ten individuals most of the time. The Principality of Sealand is not only ruled by the government of the royal Bates family, but by a constitution that contains four articles. The micronation's defined territory is simply Rough's Tower, though the Bateses have attempted to claim a region of the sea surrounding it. Finally, the Bateses argue that Sealand can deal with other nations, as they supposedly bring in \$600, 000 a year from trade of items such as clothing. The Bateses also went the extra mile, as they gave Sealand a red, white, and black striped flag, an official crest and motto, a national anthem, and its own stamps and currency. The world still ignores Sealand, mostly because the Montevideo Convention was only signed by thirteen countries, all of which came from the Americas (Eveleth).

Despite these hurdles, the Bates still pursue their dream of global recognition today in face of family losses. In the twenty-first century, Sealand had kept its motivation and ambition to remain independent and relevant in a modern world, despite being ruled by a new heir. In 2012, the founding father of Sealand, Roy Bates, passed away. Just four years later, Princess Joan Bates bade farewell to her family and country as she joined her husband in death. The death of Sealand's founding couple left Michael Bates, then 63 years old, to rule the micronation. Unlike his father, Michael gave the tiny country more world recognition through modern media by releasing pictures of the home, whose many rooms are in the rusty steel pillars below the water level (Smith).

Prince Michael set up a worldwide website for the country that offers souvenir items such as t-shirts and mugs. In addition, the site offers the title <https://assignbuster.com/sealand-the-one-acre-nation/>

of Lord, Baron, Baroness, and Knight to anyone who will pay anywhere from \$60- \$145. One of the main factors that makes Sealand relevant is the inspiration that it provides to other micronations. Today, there are an estimated eighty micronations worldwide, the majority of which began after Sealand was founded (“ About Us”). Overall, The Principality of Sealand has done extremely well to adapt to a modern world and remain recognized as a unique establishment.

Sealand is a country unlike any other thanks to its unprecedented location, daring battles with its foes, honorable attempts to be recognized in the world, and one-of-a-kind place in modern society. Fifty years ago, Roy Bates turned an illegal radio business into the world’s smallest nation with few resources and ample amounts of confidence. He and his family never failed to defend their country with all they had. When the world refused to recognize Sealand, Prince Roy used politics and philosophy to take the world head on. The new heir to the world’s smallest country still attempts to keep the country going with his family by his side.

Though the future of Sealand may be in doubt, there is no debating that the tale of Sealand is one of the greatest stories rarely told. ? Works Cited “ About Us.” Sealand Gov, Michael Bates, 1 Jan. 2017. Eveleth, Rose. “ Future – ‘ I Rule My Own Ocean Micronation’.

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