

By: Warren Bush & Neil Burgess



A Chart Depicting the South Avalon Peninsula and its Wrecks

The UASBC enjoyed a presentation titled Documenting, Protecting and Raising Awareness of Shipwrecks in Newfoundland and Labrador on 10 February 2021. Neil Burgess, President of the Shipwreck Preservation Society of Newfoundland and Labrador (SPSNL), presented to 35 people via video teleconference over a 90 minute period. Similar to the UASBC, the SPSNL's mission is to advance the awareness, documentation and stewardship of shipwrecks throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Untold thousands of ships have met their fate in that province's waters, and the SPSNL is in the enviable position of diving throughout this graveyard and probing its exceptional potential for exploration and re-search.

Exploring Shipwrecks from Coast to Coast *(continued)*

Initially formed in early 2012, the SPSNL's flagship project was the identification of three shipwrecks, known to be whalers, which had apparently been abandoned in Conception Harbour, on Newfoundland's Avalon Peninsula. The whaling industry in Newfoundland began with Basques in the sixteenth century, a period which received widespread attention through an archaeological excavation by Parks Canada at Red Bay, in Labrador, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



Wrecked whaler SS Charcot in Conception Harbour (two other wrecks lay beneath the visible one).

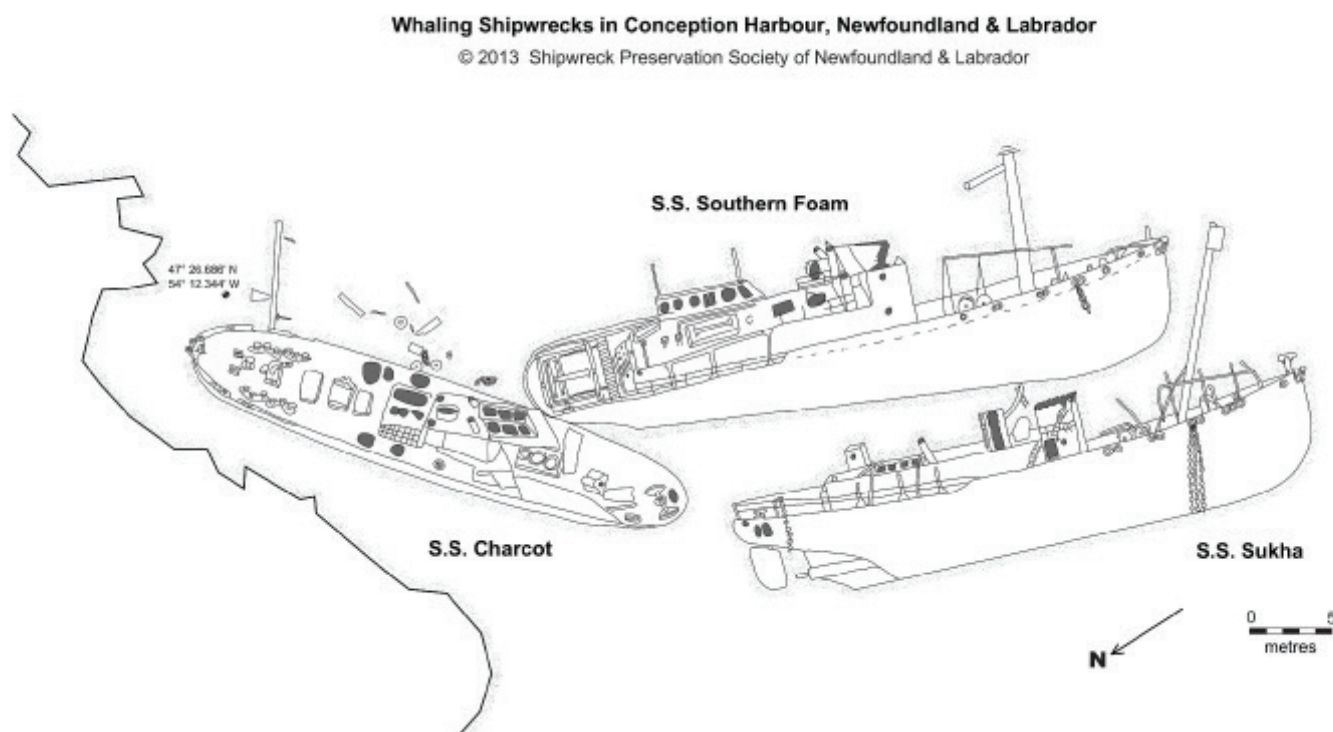
Note the SPSNL storyboard in the foreground.

North Atlantic whaling intensified over the following centuries, and the harvesting capabilities of commercial firms increased dramatically with advances in steam power and munitions. The region particularly appealed to Norwegian interests, but enterprising British subjects also set out to exploit the whale fishery. Indeed, from 1898 to 1972, no less than nineteen whaling companies operated out of Newfoundland. The whalers that the SPSNL identified during their first project belonged to Johan C. Borgen, a very active whale hunter whose 20-year career saw him active from Antarctica to Labrador. Borgen's business declined after a catastrophic fire at his whaling station in Hawke Harbour, Labrador, and his advancing age. His once industrious six-ship fleet, which he had moved to Conception Harbour (minus one that sank at Hawke Harbour), settled into the landscape, eventually becoming relics of a bygone industry and obstructions to navigation. Two were eventually towed away for scrap, two more sank below the waterline and eventually settled slightly beyond,

Exploring Shipwrecks from Coast to Coast *(continued)*

and underneath, a fifth, which is half submerged at the foreshore. Identifying these three wrecks represented SPSNL's first challenge!

SPSNL arranged to teach courses to be taught in Underwater and Foreshore Archaeology under agreement with Britain's Nautical Archaeology Society, which trained local divers in the principles and methods of archaeological fieldwork. The project's final report indicates that the course provided "an understanding of archaeological dating techniques, principles of deposition, site formation processes, archaeological legislation, and underwater two-dimensional (2D) survey skills." SPSNL members spent the remainder of their 2013 summer season finishing their surveys of the wrecks, which proved more time consuming than initially anticipated, namely through limited visibility, the labour required for 3D trilateration surveys, heavy kelp growth, magnetic interference, and cold water.



A site survey of the whaling wrecks of Conception Harbour

Fieldwork employed two avenues of methodology established during the course: 2D and 3D survey methods. The 2D method used a 20m baseline and was advantageous for mapping the debris field, which "created a spatial awareness of the artifacts in conjunction with the wreck," according to the report. Further, "each wreck was then directly measured using survey tape and then tied into the baseline using bearings and distances. Freehand sketches and measurements were done underwater of each shipwreck, noting all significant superstructure, deck machinery and components." A 3D survey method was also employed with the help of a computer program, which analyzes control points designated by divers, and creates a precise 3D map based on trilateration of the points.

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Exploring Shipwrecks from Coast to Coast *(continued)*

Once fieldwork wrapped up, SPSNL members analyzed the results, and conclusively identified the wrecks as the SS Charcot, SS Sukha, and SS Southern Foam (results that differed from regional speculation). They were off to the races, and looking for more challenges!

SPSNL next explored several wrecks around Bell Island, the site of two German U-Boat attacks during the Second World War. By the 1890s Bell Island's community of Wabana had become an important iron ore mine, and the U-513 and U-518 attacked the anchorage for bulk carriers on 5 September 1942 and again on 2 November of the same year, sinking the SS Saganaga, the SS Lord Strathcona, the SS P.L.M. 27 and the SS Rose Castle. These wrecks have become iconic Atlantic Canadian dives sites and appeal to novice and technical divers alike. SPSNL documented numerous artifacts throughout a remarkably undisturbed landscape, and was able to partner with Digital Museums Canada to produce a Virtual Museum Exhibit commemorating the attacks on Bell Island in 1942: https://www.communitystories.ca/v2/wwii-came-to-bell-island_seconde-guerre-mondiale/



The HMS Sapphire, a fifth-rate frigate launched in 1675 and burned in Bay Bulls, Newfoundland, to avoid enemy capture.

Exploring Shipwrecks from Coast to Coast *(continued)*

The SPSNL has also explored the wreck of the HMS Sapphire, a fifth-rate frigate commissioned into the Royal Navy in 1675. The warship left England during King Williams's War in April 1696 with orders to escort fishing vessels across the North Atlantic and protect them from the French. Sapphire remained active in the waters around New-foundland after its initial escort task, and was cornered by a small French fleet in September of the that year. Sapphire's Commanding Officer burned the ship instead of letting it fall into enemy hands, and the once-proud ship lay undisturbed on the seabed until salvage divers discovered it in the 1960s. The site was made a Provincial historic Site in 1975, and was partially excavated by archaeologists from the Newfoundland Marine Archaeology Society and Parks Canada.



The wreck of the USS Pollux, hard aground at Lawn Head.

The SPSNL launched their first expedition off the Avalon Peninsula in 2020, traveling southwest to three sites off the Burin Peninsula. The team had the good fortune to explore the wrecks of the USS Truxton and USS Pollux, respectively a large destroyer and cargo ship which ran aground in Placentia Bay during a particularly fierce winter storm in February 1942. The divers found extensive debris fields at both sites, including a significant amount of munitions, deck guns, machinery and cargo. Of the 398 sailors on the two ships, 203 lost their lives, and the United States Navy has never forgotten the heroic rescue by the citizens of the nearby towns of St. Lawrence and Lawn, which is still commemorated and remembered.

Moving farther along the Burin Peninsula, the expedition documented the wreck of the SS Argos. This 313-foot Swedish steamship ran aground on Cat Island in 1925, and then broke in half and sank. Next, the team explored the wreck of the Newfoundland schooner Alberto Wareham. Built in 1950, the schooner sank after catching fire in 1956 in Placentia Bay's Port Royal. Divers found a wreck completely covered with kelp, but also confirmed that bags of flour that the Wareham was hauling at the time of its loss are still found in the hold.

Neil's presentation confirmed what many Canadian divers, archaeologists and historians already know - that we are lucky to live in a country so fantastically rich in maritime heritage. Be it in the emerald waters of the Salish Sea or underneath the storm tossed waves of the North Atlantic, an underwater museum and its stories await those willing to start exploring.

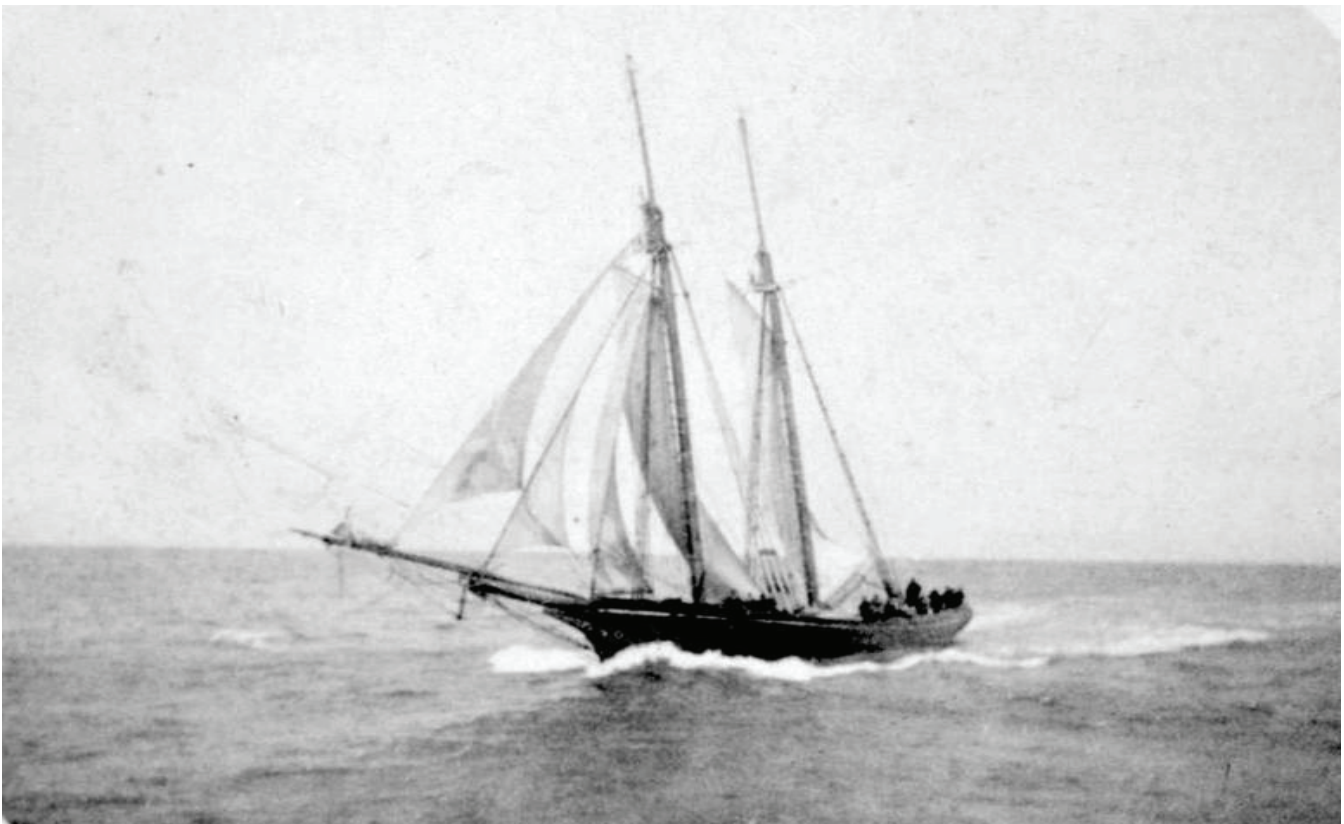
Sooke's Surprising Wrecks

By: George Silvestrini

On the morning of March 13, 2021, our keen group of divers; Jacques Marc, Paul Spencer, Gabriel Hill, Bob Simpson, Jiri Kotler and George Silvestrini gathered at the Sooke boat launch. Conditions were perfect, no rain or wind and calm seas. We quickly loaded our gear into the rigid hulled inflatable skippered by Daniel Bouchard of Esquimalt Eco Tours. After a short safety briefing we were on our way to a day of diving adventures.

First dive

Our first dive was on the schooner Surprise located off Simpson Point in East Sooke. The UASBC last visited this wreck in 1999. At the site, we were assigned our tasks, given measuring tapes and recording slates. Although it was near slack, current was still present but the dive was at a shallow 22-foot (7 m) depth. The coordinates for the Surprise were accurate, allowing the first group of divers to quickly locate the remains and commence work. The remains consist of a row of exposed frames, 13.1 m long and 0.5 -1.2 m wide, protruding from the sand-gravel bottom. The exposed portion of the wreck appears to be part of the vessel's port side. Jiri and I were assigned the job of measuring the frame size and spacing. The frames are heavily degraded and were difficult to measure. Individually they were 10 cm wide by 27 cm high. The frames appear to have been doubled (sistered) making the combined width 20 centimeters. The space between frames was 40 cm. The vessel was fastened using one-inch iron drift pins.



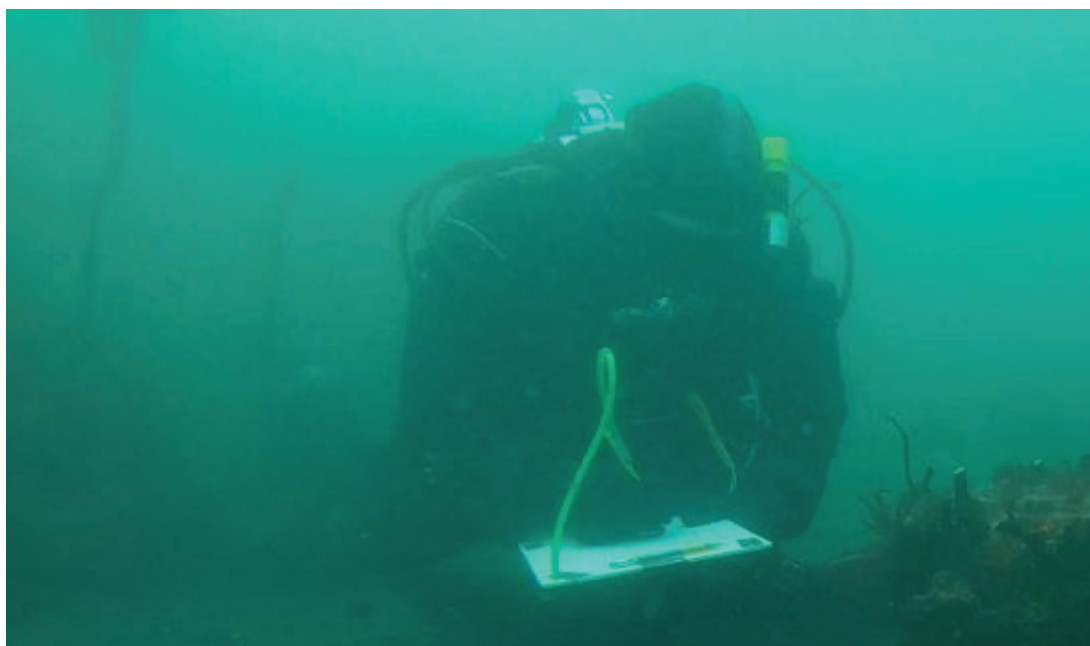
The Surprise would have been similar in size and rig to the Pathfinder shown here.

Schooner Surprise History

The schooner Surprise was built in Puget Sound in 1859. Shortly after being built, the Surprise was bought by Captains Spring and McKay of Victoria. She was 55.5 feet in length with a 16.5 feet beam and 5.3 feet draft. She displaced 40 tons. Her wooden hull was carvel-built with a square stern, two masts (main and mizzen), both fore-and-aft rigged. Her net worth at that time was 240 pounds.

Over her 14-year career in Canadian waters the Surprise had five Captains: Spring, McKay, Christensen, Francis and Peterson. The Surprise became a bit of a folk legend during her career. She transported people and supplies to all parts of the BC coast, rescued survivors from shipwrecks, hunted whales, initiated the pelagic sealing trade, traded molasses, blankets, and other goods to the First Nations in return for fish oil and furs.

After numerous near misses and incidents during her career, the Surprise was wrecked almost within sight of her home port. On November 23, 1874, while beating out of Sooke harbour bound for Victoria with a load of empty oil hogsheads, the Surprise drove ashore in choppy seas on Simpson Point, becoming a total wreck. No commercial salvage is known to have occurred on this wreck. However, as with many wrecks lost in these waters, locals likely salvaged anything of value. The remains of the Surprise were found by two Victoria area divers, Barry Ensign and Rod Palm, on November 12, 1967. With information provided by Rod Palm, the UASBC searched for and found the remains of the Surprise on November 7, 1987.



Paul Spencer taking notes Underwater on Surprise site.

Photo by J Marc

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Dive group off Simpson Point.

Photo by J Marc



After a successful first dive the gang stopped on Whiffin Spit for a lunch break.

Photo by George Silverstrini

UASBC ZOOM Explorations

Speaker Series Schedule 2021

Contact Keith Bossons at keithsharon@bossons.ca to register for a talk

Wednesday, April 14

Bob Chaulk, Board Member of the SS Atlantic Heritage Park Society

Bob Chaulk will present on the loss of the SS Atlantic, a White Star ocean liner that sank disastrously off the coast of Nova Scotia. Bob has dived extensively on the wreck, and coauthored a book on the site.

Wednesday, May 12

Dan Conlin, Historian and Museum Curator

Dan Conlin will present on piracy in the Atlantic.

Wednesday, June 9

Jonathan Fowler, Professor of Archaeology

Jonathan will present on the results of a ground-penetrating-radar survey of a mass grave in Nova Scotia associated with a famous shipwreck.

Sooke's Surprising Wrecks *(continued)*

Schooner Reville

After a quick lunch we were off on the inflatable to Christie Point in East Sooke to look for the Reville. Conditions remained perfect with no rain or wind and calm seas.

The 200-foot schooner Reville, although not historically significant, was an interesting site to visit. Little is known about this vessel other than it ran between Seattle and Alaska. The vessel was sighted a few times drifting up and down the Juan de Fuca Strait until it was finally towed into Sooke harbour. Around 1928, it was weighted down with boulders and sunk off Sooke harbour where it remains today. It sits in a depth of 24-34 feet (7-10 m) and has some of its overturned hull exposed from the sandy sea bottom; enough so that several crab traps were fouled on it. It makes for a nice habitat for marine life creating lots for divers to see (especially crabs!) compared to the rest of Sooke Harbour. The wreck was video surveyed and the coordinates from the GPS recorded.

Returning to the boat launch we unloaded our gear and watched as Daniel prepared the boat to trailer back to Victoria. Another fun successful dive trip with the UASBC completed. Looking forward to the next one.

Chemainus Barge No.1

By: Bob Simpson

UASBC divers had an exploratory (unofficial) dive Saturday, January 23, 2021 on a sunken wooden barge "No. 1" in Chemainus harbour, BC. The tide was high, the weather perfect and the underwater visibility was 20-30 feet. Divers in attendance were Jiri Kotler, George Silvestrini, Jacques Marc, Paul Spencer and Bob Simpson. Barge No. 1 lies in about 50 - 60 feet of water about 100 meters offshore.



Paul , Jiri, Bob & Jacques gather in parking lot after barge Dive.

Photo by George Silverstrini

The dive site is located at Chemainus, about one hour north of Victoria. The easiest shore access point is from Kinsmen Beach Park & Public Boat Ramp at the end of Maple Street in lower Chemainus. There is parking, a washroom and boat ramp.

The best entry point, with the shortest swim to the barges is from the beach, several hundred meters to the right of the ramp along the shoreline. You will see a rock breakwater or landing jutting out from the shore. If the tide is high and the shore is inaccessible or you do not want to walk that far with your gear on, you can swim along the shore until you get to the corner of the breakwater. We chose to walk out to the breakwater.

From the North West (nearest, outside) corner of the breakwater, partially hidden in the eelgrass there is a white nylon line (cave line) that will guide you directly to barge No. 1. The line is not hard to spot but be careful and do not swim past it!

Once on the line we followed it out swimming through large quantities of huge orange anemones and past lots of Red



Pauls Spencer Swims over Barge deck

Rock Crabs and some Big Gaper (clam) siphons. Just before reaching the barge we came across some large concrete mooring blocks with huge chains which had been used to moor the barge in place. A few more kicks and the barge loomed in front of us. Upon reaching the barge we swam up on to the deck and turned left. We worked our way along the deck, enjoying the marine life. At the far end a few divers dropped to the bottom and swam around the overhang. (I do not recommend going under it as these barges are 75-year-old rotting hulks.) When we reached the far end, we worked our way along the deck looking down into the chambers with the flood tanks. It is possible to enter the interior of the barge, but I advise caution as there are lots of pipes and other items to snag on. Once we had explored the end of the barge, we started swimming up the outside edge. There was lots more to look at and lots of colourful marine life. About halfway along the far side we found some chain hanging over the side and more large concrete blocks on the sand bottom. There is another cave line from these blocks to barges 2, 3 & 4. Be aware that barges 2, 3 and 4 are a substantial swim from Barge 1, and do not have as much marine life on them. I would recommend you do them as a separate dive unless you have adequate air supply and possibly a scooter.

Once we got back to our starting point on the barge, we



Paul Spencer examines large valve, part of the drydock pumping machinery.

Chemainus Barge No.1 *(continued)*

dropped down to the bottom and followed the cave line from the barge back to our breakwater entry point. From the breakwater most of us followed the eel grass along the shore to the boat ramp. Its advisable to carry a surface marker and line with you in case you need to surface away from the shore. Many kayakers, boats, and commercial vessels use this area.

A wee bit of the history of the barges. Most locals would say that "Chemainus lost an eyesore". But UASBC divers now have a new wreck site to monitor in the future. There were four dilapidated barges squatting in Chemainus harbour. They sank over a few days in February 2012 (originally, there were five barges, but one was previously removed to Ladysmith Harbour.) The barges were a remnant of a breakwater project tied to the failed Chemainus Quay and Marina project. They were all linked together with chains, ropes, and bumpers.

The barges originally were World War II floating dry docks. The dry docks were designed to rescue damaged vessels at



Barges 2, 3 & 4 Floating in Position before they sank.

Photo by Ladysmith Chronicle

sea and float them home. They were purchased in the USA and brought up to Canada to be used for the project's breakwater. The barges had been floating in the Chemainus Harbour for a few years and were considered an eyesore by the community. The project failed and the site was basically abandoned.

At the time of sinking Transport Canada and the Canadian Coast Guard were both advised, and they deemed them not a hazard to other boat traffic and did not pose an environmental hazard.

Another colourful bit of history for the "Little Town That Did"!

UASBC Diver Explorations

Schedule 2021

COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS

As it will not be possible to achieve a 2-meter distance between divers on board the charter boats, all divers will be required to wear a face mask while onboard the boat, when not diving. Also, we have had to reduce the number of divers that can participate on each trip.

Saturday April 24th: *San Pedro & S.F. Tolmie*

On this trip we will visit the San Pedro a large steel coal freighter that struck Brochie Ledge and sank on November 22, 1891. Our second dive will be on the wooden four masted auxillary schooner S.F. Tolmie.

The Tolmie broke free from Ogden Point wharf during a storm and was wrecked on Harrison Island. December 27, 1944. These will be recce dives in preparation for doing future survey work.

Both dives are suitable for all open water divers. We will depart from West Bay.

Charter \$85 per person. Limit 6 divers.

Call Jacques (250) 474-5797 or email: jmarc@shaw.ca

April 2021: *Central Interior*

Some preliminary side scan work was completed in 2020 around Okanagan Landing.

The plan is to continue to search the eastern shoreline around Okanagan Landing using sidescan looking for artifacts and the hull of the SS Aberdeen which was reported beached south of OK Landing.

The project is expected to occur in April 2021.

For details contact Bill Meekel : billmeekel@gmail.com

Saturday May 8th: *Idaho & Barnard Castle*

On this trip we will visit the Idaho wreck on Race Rocks and the Barnard Castle in Pilot Bay.

The Idaho was a steamer that grounded on Rosedale Reef in 1889. It eventually drifted off leaving its internal equipment on site. The Barnard Castle was a coal collier that struck Race Rocks and sank in Pilot Bay in 1886. The Idaho will be an exploration dive. We hope to trim some of the kelp on the Barnard Castle for an eventual photogrametry project. There may be some current during the first dive, but we will be using a live boat for pickup. Cost: \$85.00 per person. Limit 6 divers.

Contact Jacques (250) 474-5797 or email: jmarc@shaw.ca

UASBC Presidents' message

by: Keith Bossons

Hi Everyone,

We are coming up on the first-year anniversary of the Covid pandemic and it continues to have a major impact on the UASBC and every aspect of day-to-day life for all of us.

We have continued to move forward on various projects as much as the situation allows. One significant accomplishment is the recent completion of an on-line submerged cultural heritage map in collaboration with the BC Provincial Heritage Brand and Heritage BC. There are currently 21 shipwrecks documented on the site and we hope to add more in the future. You can find the map at <https://heritagebc.ca/cultural-maps/submerged-heritage-resources/>.

The monthly Zoom presentations that we have been holding are well attended. Tom Beasley, Warren Bush, and Rob Rondeau have done a great job of organizing some great speakers for these events. We currently have speakers lined-up for April through June and more details can be found in this edition of the Foghorn.

With the roll-out of the vaccines we will hopefully be able to resume some of our in-person activities latter this year. In the meantime, we will continue to monitor the situation adjust our activities as the situation improves.

Stay safe and hope to see you on our April Zoom Call.

*All the best
Keith Bossons
UASBC President*

**Please refer to
WWW.UASBC.COM for latest Updates!**

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