

Iroquois Dive

By Jacques Marc

It had been 14 years since the UASBC had last visited Iroquois, so I was curious to see if the site had changed much. The Iroquois was a shelter deck steamer that foundered and sank within eyesight of Sydney, BC on April 10, 1911 with the loss of 21 passengers and crew.



SS Iroquois

Photo Courtesy BC Archives

By the date of our planned dive March 21, the Covid-19 Virus was wreaking havoc across the province. In turn I watched our diver numbers dwindle from six to two. The final cancellations all occurring the Friday night before the dive. These last minute decisions made it impossible to cancel the trip. Erin Bradley our captain had already travelled from Bamfield to Victoria and we had already paid a full boat deposit. It did mean Paul Spencer and I were pretty much able to self isolate on board the *Juan de Fuca Warrior*.

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Iroquios Dive Trip *(continued)*

As we were loading our gear Paul experienced a momentary drop in blood pressure. He had left his weight belt behind. Fortunately for Paul, Jiri Kotler lived in Sidney. We made a quick phone call and Jiri arrived moments later with a back up weight belt. Thanks Jiri we owe you a beer. Despite the short delay , we got away from the Tulista boat launch by 09:30 and headed directly to the Iroquois site.

Using the GPS coordinates from an earlier dive, we dropped a shot line. In about a minute it disappeared, the current pulling it down. This gave me some consternation as I didn't know if had dragged or would return to the surface. However as if on que at 10:00 it popped to the surface.

By 10:20 it was clear we had reached slack water. Paul and I had proactively rented 120 cu ft steel tanks to have lots of air on the bottom. As luck would have it, the valve on mine was leaking. Not something you would want to take to 105 feet. Alas, I had to switch to my aluminum 80 which was going to mean a significantly shorter bottom time. With a quick change over we were in the water by 10:30.

The daylight light began to fade at about 80 feet and by the time we reached the bottom it was a night dive. The good thing was, our shot line landed 3 meters from the Iroquois windlass. The underwater viz was about 3 meters. Using the windlass as our starting point we worked our way north toward the rudder. Along the way we encountered many small artifacts, bottles and shipboard fittings.

At the rudder we started forward along the prop shaft until we reached the compound steam engine. It seemed to have more of a cant than I remember it, but the whiskey jug was still in place fused to the flywheel. Swimming further forward we inspected the boiler and eventually ended up at windlass. Next to the windlass was small 1½ meter long anchor its stock still folded. We began a second tour of the wreck and along the way we found several pieces of china and the remnants on an old outboard motor. There was a UASBC survey tag on the outboard motor and on a door lock, evidence that perhaps the site has remained undisturbed since our last visit.



Cabin Door latch

Photo by J.Marc



Oval Dish

Photo by J.Marc

It seemed we had only been down for about 10 minutes when our computers said it was time to leave. We made our safety stop a little longer than prescribed to play things safe.

Iroquios Dive Trip *(continued)*

On the surface Paul and I compared notes and agreed that we would have to do the dive again soon. After about an hour surface interval we motored over to Curteis Point. Our goal was to look for airplane wreckage. Lockheed Hudson 776 crashed at 2:10 in the afternoon of 21 February 1942, approximately 100 feet off Curtis Point. Sergeant William Hatfield the pilot and Bruce Hutchinson the Wireless Operator/Gunner were killed in the crash.



Lockheed Hudson Aircraft

Photo Courtesy www.paradata.org.uk

Most of the plane was salvaged but we hoped we might identify where it crashed by finding some wreckage. Paul and I started North of Curtis Point and swam in 25 feet of water heading south and then west. After about 15 minutes we dropped into 30-35 feet of water and circled back to our starting point. We came up on the offshore reef directly in front of Curteis Point. The bottom is rocky close to shore but becomes muddy as you move into deeper water. We saw lots of crabs scurrying around on the bottom but didn't find any evidence of plane wreckage what-so-ever.

All-in-all it was a great day, clear blue sky, calm water and two good dives.

Smyth Head Reef Net Site Survey & Twenty-First of May Dive

By: Paul Spencer

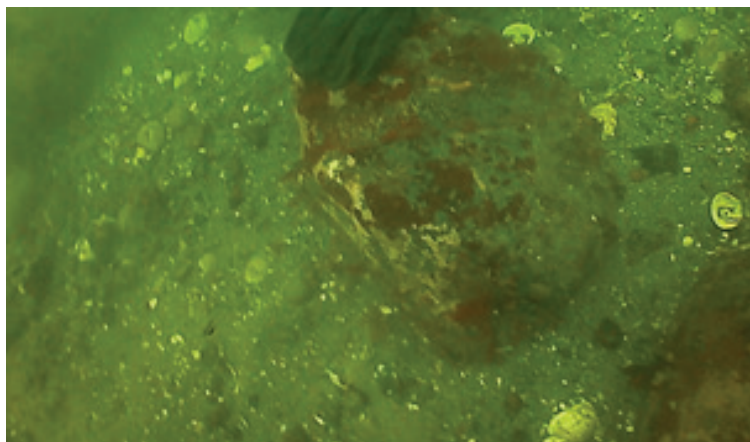
The intrepid explorers of the UASBC set out on a redo of the planned dives from our October 20, 2019 trip. The plan then was to dive the iron barque Swordfish and do an exploratory dive on a possible First Nations reef net site. Weather conditions then proved too difficult for the wreck dive. The weather forecast and predicted conditions did not match what we found. The dive at the Smyth Head reef net site was successful and led to the discovery of a chipped stone canoe anchor.

This anchor, however, only proved that someone with a canoe had visited this site. This is an important artefact, in that, it would not have been a discarded object. The amount of labour required to manufacture it means that it would have been a significant loss. There were many rocks covering the site. It is difficult to say they represented “piles of rocks” as one might expect at a reef net site. Establishing a pattern was impossible. More investigation was necessary.

On Saturday February 8th the team of divers consisting of Ewan Anderson, Rob Field, Jiri Kotler, Rory MacKenzie, Jacques Marc, David Planes, Paul Spencer, and Ian Stephen assembled at Pedder Bay Marina. Erin Bradley of Emerald Ocean Charters provided the Juan de Fuca Warrior for the short trip to South Bedford Island and the wreck of the Swordfish.

For a second time, we arrived at the site to find conditions too challenging to dive. Despite all the technology available the predictions of wind speed and direction were opposite to what we found. This gave us some insight to how difficult it would have been for large wind-powered ships plying these waters at the end of the 19th century.

The conditions inside Beecher Bay were better and provided us access to our second objective. The goal this time was to set up baselines and do photogrammetry work to provide a better picture of the bottom. We used the GPS coordinates from our last trip to find the site. The first team of Jacques, Rory, and Paul dropped down and were quickly able to locate the canoe anchor. The anchor was to the center-point of the baselines which we laid down next. Ian and Jiri followed and conducted the photo runs using the baselines. David and Rob conducted a broad area search for more artefacts. Their search yielded an interesting find in what is probably a worked stone net sinker. Measurements and photos were taken.



Reef Net Anchor Stone at Smyth Head Site.

Smyth Head Reef Net Site Survey & Twenty-First of May Dive *(continued)*

We visited the Twenty First of May for our second dive. The wooden –hulled barque was lost December 10, 1881, loaded in ballast as it beat up the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Approaching Race Rocks it was struck by a squall. The vessel tacked but missed her stays. As it became more unmanageable anchors were let out but failed to hold. The barque struck stern first on the rocks off Bentnick Island near Rocky Point. The UASBC surveyed the site in the early nineties. There is not a lot left of the ship but it is still an interesting site. You have to take many passes over its flat profile to get a sense of it.



Photogrammetry Model of Pump Tube on 21st of May.

Photo by Ian Stephen & Ewan Anderson

Despite conflicting weather profiles, we managed to have a successful day of diving. The results of the mapping will determine what we do next at the reef net site. Next visit may even include a dive on the Swordfish.

Note: Ewan Anderson was going to give a presentation on the reef net site at this years Shipwreck Symposium. Unfortunately as everyone knows we had to cancel it.

UASBC Presidents' message Spring 2020

by: Keith Bossons

Hi Everyone,

The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly turned our world upside down in a very short time span. Earlier in month we made the decision to cancel the Shipwrecks Conference this year. It was a hard call as a lot of work had gone into the preparations but it was really the only option.

For those of you that bought Shipwrecks tickets we are working on getting the refunds made to you through PayPal.

We were also forced to postpone our Annual General Meeting. At this time, we are looking into having the AGM online and will hopefully be able to send provide more details in the near future. The Society's board of directors will continue to monitor the situation but I think it is safe to assume that all UASBC activities over the next few weeks will be cancelled.

Please take care of yourself and family members during this trying time.

*All the best & Stay Safe
Keith Bossons
UASBC President*

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

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