

A Pioneering Tech Team Dive on ***Henry Foss***

By: Chris Mills



Henry Foss as it appeared prior to wrecking.

Photo Courtesy of Michael Skalley Collection

The *Henry Foss* was a working tug whose career ended in tragedy on February 13, 1959, when it struck the Channel Islands off Salt Spring Island and sank, claiming the lives of six of its seven crew. The wreck lies at approximately 35 metres and has been visited by the UASBC on several occasions, most recently in 2024. On March 1, 2026, a six-person team of technical divers set out from Sidney to document the site and assess its current condition.

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The dive was run from Tulista Boat Ramp, with Keith Karlsson at the helm of the *MV Inde* providing an excellent dive platform. The team departed on schedule at 08:30 and made a smooth crossing to the dive site, where a shot line was placed on the target position. Illness had claimed three divers in the days before the trip, but the team that assembled — Aaron Speare, Lee Critchley, Rory Mackenzie, Kail Pawson, Ewan Anderson and myself, was more than capable of completing the dive. All divers were on closed-circuit rebreathers or technical open-circuit rigs breathing trimix, planned to keep everyone within a maximum equivalent narcotic depth of 30 metres.

Conditions on the surface were cooperative. Slack current was predicted to occur at 10:11 at Active Pass. There was a mild current at the start, but it was essentially negligible by the time the first team reached the bottom. Aaron and Lee went in first at 09:43, running a circular search from the shot with a spool to try to relocate the wreck. The shot had come to rest 15–20 metres shy of the site, which made for a challenging hunt in poor visibility, and despite a methodical search the wreck eluded them. Rory and Kail fared better in their dive, making it onto the wreck during their bottom time. Ewan and I were last in the water. Rather than repeat the circular pattern, we descended and navigated to the site on a compass bearing (based on our suspicion of where the wreck lay relative to the reef), found the wreck, and ran a line back to the shot. For future expeditions, using the boat's depth sounder to pinpoint the wreckage (and not just relying on GPS coordinates!) would make for a more reliable shot location.

On the wreck, Ewan made good use of his camera to document the midships section the area around the former wheelhouse, which has historically been of particular interest to UASBC. The visibility was poor and the soft black bottom stirred up easily when disturbed, conditions that all but ruled out any serious photogrammetry effort at this site.



Diesel engine cylinder heads and engine room catwalks.

Photo by Ewan Anderson

We also noted several commercial crab trap lines and the traps themselves running through and across the wreck, which could be worth removing on a future dive.

The day went exactly to plan. All teams surfaced within their dive windows and the *Inde* had us back at the marina by 1230. It was a productive experience for the team of tech divers working together on a UASBC project, and it confirmed that the group along with the *Inde* and Keith is well set up to support future explorations at sites beyond the reach of recreational diving.

Presidents' Summer 2026 Message

By: Holger



Hello Everyone,

UASBC has been busy since our Winter 2026 Foghorn was published.

Our Underwater Archaeology for Divers (UAD), course was held March 21 and 22, graduating 5 students. We had 3 students from Oregon, One from Edmonton and one from Victoria. The UASBC-developed course consists of 8 modules introducing divers and non-divers to underwater archaeology specific to British Columbia.

UASBC hosted another successful annual Shipwrecks conference, "Military Wrecks in BC & Around the World". The event was held at the Cedar Hill Golf Club in Saanich on March 28, 2026, and drew 56 persons to the day session and 62 to the dinner and evening session. Russ Mathews gave the Woodward Lecture on the *USS Yorktown* and Devastator bomber wreck investigations. Many thanks to our event sponsors Wilson Diving, Shearwater, Scubapro, Thremocline Diving, and Robin Woodward for making our conference a success.

The fully subscribed UASBC expedition to Barkley Sound April 11 and 12 had mixed success due to challenging conditions underwater of surge and poor visibility, contrasted with excellent weather above water. The team dove the *Vanlene* and *Tuscan Prince* on Saturday and searched for the *Mascotte* in Pachena Bay on Sunday. The *Mascotte* was found late in the dive so not much was accomplished.

Our UASBC Interior chapter dived on the Procter railway transfer barge wreck. The dive team next moved to Slocan Lake to locate and document a recently reported barge located at the south end of the Lake. The barge was found and measured.

The UASBC Annual General Meeting was held online through Zoom on April 29. Director reports were provided for our 2025 activities and 6 UASBC directors were elected for two-year terms. Our financial status is solid.

The website renewal project is nearing completion. We are excited to announce that our new site should be live on the publication of this issue of the Foghorn. The site will have greater functionality, more resource material and be more interactive, including a Shipwrecks Map.

Victoria Chapter meetings continued monthly and have included Tiare Boyes speaking on the Morrison Creek Lamprey on March 18 and Rory MacKenzie speaking on Tidal Science April 15. Both meetings were very well attended.

*Best regards and safe diving,
Holger
UASBC President*

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

UASBC April 2026 Kootenay Trip

By: Bill Meekel



Railcar teeters on the brink at Proctor Wreck site.

Photo by © Brad Tingstad

The members of the trip were Brad Tingstad, Tom Crisp, Brian Nadwidny and Bill Meekel. The first dive was at the site of the Procter railway transfer barge wreck located in Kootenay Lake near Balfour.

Seven railcars carrying coal were lost from a railway transfer barge in April 1901. Only 6 of the cars have been found. The car below is sitting at a 60-degree angle with the bottom of the car perched on a ledge at 25 meters. This is an exciting dive due to the precarious position of the car. If it were to slide off the ledge, the fall would be a sheer drop to over 100 m.

The site overall is a stunning location to see coal rail cars and their cargo from over 125 years ago. Due to the cold freshwater location, the cars are in fair condition. The cars were originally clad with wood, however with the corrosion of the nail fasteners the shiplap has mostly fallen off the cars. The cars were carrying coal from the mines in Fernie, BC area to Nelson. There was more lost than rail cars. The barge was not only carrying 15 railcars but also three gentlemen (aka hobos) taking an unauthorized, free ride on the CPR rail system. All three were dumped in the lake with the railcars but only one could be saved.

There have been at least two other incidents in which there has been a loss of life associated with the movement of barges in rough weather conditions. In 1890, Joseph Wilson, a Nelson butcher, was moving a barge loaded with cattle. It was involved in some stormy weather, and Joseph was trying to calm the cattle. However, they began moving on the barge which further destabilized it. The barge started tipping which wound up putting Joseph and a number of cattle in the lake which led to their drowning.

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There have been at least 7 incidents in Kootenay and Slocan lakes involving the loss of rail equipment from barges. There are many possible causes of these incidents. The weight and distribution of the load, the condition of the barge and the lake conditions could all be factors that individually or together would de-stabilize a barge and lead to a loss of their cargo.

The dive team next moved to Slocan Lake about 50 km to the west. Our first objective was to locate and document a recently reported barge located at the south end of Slocan Lake. The stern end of the barge is shown in the photo below. The wood barge sits upright at a 25-degree slope with the bottom end in 30 m of water. Note the railcar stop blocks to prevent cars from rolling off the end of the barge. This is the 7th barge located in Slocan Lake.



New Wooden transfer barge located at south end of Slocan Lake.

Photo by © Tom Crisp

This barge is generally in good shape with some log debris sitting on and around the deck. The South Slocan barge dimensions are listed in the first row in the table below:

| LOCATION | Length, m | Width, m | Depth, m | Material |
|--------------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|
| S. Slocan | 39.6 | 10.9 | 2.1 | wood |
| S. Roseberry | 70 | 11.6 | 2 | steel |
| N. Roseberry | 55.2 | 11.3 | 2 | wood |
| West Shore | 48.8 | 11.4 | 1.8 | wood |

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Massive steel barge documented during spring trip

Photo by © Brad Tingstad

During the trip several other barges were measured such as the massive steel barge (photo above) built in 1951. This is barge #6 which could carry 10 railcars and was the last barge to be used in the CPR's Lake and River Service which shutdown in 1988. The wood barges had two rows of tracks and could carry 8 cars. The CPR built and maintained the barges at a ship building works located at Roseberry. Some could have a working life of 20 years if they were maintained and had good luck in their operating life. The early barges were 48.8 m long but the newer barges were increased to 57 m. The new South Slocan barge is an odd length. The plan is to investigate this difference and look for and document additional barges in the BC interior lakes.

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

Rusty Wreck Dive: Cloudy Skies, Clear Water

By: Leila Bautista



Post dive group shot at Underwood Cove.

Photo by Leila Bautista

Five UASBC divers—George, Jiri, Jacques, Grant, and Leila—set out for a crisp winter dive on the *Rusty*. With exceptionally clear visibility and a conveniently low tide, they enjoyed slightly extended bottom times and a shorter swim to the site.

The *Rusty* is located in Underwood Cove near the China Creek Marina, South of Port Alberni. It is one of four immigrant vessels intercepted and seized by Canadian authorities off the BC coast in 1999. The *Rusty* arrived in Winter Bay with 130 immigrants. It had a length of 130' and a width of 23.6'. The Port Alberni Reef Society bought the fleet of vessels from the Federal Government for \$1,000. The *Rusty* was cleaned and sunk as an artificial reef on June 10, 2001, and now lies in 60-110 feet of water.

Sometime over the winter the buoy on the wreck was lost. Fortunately for us, Nanaimo Dive Outfitters installed a surface marker buoy (SMB) with a spool on the *Rusty* a week prior to our dive, making descent and navigation to the wreck considerably more straightforward.

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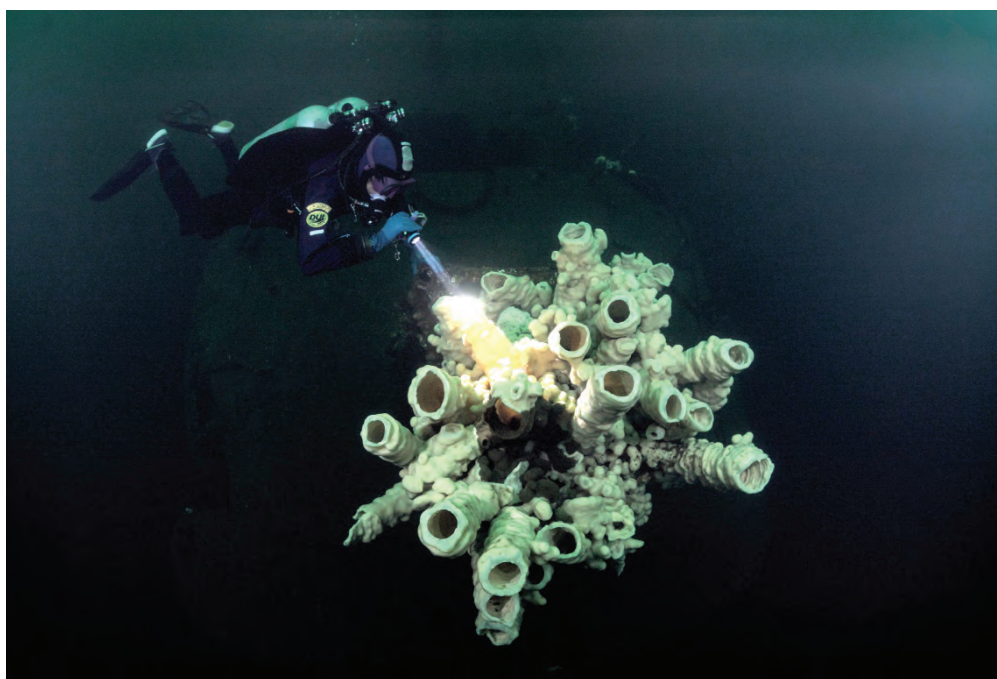
Rusty Wreck Dive: Cloudy Skies, Clear Water *(continued)*

The wreck was home to two large lingcod egg masses guarded by a very attentive and appropriately territorial father. Grant Macdonald captured spectacular wide-angle images throughout the dive, showcasing the structure of the wreck, glass sponges, and the lingcod. These photos will support upcoming UASBC promotional materials and create opportunities for interested divers to join trips.



Leila Bautista swimming under Rusty stern.

Photo by © Grant MacDonald



Leila Bautista examining glass sponge growing on Rusty Mast.

Photo by © Grant MacDonald

UASBC Barkley Sound Trip 10-12 April 2026

By: Tim Butt

Friday 10th April, 10 members of UASBC descended on Bamfield ready for a fun filled weekend of diving the historical wrecks on the West Coast.

This stretch of the Vancouver Island coastline is known as the “Graveyard of the Pacific” for good reason. The area is infamous for dangerous conditions caused by violent storms, heavy fog, shifting sandbars, and rocky shorelines. This is the reason the UASBC likes to visit the area once a year to survey and document changes to the decaying wrecks.

Organiser Jacques Marc does a tremendous job of organising the target wrecks and dive objectives based on the skillset of the divers and weather and tide conditions. This year we were joined by 2 CCR divers complete with scooters and some photogrammetry equipment.

Friday night after dinner we received the outline plan for the weekend and chatted with our dive charter operator Erin Bradley from Emerald Ocean Charters. We were all set for a weekend of good diving and exploration.



Jacques briefing group on dive sites

Photo by Leila Bautista

Saturday 11th April – A cloudy showering start to the day we slipped mooring at 08:30 as planned and headed out into Barkley Sound to dive the British Freighter - *Tuscan Prince*. It was lost in a severe storm in February 1923.

The dive itself was challenging. Surging currents in the shallows pushed and pulled the divers up against the rocks and this is exactly where a lot of the torn wreckage lies scattered in and around the 20-30’ area. Slightly deeper in the bay we came across the huge imposing boilers that lie on the sand. One group located the engine, block however the

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power of the surges prevented any accurate measurements from being taken. Ewan and Chris managed to get some photogrammetry work completed on the boilers. We were hoping to locate one of the ship's propellers, but the poor conditions prevented this.

The second dive of the day occurred on the very popular *MV Vanlene* freighter lost in March 1972. It had set sail from Japan to Vancouver with known issues with its navigational equipment. Navigationally lost, it ran up on the rocks of Austin Island. All the 38 Chinese crew were airlifted to safety as were almost half of the 300 Colt Cars in the hold.

Its an impressive 470-foot-long wreck with its stern in 130' of water up against a steep rock wall with its bow in the shallows. It's a haven for a variety of marine life especially rockfish and Puget Sound king crabs... Even in low viz a lot of the wreckage is identifiable. We returned to Bamfield mid – afternoon with plenty of time to change out dive cylinders or have them topped off ready for the next days diving.



One of Vanlene's gantry towers.

Photo by Chris Mills

On Sunday we departed a little earlier as we were heading out on the long 90 minute plus transit to Pachena Bay, where we hoped to relocate the wreckage of the *SS Mascotte*, a salvage ship lost to fire in April 1893. We had GPS coordinates for the wreck from the early 2000's but they were believed to be inaccurate.

The two CCR divers were dispatched in the first wave to conduct a search with scooters. The hope was that they would locate the wreckage and send up a marker float so the GPS could be recorded and the other divers would then dive in a second wave.

The underwater viz was very poor and the CCR divers failed to locate the wreck within a reasonable time. The remaining divers dived on the original GPS wreck site. Two of five groups eventually came across the wreckage late in their dives preventing any meaningful documentation. Jacques recorded the boiler bricks as being made by "Towey".

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Weather conditions began to deteriorate around noon as predicted. It was decided with the worsening conditions not to make the fourth dive as planned on the Ericsson but instead dive a more sheltered rock pinnacle known as Execution Rock. This was very pleasant dive to 60' circling a huge pinnacle. Viz again was not great but nonetheless everyone enjoyed the dive.

We returned to Bamfield in worsening conditions arriving at the dock at 4:00 PM. 30 minutes later we after packing up the cabins and trucks we headed home exhausted but with a positive feeling of accomplishment.

The Bamfield dive weekend is always a gem on the UASBC dive roster, and this year was no exception. Thanks to the stellar organisation of Jacques Marc but also the energetic Presence of the divers; Paul Spencer, Jiri Kotler, George Silvestrini, Monica Mowez, Leila Bautista, Ewan Anderson, Chris Mills, Tim and Becky Butt.



Group Photo on stern of *MV Reef Island*.

Photo by J Marc

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