

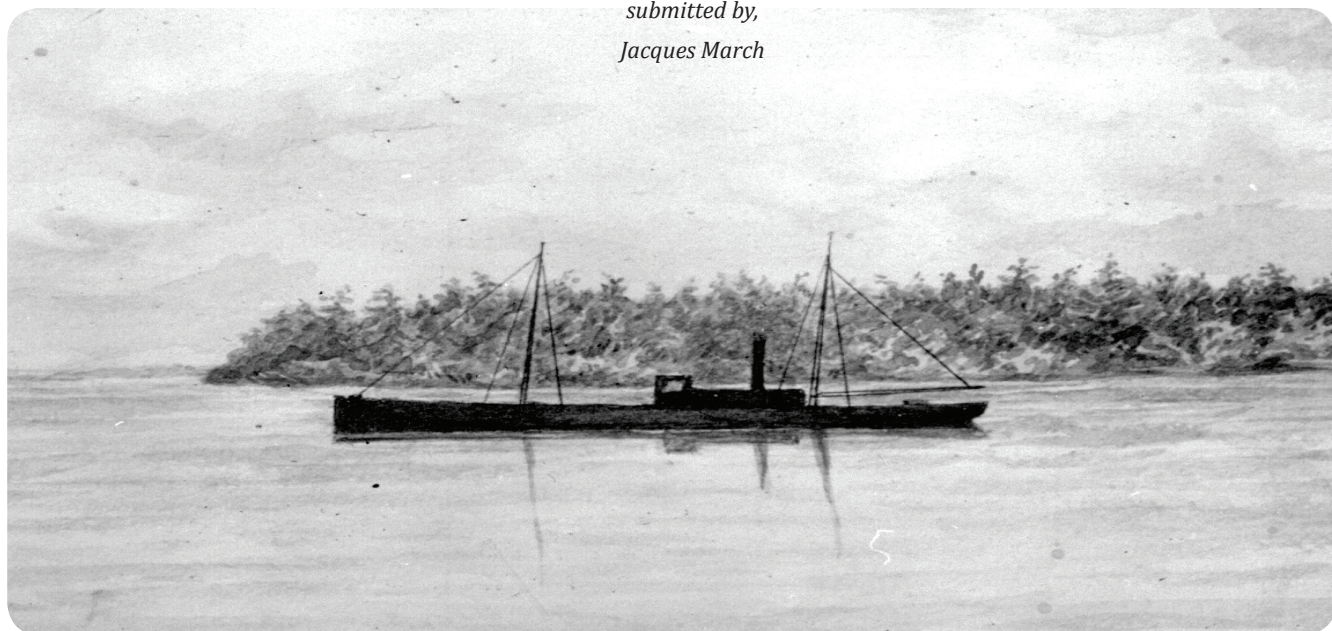


UNDERWATER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

VOL. 33 NO. 1 FIRST QUARTER

## Search for the Emily Harris

*submitted by,  
Jacques March*



On February 19th 8 UASBC divers gathered at the Van Isle Marina in Sidney, in preparation for doing a swim search to look for material from the small coastal steamer Emily Harris. We boarded the MV Cape Able a 50 foot former RCMP vessel operated by Erin Bradley, of Emerald Ocean Adventures. The participants included Jiri Kotler, Holger Heitland, Warren Bush, Doug Maynard, James Griffiths, Paul Van Adrichem, Ewan Anderson and Jacques Marc. Once everyone was aboard, we picked up some fuel and water and made way for Captains Passage and Nose Point, arriving on site at about 10:30.

The Emily Harris was a small 100 foot wooden steamer built in Victoria and launched January 3, 1861. The British Colonist states that she was the fourth vessel built in Victoria and that her engines were manufactured locally by 'Mr. Dougal' in his Victoria foundry. She was schooner rigged on fore and aft masts and she had a small cabin amid-ship. The Emily Harris could accommodate fifteen passengers and eighty tons of freight. She quickly became a workhorse of early British Columbian shipping, typically plying the waters around the Southern Gulf Islands and frequently loading coal at Nanaimo.

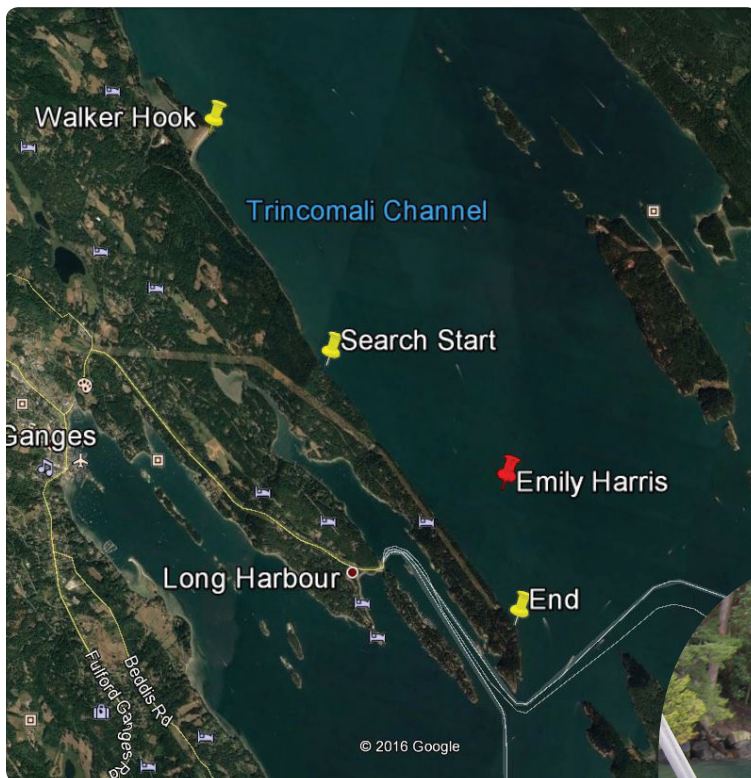
Tragically the Emily Harris was lost in a boiler explosion somewhere in Trincomali Channel on August 14, 1871. According to survivors' testimony, an explosion tore through the Emily Harris at 8:30 at night somewhere

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## In Search of the Emily Harris (cont'd)

between Saltspring and Galiano Islands, possibly between Fernwood and Walker Hook. The vessel sank after drifting for around thirty minutes. The three First Nation passengers and the engineer successfully swam to Saltspring Island's shore, while Captain Frain, the Chinese cook, and the sole white passenger either drowned or succumbed to injuries sustained in the blast. The Dominion Government Steamer Sir James Douglas was dispatched to look for possible survivors, but returned with only the wheelhouse doors and a barrel from the vessel. Today, both the vessels loss and sinking location remain a mystery.



*Emily Harris Search Area*

As a result of reading the survivor accounts and examining tidal records there is a strong likelihood that the vessel went down somewhere in the vicinity of Walker Hook. Our goal on February 19th was to try search as much underwater coastline along Nose Point as possible. The rationale was that anything breaking loose

from the vessel during its sinking would have drifted south. To initiate the search I established 4 GPS start locations 400 meters apart along Nose Point. Since the tide was ebbing, the current was flowing towards the south. Each of the buddy team was dropped on a GPS point and asked to swim south along a depth of 30-40 feet of water. When the first search was completed we took a short lunch break and then continued the search on 4 additional GPS locations. In total the group swam 3.85 kilometers of coastline. We found that the bottom started off rocky and at about 25-30 feet it became sand and shells. During the entire search distance we found virtually no sign of human artifacts of any sort and nothing that could have come from the 1871 Emily Harris.

As Jiri said, we know where the wreck is not! It may be worthwhile in the future to do some searches further north. Also it might be worthwhile to deploy the UASBC side scan at some point to continue the search in deeper water.



*Searching for Emily Harris Nose Point*

# UASBC Gulf Islands Expedition, April 7-10, 2017

by  
*George Silvestrini*

As the date arrived for our spring expedition we read of the special weather warning and gale warning for Strait of Georgia south of Nanaimo. No matter, we met up at Van Isle marina and loaded fifty tanks, dive gear and boxes of food aboard the Cape Able. After a short fuel stop we were on our way. Besides a few showers the wind was light on Trincomali Channel and we had a nice cruise up to Conover Cove located on the west side of Wallace Island. There we met Holger who had arrived from Maple Bay on his power boat. We quickly transferred his gear and we were on our way to the



*April Survey Group with MV Cape Able*

dive site. Unfortunately two other boats ( Eric & Bronwen Young and Keith and Sharon Bossons) were unable to meet because of the extreme weather on the Strait.

By 1:00 pm we were on the Robert Kerr. Five divers geared up and did an exploration of the wreck. Floats were placed at each end of the wreck and a baseline was set in place so we could begin the survey work on the next dive. Visibility was less than 10' in the shallow depths but it improved to 20' at the stern sitting in 50' of depth. On returning to the boat the southeast winds had caught up with us and after hearing that BC Ferries can-

celled all sailings out of Tsawwassen we decided to cancel the second dive and head for the dock at Conover Cove. With all the rain our dive gear stayed pretty damp especially after the winds shredded the canvas covering the back deck of Cape Able.

The Robert Kerr was a 1,123 ton barque of 190' length, 38' beam and 24' hold. Built in 1866 in Quebec for the Hudson Bay trade between the Pacific Northwest and Great Britain. In 1888 it was converted to a coal barge hauling coal from Comox, Ladysmith and Nanaimo to Vancouver. On March 4, 1911, it ran aground while outbound from Ladysmith to Vancouver. It now lies in 25' to 60' depths.

On day two, the winds had let up so we were able to get our two dives completed. On the first dive each buddy pair took on an area of the wreck and began the survey by measuring offsets from the baseline. Between dives we pulled up the anchor and headed to what we thought was a public dock (opps it wasn't) in North Cove, Thetis Island. After a nice lunch break and visit with the locals we headed back to the dive site to continue our surveys. By the end of the second dive the southeast winds were back making it a choppy ride back to Conover Cove. Here we met Keith and Sharon



*Jiri Kotler Plotting Survey results*

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(cont'd)

## **UASBC Gulf Islands Expedition,** **April 7-10, 2017**



*Paul & Holger Plotting Survey Result*

measurements and relaxing aboard Cape Able.

Sunday morning we did our final dive on the Robert Kerr finishing up our surveys and sketches. After our lunch break we found and dove on the wreck of the Miami. We did a swim over all the dispersed wreckage but other than marking the bow and stern with mark-

who had been able to cross the Strait in their power boat. It was a nice dinner and evening plotting up our survey

We carefully cruised the east and north shores looking for possible locations that matched the historical account of the sinking. Somewhere where a boat



*Tranquil Conover Cove*

could go aground, get crew ashore "for supper" and firewood then watch their vessel catch fire and burn to the point it was declared a write off. We decided to divide into

three teams to search the entire east shore in depths of 15 to 25 feet. The first team found a few pieces of coal, the second team found a cast iron stove door and the final team found some iron valves, gear wheel and porcelain pot. The later two sites were marked and GPS positions noted. No wreckage was found.

We then returned to Conover Cove for the last time to transfer gear to Holger and Keith and Sharon's boats for their return home. While on the cruise back aboard Cape Able we stopped in Captain Passage near the wreck site of the Henry Foss, a tug that sunk in 1959. After several passes we believe we have relocated the wreck at a depth of 95' and now have the coordinates for a future expedition.

Finally on returning to the Van Isle Marina in North Saanich we unloaded all the gear into the vehicles. Unfortunately, we had to dodge heavy rain showers but it all worked out well. Another successful and fun expedition for the UASBC.

Participants: Jacques Marc, Jiri Kotler, George Silvestrini, Holger Heitland, Paul Spencer, Keith and Sharon Bossons, Erin Bradley (Ogden Point Charters).



*Rising Seas on Robert Kerr Site*

ers for GPS measurements we did not do any survey work. After the second dive the wind came up for another choppy ride back to Conover Cove. After dinner our survey notes were added to the master drawing of the Robert Kerr. More dining and relaxing.

On our final day we headed out to look for the wreck of the Mary Hare on the east shore of Reid Island (which is located immediately west of Porlier Pass).

## **UASBC Diver Explorations Spring Diver Schedule 2017**

**Saturday May 27th**

### **Search for Thrasher on Gabriola Reef**

We will travel to Gabriola Reefs to try relocating the remains of the sailing ship Thrasher which grounded on Gabriola Reefs in 1880. The UASBC found pieces of the wreck in the late 70's but has not been back.

**Cost \$80 per person. Limit 8 divers.**

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

## **Victoria Underwater Explorer Speaker Schedule 2017**

**Wednesday, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017**



### ***18th Century Spanish Exploration of the Pacific Northwest***

*Dr. Pablo Restrepo-Gautier, Assoc Professor, UVIC*

Dr. Restrepo-Gautier's main area of European Studies research is 17th-century Spain.

A more recent field of study for him focuses on the Spanish Crown's exploration of the Pacific Northwest between 1774 and 1793, which brought Spain and Great Britain to the brink of war in what is known as the Nootka Incident.

Dr. Restrepo-Gautier, will focus his talk on 18th century Spanish exploration of the Pacific Northwest.

**The UASBC Victoria Chapter meets  
at Swan's Hotel and Brewpub,  
506 Pandora Street in Victoria  
at 07:00 PM**

**PLEASE REFER TO [WWW.UASBC.COM](http://WWW.UASBC.COM) FOR THE LATEST UPDATES!**



Foghorn (ISSN 1198-7081) is published quarterly by the Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia (UASBC), c/o the Vancouver Maritime Museum, 1905 Ogden Avenue, Vancouver, BC V6J 1A3 [www.UASBC.com](http://www.UASBC.com). The UASBC is a group of volunteer avocational and professional underwater archaeologists who conserve, preserve, and protect the maritime heritage lying beneath BC's coastal and inland waters.

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