



## **Richard E. (Dick) Wells** **Engineer, Researcher, Author, & Marine Illustrator**

By: Jacques Marc

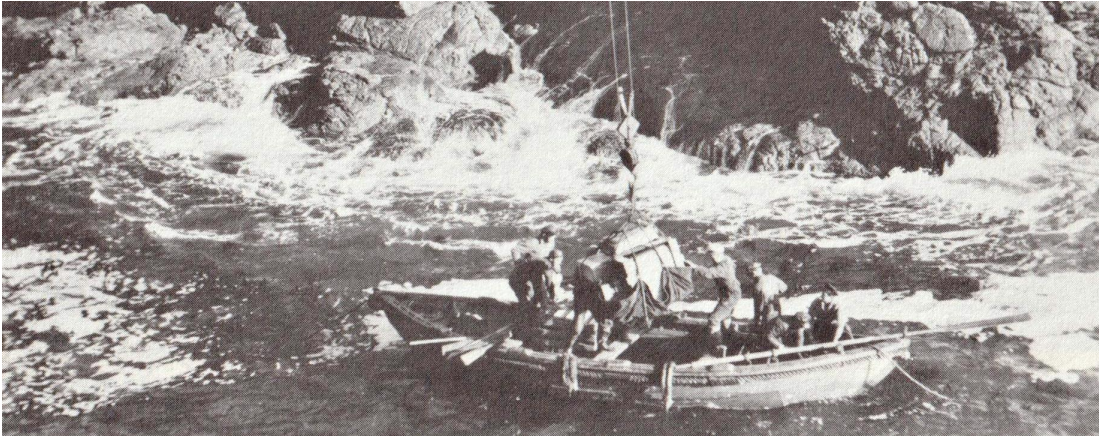
In our summer 2021 edition of the Foghorn, we profiled the life and times of Leonard Clay, fisherman, logger, and historian of west-coast maritime lore. At that time, we committed to chronicling additional individuals who have contributed to recording and preserving the maritime history of the province. In this edition of the Foghorn, we are looking back at the contributions of Richard (Dick) Wells of Sooke.

You will come across Dick's name in relation to shipwrecks and the maritime history of the West Coast Life Saving Trail. Dick was prolific in his writings about specific shipwrecks and the trail in general. Discovering unknown manuscripts and ferreting-out shipwreck facts were his stock and trade.

Dick, as he liked to be called, was born in 1928. He attended university and graduated as a civil engineer. Beyond this I don't know much about his working career. At some point Dick was married, as he mentions exploring the West Coast Trail with his wife in 1974.

Dick wrote that one his first experiences on the west coast, was during a coal landing at Carmanah Point Light on the work boat of the CGS Estevan.

*Continued on page 2*



Landing Supplies from the Work Boat of the Estevan at Pachena Point.

Photo by Jack Hunting.

In the spring of 1943, Dick took his first summer job at the Pachena Point lighthouse on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Upon arriving at Bamfield he was taken by Percy Brady, coxswain of the Bamfield lifeboat, from Bamfield, around Cape Bale to Pachena Point. In his book “There is a Landing Today”, Dick credits Percy for introducing him to the West Coast.

During that summer he climbed all over the recent wreck of the SS Uzbekistan. The Uzbekistan, a Russian transport ship, was wrecked April 30, 1943, at Darling Creek due to a gale and poor visibility. In later years Dick often used to think about the ship and wondered how and why the ship came to her end and what really happened, as there was a blackout on information during the war. Dick would write his first book about the stranding of SS Uzbekistan in 1973.

During the late 1940’s and early 50’s Dick worked on two veteran west coast freight and passenger steamers, Princess Maquinna and Princess Norah and spent time on coastal tugboats.

After Uzbekistan, Dick began writing articles for the Islander magazine in the Victoria Daily Colonist. In his first story October 6, 1974, he wrote about finding the anchor from the Vesta along the West Coast Trail. This was followed with an article called “Otago’s Retreat”.

In 1975 Dick travelled to New Zealand and took a supply ship to the Puysegur Point light station. He was interested to see where Capt. G.H. Richards (Hydrographer) had taken refuge from a storm in the schooner Otago while surveying the rugged southeast coast of New Zealand. He found the conditions and terrain not unlike the BC’s West Coast.

As a result of his time on the coast Dick developed a lifelong interest in the West Coast especially the stretch from Port Renfrew to Cape Beale and the people who lived and worked there. During the 1970s he lobbied the federal government to include the West Coast Lifesaving Trail in Pacific Rim Park Reserve. An agreement to add the West Coast Trail to the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve occurred in 1988.

When Dick completed his book on the Uzbekistan in 1973, he was living in Comox. At some point he moved to Sooke. I recall visiting him in the mid 1990’s in a small A-Frame house on the water, near Otter Point. The A-Frame and his Volkswagen van are visible in this 2012 Google Street View image. In later years he spent time living on his sailboat which he also used to explore the coast.

*Continued on page 3*





Dick's A-Frame at 8065 West Coast Road, Sooke in 2012.

Photo by Google Street View



Lord Western Aground in Adventure Bay

R.E. Wells Drawing

In addition to researching shipwrecks Dick produced marine drawings, his media being pen, ink and with charcoal shading.

Dick donated his collection of artwork and information about shipwrecks along the West Coast Trail to Parks Canada some time in the 1990's. His donation is acknowledged in the Pacific Rim State of Park Report released in 2008.

Dick collaborated with the UASBC on several projects in the late 1980's and early 1990's

In 1988 his research was instrumental in identifying the Lord Western, BC 's oldest located shipwreck. He was able to track down the HBC Otter ship's log in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives in Winnipeg, which revealed that the Otter was dispatched to Sidney Inlet to rescue the crew of the Barque Lord Western and arrived there December 21, 1853. A capable artist, he also produced a drawing of what the ship would have looked like when it was wrecked in Adventure Bay.

*Continued on page 4*

In August 1989 Dick accompanied the UASBC aboard the MV Beatrice up the West Coast of the Island to familiarize us with the location of several West Coast trail wreck sites. His research was impeccable. Usually, we were able to locate the wrecks in a single dive. We dove 6 different sites on that trip, and we wouldn't have found them without Dick's help.



Dining on board MV Beatrice August 1989. Dick Wells is furthest Right.

Photo by J Marc

In 1993, the City of Victoria wanted to redevelop Bastion Square and the Lord Western Anchor was removed from the square and stored at Capitol Iron. The Maritime Museum of BC, who owned of the anchor, sought to find it a new home. Dick thought that it should go to Sooke as that is where the cargo of fir piles had been cut and loaded aboard the Lord Western. Ultimately the anchor went to Tofino as it is closest community to the wreck and there was a commitment to put the anchor on display in a publicly accessible location.

By the late 90s the UASBC lost touch with Dick.

In 1999 while being interviewed for a Pacific Rim Magazine article Dick indicated that he had all but retired from researching and writing about West Coast Trail wrecks. When I last spoke to him circa 2000, he was enjoying retirement and was off to explore the Arctic.

However, it is clear he was not finished. He published his final book "Calamity Harbour: the voyages of the Prince of Wales and Princess Royal on the British Columbia Coast, 1787-1788" in 2002.

In 2006 he penned an article on "Banks Island" for the BC Historical Quarterly Vol.39 No. 3. In it, he describes an interesting connection between "Banks" a famous British naturalist and Māori warriors of New Zealand.

One of Dick's final maritime contributions was assisting Elida Peers with an article about Sooke History which was carried in the June 9, 2018, edition of the Sooke News Mirror.

Dick entered assisted living at the Ayre Manor at Sooke circa 2012 and by 2018 his memory was failing. After a short stint in hospice, he died February 29, 2020.

Dick wrote 10 books in total, 8 of them on West Coast topics. He is probably best remembered for his booklets; A Guide to Shipwrecks Along the West Coast Trail and A Guide to Shipwrecks from Cape Beale to Cox Point including Barkley Sound. You can find many of his books in second hand bookstores, on ABE or by Googling "R.E. Wells Author".

Thank you to Elida Peers of the Sooke Museum and Nancy Garrison of Ayres Manor for helping me fill in Dicks final years.



# UASBC Diver Explorations Fall Schedule 2022

## **Saturday September 17 - Swordfish Wreck**

We will try another attempt to dive on the iron bark Swordfish, wrecked on South Bedford Island in 1877. Our second dive may be on the Smyth Head Reef Net site. The Swordfish will be a recce dive. We hope to relocate and GPS several large artifacts. There may be some current during the first dive, but we will be using a live boat for pickup. We will depart from Pedder Bay.

Cost: \$100 per person. Limit 7 divers.

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

## **Friday to Monday September 23 - 26 – Shuswap Lake**

Trip to the Sicamous area on Shuswap Lake to do some diving and side scan work to try locating the SS Maud Annis. The SS Maud Annis was a 65-foot tug operated by Shuswap Transportation Co. on Shuswap Lake. Its registry was closed in 1919. Space is limited.

For details contact Bill Meekel : [billmeekel@gmail.com](mailto:billmeekel@gmail.com)



## **Saturday & Sunday October 8 & 9 – Underwater Archaeology for Divers Course**

Underwater Archaeology for Divers (UAD) is a 16-hour, two-day course, with a 2-hour pool session and an open water survey dive. The course is designed to introduce students to the essential skills required to undertake basic underwater archaeological recording work.

8 modules will be completed online in advance of the 2 field days.

On Saturday October 8th there will be a pool dive to learn and practice survey techniques. On Sunday October 9th we will do an open water dive to implement surveying skills and learn about shipwreck conservation. The cost per person is \$200 for UASBC members and \$240 for non-members.

To register, contact Jacques Marc (250) 474-5797 or email [jmarc@shaw.ca](mailto:jmarc@shaw.ca)

## **Saturday October 15 & 16 – 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 auxiliary schooner S.F. Tolmie.

The Tolmie broke free from Ogden Point wharf during a storm and was wrecked on Harrison Island.

December 27, 1944. The goal on day one will be to cut kelp in preparation for doing photogrammetry. Please bring a pruning saw or garden shears to cut kelp. On the Sunday we will return to the San Pedro to carry out the photogrammetry. On the S.F. Tolmie we will establish a baseline and UAD graduates can practice their newly acquired surveying skills.

Both dives are suitable for all open water divers.

We will depart from West Bay. Charter \$100 per person. Limit 7 divers.

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

## **Saturday November 12 – SS Del Norte & Mary Hare**

This day trip will be to continue our survey work in the Gulf Islands. We have Chartered the MV Ocean Quest for the day to visit the SS Del Norte and conduct another search for the Mary Hare off Reid Island. These are moderately easy dives, so everyone is welcome. This trip will depart from Maple Bay. Estimated costs are \$120 per person. Limit 7 divers.

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

# Rosedale Reef Expedition: Exploring the Idaho & Church Point

By: Warren Bush

Five UASBC divers assembled at Pedder Bay Marina at 0830 on Sunday 12 June 2022, intent on exploring the remains of the steamer Idaho and the undersea terrain around Swordfish Island. The team met the always-trusty Daniel Bouchard of Esquimalt Eco Tours at the marina and set off for Rosedale Reef well before slack. The team consisted of Jacques Marc, Paul Spencer, Melissa Lazeo, Laura Millott, and Warren Bush.



Rocking & Rolling in the swells waiting for slack current at Idaho site.

Photo by J Marc

The team quickly reached Rosedale Reef, where a respectable sea state battered the RHIB. Slack water made conditions less challenging, so the divers entered shallow water and swam the reef, trying to locate what remains of the Idaho. The 198 foot long and 31 foot wide wooden-hulled steamer Idaho was launched in faraway Bath, Maine, in 1866. The vessel's story is impressive, and it played an important role in transporting passengers and freight around the pacific northwest upon arriving in San Francisco in 1867. The steamer made countless transits to Hawaii, various ports along the western seaboard and Puget Sound and in the early-to-mid 1880s provided the only regular service to certain parts of Alaska. Further, Idaho enjoyed some notoriety when the Canadian government brought a smuggling lawsuit against its skipper James Carroll, who was using the vessel to transport large volumes of opium to an isolated cannery on Prince of Wales Island, just across the Alaskan border. Once the drugs were stashed inside the cannery, Carroll and his associates would divide the illicit cargo before loading it onto ships bound for various ports throughout the pacific northwest.

Idaho's final voyage occurred on 28 November 1889 and originated in Friday Harbour. The crew loaded 800 barrels of lime, 150 barrels of oil, 370 barrels of salted salmon, 65 bales of hops and 200 tons of coal and then departed for Portland, Oregon. Sailing in heavy fog, Idaho struck Rosedale Reef only a few hours later, tearing a large hole in the port side. A fire broke out as the vessel rapidly filled with water, but the crew escaped without injury. A salvage operation played out over the succeeding weeks, and those involved were unusually lucky in being able to work the wreck given its very exposed location subject to extreme conditions. However, on 20 December the hull floated off the reef and into the Strait of Juan De Fuca. The Victorian tug Alert went after the derelict as it posed a not-insignificant danger to shipping, and eventually reached an agreement with the American tug Discovery to tow the ship to Port Angeles. Men from the Discovery boarded the Idaho and discovered that the machinery was no longer onboard – it appears that it fell from the hull while the ship was impaled on Rosedale Reef, and without those fittings acting as ballast the hull was able to float away. The engineering plant and related machinery are what now rests on Rosedale Reef, while the Idaho's actual hull is somewhere near Port Angeles. Fast forwarding 101 years, in September of 1990 the UASBC's former South Island Director Ian Pope was on a pleasure dive on Rosedale Reef and came across the same wreckage. UASBC divers first visited the site the following month, and Jacques Marc confirmed the site as the Idaho's machinery after a significant amount of research.

The team quickly located the wreck site, which emerged through the emerald waters after only a few minutes of swimming. Divers took note of a long propellor shaft standing proud off the reef, which is easily identifiable as man-made. Nearby are the remains of several gudgeons, and atop a small plateau is Idaho's propellor, which is an interesting feature to see. The site has very much become part of Rosedale Reef, and would be easy to miss if you didn't know that it was there – one wonders how Ian Pope managed to initially spy the site back in September of 1990, and, for that matter, that a charter operator brought divers to a site so exposed.



Idaho Boiler covered with marine growth on the wreck site

Photo by J Marc

*Continued on page 8*

Please note that treacherous currents surround this site – it is very dangerous. Divers are not encouraged to visit unless familiar with planning expeditions to areas subject to heavy and quickly changing currents. If you are in doubt about how to interpret the forecasted currents, do not visit Rosedale Reef.

The team boarded the RHIB and relocated to Church Point, northwest of Race Rocks. Shallow water and the lee provided by Swordfish Island and Church Island make this area a well-protected oasis from the sporting conditions often found just to the south, and abundant vegetation makes one feel like they are a modern-day interloper visiting a primordial world. This impression was further reinforced by the landscape under the RHIB's hull, which the divers encountered next.

The area between Swordfish Island and Church Point is home to abundant marine life, and is stereo-typically pacific-northwest-diving. The team descended into emerald water teeming with sediment that did not dramatically reduce visibility, but rather gave the impression of being part of a living environment – sort of like a gentle washing machine full of friendly marine life. Kelp covered the seabed, and the divers navigated through the forest while shoals of fish darted to and fro, illuminated by the sun. The team reached an interesting feature after a few minutes: at the east end of Swordfish Island a cut between rocks provides a tunnel that divers can swim through. Entering the tunnel is really cool, as it feels like some sort of hidden crevasse when a diver approaches from underwater. The walls of the tunnel are home to countless anemones, and it is a very fun spot to explore. Now on the south side of Swordfish Island, the team tracked west along the wall, enjoying teeming marine life and excellent conditions. The divers eventually turned the dive, and swam the opposite way back along the south face of Swordfish Island, through the tunnel and into the protected zone between the island and Church Point. Floating through the kelp and fish above the rocky terrain was very enjoyable, as was knowing that the team were almost certainly the only people to visit the long-forgotten Idaho since the Society's last visit.



# Exploring the Nanette and Twenty First of May

By: Warren Bush

On the morning of 14 May 2022, seven UASBC divers met at Metchosin's Pedder Bay Marina with the intent of exploring two shipwrecks located nearby. The divers loaded up Daniel Bouchard's recently overhauled Rigid Hull Inflatable Boat (RHIB) and put to sea at 09:30 sharp. The team consisted of Jacques Marc, Jiri Kotler, Paul Spencer, Chris Mills, Leila Bautista, Peter Radonic and Warren Bush.



Motoring out of Pedder Bay aboard Esquimalt Eco Tours RHIB

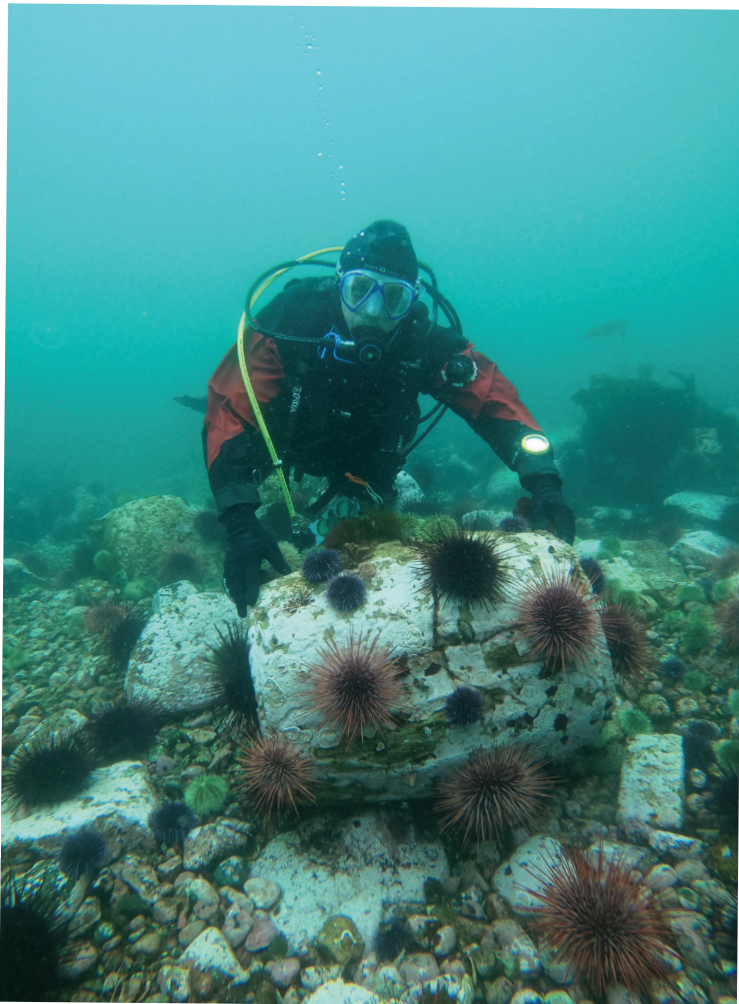
Photo by J Marc

The team first transited to the suspected site of the barque Nanette, located very near the Race Rocks lighthouse. Nanette was built in 1857 as a 118 foot long and 28-foot-wide barque and launched at Quebec City in that year. It had three masts, two decks, a deckhouse, and a square stern. Its maiden voyage went from Quebec City to Glasgow, and the vessel subsequently traveled widely throughout Europe and the far east. Nanette's final voyage commenced on 30 June 1860, when it left London for Victoria. The new owner, Captain Main, quickly fell ill with dysentery to such an extent that almost the entire transit was conducted by First Mate McCulloch, who entered the Strait of Juan de Fuca on 22 December 1860. The crew encountered restricted visibility near Victoria, which contributed to a rapidly deteriorating situation – Fisgard Light had recently been constructed and illuminated at the mouth of Esquimalt Harbour but was not yet charted, whereas Race Rocks lighthouse had been constructed and charted but not yet illuminated. While McCulloch tried to make sense of the confusing navigation picture, the Nanette grounded near Race Rocks. An extensive salvage operation ensued, both

permitted and illicit, and about two months after the initial grounding the stricken vessel slipped into deeper water somewhere northeast of its initial wrecking location. The UASBC has long considered the known site as a very likely location for the Nanette but is still conducting fieldwork in support of a conclusive identification.

While the team waited for slack water, Jacques explained the plan: divers would spend about 20 minutes on the main site, enjoying the dive and looking for any clues that might shed light on when this vessel sank. They would then surface, obtain a float from Daniel, and descend again and swim a transect out from the known wreck site in the direction the hull is thought to have drifted after sinking in an attempt to locate it.

The team encountered excellent visibility and very little current, which made exploring the gully where the wreckage is located quite comfortable. Plentiful sea life populates the area, and divers can float amongst the wreckage but enjoy the flora and fauna, too. The divers succeeded in locating numerous pieces of pottery and other ceramics which they investigated for hallmarks that could provide leads to long-forgotten companies that may date to Nanette's time, providing further evidence in support of the site's positive identification. However, Leila Bautista made the dive's best find – a fully intact torpedo bottle for “aeriated water” manufactured for Schweppes, complete with an address in London!



Jiri Kotler with lime barrel on Nanette

Photo by J Marc

After around 20 minutes underwater, the divers received their floats from Daniel, and then descended near the northeast extremity of the known site. Three teams swam to the northeast separated laterally by about 20 meters. Material on the seabed does indeed support that after slipping beneath the water the hull drifted in that direction – for example, plenty of the same styles of bricks that are located at the known-site are scattered to the northeast, as if they had fallen of a hull that was drifting underwater in that direction. The teams swam as far as 500 meters to the northeast of the known site but did not find wreckage that might indicate where Nanette's hull had finally come to rest. The hull remains undiscovered – a tantalizing potential project for the UASBC and the currently-underway Historic Shipwrecks of Southern Vancouver Island Project.

The divers surfaced after having spent between forty and sixty minutes underwater, and Daniel transported divers to a location near Rocky Point, around the entrance to Pedder Bay and near the shore of Bentick Island, to the north of Race Rocks. 141 years earlier, the Chilean barque the Twenty First of May wrecked in the same place.

Boston's Curtis & Tilden shipyard constructed the Twenty First of May as an 853 ton 160 foot long, 33 foot wide and 20 feet deep ship in 1866 (it was initially

named the Camilla). Camilla's activities between its launch and 1880 are unknown, but it likely engaged in trading. On 3 July 1880 Valparaiso's Captain Martinas purchased the vessel, renaming it Veinte y uno de Mayo, or the Twenty First of May in English. Its final voyage commenced from Valparaiso in the late fall of 1881 when it sailed for the Puget Sound area via San Francisco. On 10 December while sailing down the Strait of Juan De Fuca, a squall drove the vessel ashore at Edye Point at the entrance to Pedder Bay. The vessel was declared a total loss and Victorian authorities recommended that the wreck be sold with all dispatch, as strong southeast winds would surely destroy the vessel by driving it ashore. A salvage effort shortly thereafter had to be abandoned, and the vessel slowly broke up that winter, ending up on the seabed in twenty-five feet of water.

The team quickly changed tanks and descended a shot line on the wreck coordinates. Visibility had decreased with the ebbing tide, and the divers found themselves amidst a large forest of kelp – the entire seabed was obscured by its heavy growth. As a result, the team could not even find wreckage that they knew existed. Heavy kelp simply covered the bottom of the ocean to such an extent that no shipwreck was visible. Some members of the team did succeed in finding some brass pins and bits of copper, but the major artifacts like the bilge pump, planks and anchor chain could not be located. Regardless, diving through the kelp was still fun, and searching for a long-forgotten ship rarely visited by divers is a great way to spend a Saturday.



# **UASBC Victoria Explorations**

## **Fall Speaker Series Schedule 2022**

Note: Out of town members can join the meeting and presentations via zoom  
Contact John Middleton 250-743-4495 or email: [josa82@shaw.ca](mailto:josa82@shaw.ca)

### **September 21 Ross Bay Cemetery Tour**

Join us for a walk around Ross Bay cemetery to visit the headstones of passengers and crew of various shipwreck events. This tour will be guided by our very own Jacques Marc.

We will meet near the Ross Bay Pub at the Fairfield Village Shopping Centre, 1516 Fairfield Rd. at 05:30 PM. The tour will take about 1 ½ hours and will finish at the Ross Bay Pub.

Please RSVP John Middleton 250-743-4495 or email: [josa82@shaw.ca](mailto:josa82@shaw.ca)

### **October 19 Wrecks of Scapa Flow**

Ewan Anderson UASBC Communications Director, recently returned from diving the wrecks at Scapa Flow in Northern Scotland. Following the German defeat in WW I, 74 ships of the Imperial German Navy were interned at Scapa Flow. On 21 June 1919, a decision was made by the German Admiral to scuttle the fleet. Most of the ships were salvaged but many remain on the bottom to be explored by divers. Ewan will share with us what he found.

### **November 16 To be announced**

### **December 21**

Guy Shockey GUE Instructor, Explorer, Charter Boat Operator has travelled the world pursuing his diving passion. Mauritius is literally on the other side of the world from Vancouver Island, and it has some unique Indian Ocean diving. Lots of rock, but not the coral reefs we think of. They have a ton of wrecks that have never been dived. Guy will share his experiences exploring this distant and unique location.

# Archaeology Day 2022

By: Gabe Hill

The UASBC's mission is primarily to research, locate, identify, survey, and protect British Columbia's underwater archaeological resources. While Foghorn is largely dedicated to the documenting of these activities, there is another important role that UASBC plays in British Columbia: ensuring that the information recorded, and the discoveries made by the UASBC are presented to British Columbians and visitors to our Province. This educational component of UASBC's mission is critically important to UASBC's work, and with that in mind, on July 10th Jacques Marc, John Middleton, Ewan Anderson, Murray Maffey, Jiri Kotler, and Gabe Hill descended - through warm conditions and nearly unlimited visibility - on Archaeology Day at Point Ellice House.

Archaeology Day is an annual event that highlights groups and organisations that are working to preserve, document and present BC's history and heritage. Among the attendees this year were the Archaeological Society of BC, the Royal BC Museum, and the Metis Nation of Greater Victoria - in addition to UASBC. Each participant offered a unique and important perspective on BC's history. UASBC's contribution to Archaeology Day included a variety of artifact displays, activities and resources that highlighted, obviously, BC's underwater history - and the ways in which that history is discovered and recorded. Visitors to the UASBC tent seemed particularly interested in the 'sand box' which allowed participants to experience how artifacts can become lost, the difficulty with which they are found, and the further difficulty faced in trying to establish the stories that they tell us about the wreck, the ship, and its place in our history. At least a few young people came by a few times to dig through the sands and see history emerge - without a doubt avocational (or perhaps professional) archaeologists in the making!



2022 Archaeology Day set up with Jiri & Murray at the helm.

While the activities were a major draw to the UASBC tent, the wealth of knowledge about archaeology, diving, British Columbia history, and maritime history more generally, kept people around, and the conversation lively. In addition to asking about the UASBC and the work being done, attendees were equally excited to share their own experiences with, and interests in, British Columbia's maritime history. No doubt for some this was their first interaction with UASBC, but I'm sure that for many it won't be their last.

# **UASBC Presidents' message**

*by: Keith Bossons*



*Hi Everyone,*

*I hope you are all enjoying the pleasant summer weather we have been experiencing.*

*We had a very successful reboot of the Shipwrecks Conference in March after a two-year covid hiatus. It was great to see everyone in person rather than on a Zoom call.*

*We added a new director to the UASBC board in June with Guy Shockey coming on board as a director at large. Please join me in welcoming Guy as a new director of the society.*

*As we enter the fall things seem to be looking positive in terms of our ability to hold functions and operate in a more normal fashion. Jacques has worked up the fall dive schedule, which is included in this edition, so please take a look and try to get out for some dives. We have also scheduled an Underwater Archaeology for Divers Course to run in October. If you are interested, please check it out on our website.*

*We have some great articles in this edition of the Foghorn so sit back and catch up on what has been happening over the past few months.*

All the best

*Keith Bossons*

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



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