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Cedar Beach Ocean Lodge & 49th Parallel Dive Charters
Vancouver Island BC, Home of the Boeing 737 Artificial Reef

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News from the SALISH SEA

December 2008

Greetings once again from the Salish Sea, we have had a busy summer and fall including some great diving and meeting new customers.

Peter and Andy have continued their explorations and have several excellent sites south of Thetis Island that we look forward to sharing with guests.

A recent dive on the Boeing 737 produced some additions to the "passenger list", boosting the count to 103. Particularly significant was a tiny juvenile yelloweye rockfish (red snapper) living amid one of the support pedestals.



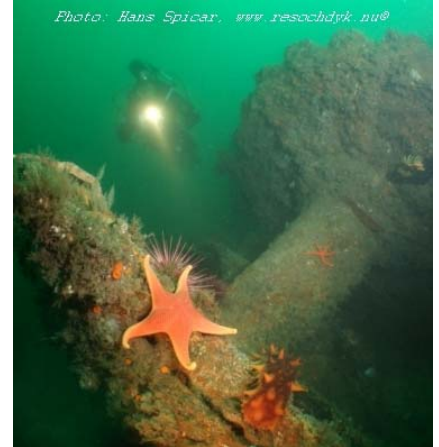
THE WRECK OF THE DEL NORTE

Many of us are aware that the 150th anniversary of British Columbia's entrance to the Canadian Confederation occurred this year. Numerous celebrations were held throughout the province. Another anniversary, a 140th, is also marked this year, although

the circumstances are much different and we would hardly celebrate the event. The unfortunate incident unfolded just around the corner from Thetis Island at the northern entrance of Porlier Pass.

At about 9 o'clock, on the morning of October 21 1868, the paddle wheeler *SS. Del Norte* encountered fog as it entered Porlier Pass. Captain Windsor was concerned about the vessel, her crew and the lack of space to turn. He decided to reverse course and back away. Unfortunately, a flood tide swept the coal laden ship on to the submerged rocks associated with Canoe Islet. Noting the rudder and a portion of the keel floating away, Windsor ordered the load of coal to be redistributed forward, so as to lighten the stern in hopes of refloating on the next high tide.

Sadly, the tidal sequence proved inadequate and heroic efforts by the crew to save their ship proved futile. Within hours, the *SS Sir James Douglas* arrived from Nanaimo and rescued the crew, but was unable to save the doomed *Del Norte*. Salvage vessels arrived nearly two weeks later and found no evidence of the vessel. By then a southeast gale had swept the remains beneath the surface.



By the late 1960's, a group of Victoria SCUBA divers had located the wreck lying perpendicular to the reef structure between depths of 10 and 25 meters. The Underwater Archaeological Society of B.C. was established in 1975 and soon after, began surveying the *Del Norte* for official protection. A plaque and mooring block were installed as part of the process.

Recently, Peter Luckham and 49th Parallel Dive Charters have been taking guests here on a fairly regular basis. This dive is greatly impacted by tidal currents. It requires specific logistics to ensure a safe and an enjoyable experience. Such an effort is very rewarding for both wreck divers and those interested in marine life.



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Much of the ship remains, including the paddle wheel armature, drive shaft, twin boilers, wooden planks and copious quantities of scattered coal. In addition, an impressive array of colourful creatures inhabits the wreck and surrounding sea bottom. It is anticipated that a mooring buoy will be successfully affixed to the block to provide a stable and definitive access.

FLUTED BRYOZOAN

Mention diving and the underwater world to nearly any one and the immediate image that pops into their minds is a tropical coral reef. Even those of us who are enthusiastic devotees of the Pacific Northwest and its spectacular diving might share such a vision -- from time to time. The warm water and impressive hard coral formations are classic!

While our marine environment is bereft of such warm water, it is fortunately emblazoned with spectacular marine life. And in fact, The Pacific Northwest is home to a variety of 'reef building' creatures which in certain locales create creature habitat that even mimics a coral reef in many ways. Various polychaete worms and bryozoans may grow in such profusion and size that a diver might have a 'twilight zone/coral' experience right here in British Columbia.

One of several bryozoan species capable of such a 'coral reef impression' is the fluted bryozoan *Hippodiplosia insculpta*.



Although colonial bryozoans may superficially resemble hard corals, they are entirely different creatures, not even remotely related. While the fluted bryozoan lives along the west coast of North America from Alaska to Mexico and even Costa Rica, it seems especially lush and gigantic in various British Columbia locales. Its 15 cm (6 in.) across maximum recorded size seems an inadequate measure to describe what we have recently observed at Vernaci Point, in Porlier Pass. Here, fluted bryozoans grow in large mounds and even irregular, flattened 'sheets' coating significant areas of the bottom. We are particularly excited about Vernaci Point as a dive site not only due to the fluted bryozoan 'reef structure', but all the impressive marine life assembled there. We look forward to perhaps sharing it

with you as part of your next visit. It is our latest feature dive.

Planning your next trip

Our New Years Dive event is full and 2009 is already beginning to shape up with reservations. Many of you have wanted to book in advance for your particular long weekend or holiday time, now is the time to contact us to make sure that you can reserve that spot. We are continuing to offer 10% off for the months of April & May as these are our low vis months.

The following great winter vis weekends are still open: January 10/11; January 31/February 1; February 7/8; February 21/22. Also early spring openings: March 14/15; March 21/22; March 28/29.

For interested naturalists, February is Lingcod Egg Mass Survey month – come join in. It is easy, useful, and good fun too.

We have expanded our great meals to include Thai food. This has been very popular. If you have a particularly favorite cuisine let us know and I bet we can put something special together for you. As some of you know we also do birthday cakes and anniversary specials.

Happy Diving,
Andy, Virginia, Peter & Simone

Call or email us soon to arrange your next diving vacation.