

Gulf Islands Dive Trip

By: Eric Young



Nick Bowman Hovers over Wheel Boss on Robert Kerr Wreck.

Photo by Ewan Anderson

Spring usually comes to the BC coast a month before the equinox. Spring means that you can experience just about any weather condition, and more than likely get them all in the course of one day. Sunday, February 24th was a Spring day. We avoided snow, though a little

ice fog to start made us feel that we hadn't completely missed out. Ending in glorious sunshine, with 7-8° C after two great dives was a nice way to finish things off.

Led by the indefatigable Jacques Marc, divers Ewan Anderson, Nick Bowman, Gabe Hill, Bob Simpson, and Eric Young set out from Chemainus aboard the Juan de Fuca Warrior piloted by stalwart captain Erin Bradley. After a few hiccups from the outboard, due to the cold weather, the team was off to the reef at the North end of Thetis Island.

When one looks at satellite images of the Gulf Islands the general impression is that the surface is about equally covered by land and water. Then one sees all the constriction points; the 'door ways' in and out, the tight passages up and down. The UASBC has done a good amount of work looking at the havoc those spots



Robert Kerr Miami Dive Group Shot

Photo by Brown Young

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Shaft Bushing on Maimi Wreck.

Photo by Ewan Anderson

have caused. Next one sees the myriad of little stationary hard spots that litter the supposedly 'open' areas. Well, we were going back to flesh out our understanding of the particular havoc that the reef south and north of Miami Islet had wreaked.

The Robert Kerr was an 1866 wooden sailing ship that was sold to Canadian Pacific in 1888 and converted into a coal barge. She was used in that capacity to haul coal from Vancouver Island mines over to Vancouver to fuel the steam ships that plied the Pacific Ocean. On March 4th, 1911 she left Ladysmith under tow with a load of coal. The tug that was pulling the Kerr attempted to take the "short cut" between Miami Islet (north) and the Ragged Islets (south) towards Porlier Pass (to the south). There is enough depth for a vessel that draws 8.0 m of water from the midway point between the islets over to the south. Apparently the tug lost its way and the Kerr came across too far north and wrecked on the reef.

Most of the Kerr's timber has been eaten away over the years, but significant portions of her keel and

central hull still exist because they have been covered with coal for the last century. As technology advanced, the Kerr was constructed or retrofitted with significant iron/steel pieces, e.g. iron knees. These metal pieces have fallen to the rocky bottom as the wood disintegrated.

Jacques and Gabe placed a 60 m baseline from the stern in deeper water up to the bow in about 5.0 m of water at a medium tide. They then proceeded to survey some iron pieces in shallower water towards the bow. Bob and Eric were tasked with surveying the hawse pipes at the bow. Only one is still with the site, though the second may have rolled off into the deeper water to the south. They continued surveying metal knees and braces which were found in the same area. Ewan and Nick were assigned to photograph the Kerr in order to develop a 3D computer model of the wreck. They took 170 images along the centreline. In addition they concentrated on the "steering gear" at the stern and the hawse pipe near the bow.



Nick Bowman swims along Miami Hull.

Photo by Ewan Anderson

After a pleasant, though somewhat cool hour underwater, we surfaced to find the sun shining. Apparently the Warrior was enjoying the sun so much she wanted to stay put. The anchor took considerable coaxing by hand to lift out of the rocks. Or, perhaps the Warrior was just concerned about our surface interval, as the Miami was barely 800 metres away on the other side of her Islet.

The Miami was an 1892 steel hulled, propellor driven freighter that spent six years plying the Atlantic and Pacific. In 1898 she was converted into a collier and put into service transporting coal to San Francisco from various ports around the Salish Sea. In early 1900 the Miami loaded coal at Ladysmith and set out for San Francisco on January 25th. Her captain was also headed for Porlier Pass, but was not tempted by the space between the islets. After he hit the reef the

captain complained that the Hydrographic Service had not shown the reef on their charts. A month later the Service re-surveyed the reef and assured the world that in fact the reef “had not changed position”.

As the Miami, being 97 metres long, struck the reef amidships in a moderately high tide, she immediately broke her back as the tide went down. The vessel was heavily salvaged, but there remains the aft third down slope to the west and the forward two-thirds down slope to the east. The Hydrographic Service now has a red marker buoy 50 metres to the north. The wreck clearly is still of interest as we found a small white float that the Coast Guard had left at the highest point of the site.

Due to the heavy salvage work very little of interest remains on the Miami wreck site. Our visit was to re-affirm the wreck’s orientation. We placed floats at each end to re-check our compass heading, which lined up with the Coast Guard float one third of the way over. While this happened, Ewan and Nick took numerous photos of some shaft bushings and hull segments.

My wife, Bronwen, and I are sailors. We have spent a fair amount of time sailing on the Pacific coast. Bronwen is very fond of reminding us: “That is a point of land, why would we want to get any closer to it? Bad things happen around points of land.” The wrecks of the Miami and the Robert Kerr are an all too vivid reminder that she is completely correct. In each case if they had been only 100 feet away (30 m) to the north for the Miami and to south for the Kerr they would have passed through unharmed. Also, in each case, they grounded on what appears from underwater to be the highest piece of the reefs that they hit. One might call it ‘bad luck’. I prefer to think that we make most of the ‘luck’ we encounter. Just as we made the most out of a nice day on February 24th.

UASBC SHIPWRECKS Conference 2019

Mediterranean & Classical Nautical Archaeology

Shipwrecks 2019

Mediterranean and Classical Nautical Archaeology.

Mark your calendars for **April 6**. It will be a fabulous event.

Dr. Justin Leidwanger, a nautical and classical archaeologist at Stanford University is the Dinner Speaker with a presentation on the 1500 year old 'Marzamenti Church' wreck off Sicily.

Dr. Elizabeth Greene, a nautical and classical archaeologist at Brock University, will give a daytime presentation, likely on the 6th century BC Archaic shipwreck she excavated at Pabuc Burnu, Turkey.

Details about other daytime speakers, costs for the daytime program and the evening banquet are available on our website:
<https://www.uasbc.com/shipwrecks-conference>

The 32nd Annual **UASBC Shipwrecks 2019** will be held on **April 6, 2019**
in Vancouver, at the Hellenic Community Centre,
4500 Arbutus Street.

For more event details, check with Kieth Bossons
keithsharon@bossons.ca

or

Tom Beasley tbeasley@telus.net

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

UASBC VISITS THE PORLIER PASS AREA, SOUTHERN GULF ISLANDS

By Jiri Kotler

As a continuation of the Southern Gulf Islands Project, UASBC mounted a one-day expedition to the Porlier Pass area. The goal was to assess the condition of the wreck of Point Grey at Virago Rock in Porlier Pass, and to continue the search for the Mary Hare, a small steamer wrecked somewhere off Reid Island.

On 16 March 2019 a group of UASBC divers gathered at the municipal pier in Maple Bay. The participants included Jacques Marc, Paul Spencer, George Silvestrini, Jiri Kotler, Ewan Anderson and Damien Harabalja. Erin Bradley captained Juan de Fuca Warrior – the usual charter vessel! The predicted tidal slack at Porlier Pass was at 1226. However, the group departed the pier by 1030 allowing for the ‘unforeseen’, and the inevitable uncertainty in tidal predictions. The 50-minute or so ride to the Virago Rock was uneventful while everybody completed their respective ‘suited up’ and ‘gear setting up’ processes. The weather was nearly perfect – lots of sunshine, 10°C and calm (though the boat wind was little ‘biting’)!

The group arrived at Virago Rock by 1130. There was still a light flood current so we made ourselves comfortable and waited. Erin alerted an approaching

tug and barge via VHF of ‘divers down’! Jacques, in the meantime, assigned a few tasks to be carried out while on the wreck. George and Jiri would gather some of the missing data on the ship’s rudder and boiler. Ewan and Damien would concentrate on photogrammetry of the stern section and the propeller, while Jacques and Paul would lay down a base line and record positions (new if any) of the major components. The wreck is badly damaged (due to storm(s) and likely encounters with ‘wayward’ barges). Save for a small stern section bearing the propeller and a large boiler approximately midship, an untrained ‘eye’ would not recognize it as a shipwreck. What remains is mostly twisted beams and plates. Visibility was no more than four meters with water temperature around 6°C.

With tasks completed everybody headed back on board. In the meantime, the current had shifted to a noticeable ebb. So much so that, with most crew back on board, Erin pointed Juan De Fuca Warrior down stream to pick up Ewan and Damian. There they were comfortably floating in the middle of Porlier Pass towards Reid Island.

After a suitable surface time and lunch the next dive would be a search for the wreckage of Mary Hare reported to have sunk in February 1896. UASBC had searched for it before without success. The area that remained to be covered was the south-east section of Reid Island. The three teams searched in tandem, from approximately the center to the south-east end of the Island. One by one Erin picked up the teams who all reported: “Nothing resembling a wreck or any part thereof”! Once again it was asserted where the wreck is not! Hopefully, little by little through a process of thorough elimination, the small steamer will eventually reveal herself and her secrets!

Back in Maple Bay the events of the day were reviewed – in depth – at The Lion Rampant Scottish Pub!



(left to right) Damien, Paul, Capt. Erin, Jacques, George and Jiri

Photo by: Ewan Anderson

SEARCH FOR THE WRECK OF SS ENTERPRISE

By: Jiri Kotler



Alex and Aidan Getting ready to swim

Photo by: Ewan Anderson

The weather conditions could not have been more perfect when members of the UASBC gathered at Gyro Park beach. It was a sunny day, with light SE wind and the almost placid waters in the bay were at high tide. The beach was fairly quiet, apart from a few kayakers and the usual compliment of morning dog walkers.

The goal was to continue with search efforts for the wreck of *SS Enterprise*. The vessel was a side wheel steamer. It was damaged during a collision with another steamer *R.P. Rithet*. Subsequently she was towed to Cadboro Bay where it sank in 1885. The vessel was extensively salvaged after her wrecking. The engines and boilers were removed as well as all furniture and other accessible material. During the last few years the Society has searched for the wreckage four times (in addition to efforts in early 1990's). There have been only a few clues regarding a potential location of the wreckage. Apart from scant newspaper accounts the best clue is a period sepia photograph of the ship taken shortly after its sinking. It shows the vessel (with its gunwales almost at the water line) against a tree covered shoreline approximately where the Royal Victoria Yacht Club (RVYC) is presently located. While

it is clear that the photographer was at Gyro Park beach (somewhere) the tree outlines in the photo's fuzzy background have certainly changed with time. That makes it difficult to determine the 'last' position of the vessel. As a result, the recent searches had to be, and have been, quite methodical. Using Google Earth a network of search patterns starting at the beach was developed over sections of the Bay. Typical search lines (transects) would be about thirty meters apart heading into the Bay for a distance of two to three hundred meters. Each dive team would follow a prescribed course (compass bearing) and return on a reverse course. The return would be off-set by about 20-25 meters from the outbound course (to ensure some overlap). Normally the dive team would surface before returning so that crew of a support boat could accurately record (GPS) its position. As a result of these efforts, most of the Bay area in question had been searched. One area remained however. The most north-western part of the Bay between the beach and the RVYC thus became the search area in this latest effort.

Five members of the UASBC arrived at the Gyro Park by 0900. The group included Jacques Marc, Gabriel

Spring Exploration Schedule 2019

April 1 - April 14th Minto Search

Kootenays – A magnetometer will be used to try find the elusive stern wheeler Minto.

If targets are found, divers will be used to dive located targets.

This is a joint UASBC/INA project using small boats so space is limited.

Contact Bill Meekel for details billmeekel@gmail.com

Saturday April 13th Cowper Search

Gulf Islands- The clipper ship Cowper struck a rock northwest of Tumbo Island November 21, 1869 and was lost. The UASBC will conduct a search for this wreck. Afterwards we will dive the Zephyr site off Mayne Island. We may experience a bit of current, but this dive is suitable for all open water divers.

We will depart from Sidney for this trip.

Charter \$90 per person. Limit 8 divers.

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

May 13 to 19th Okanagan Landing

The UASBC and INA will be conducting a side scan sonar survey of the Okanagan Landing area of Okanagan Lake. This project will be using small personal boats so space is limited.

Contact Bill Meekel for details billmeekel@gmail.com

Search for the Wreck of SS Enterprise^(continued)

Hill, Alexander Braun, Aiden Cole and Jiri Kotler. The sixth member was Ewan Anderson who volunteered to operate the support Zodiac (and 'sailed' in). As before Jacques had prepared a detailed search pattern consisting of three individual courses complete with starting points, courses and distances to cover. The teams were made up of Jacques and Gabriel, Alexander and Aiden,

and Jiri (on his own). Ewan skillfully distributed the teams to their respective starting points. Then he spent the following thirty minutes (or so) tracking bubbles and looking for surfaced divers to mark the end-of-line positions. As the teams returned to their starting points Ewan would collect them and then learn the hard truth – nobody found anything that would resemble a wreckage of a 142-ft steamship (or any parts thereof). However, a lot of other stuff was noted strewn along the bottom. That included sunken boats, abandoned moorings and crab traps, and various boat gear - a testimony to the Bay's popularity. The teams spent on average about forty-five to fifty minutes in 48-degree water. It is doubtful though that anybody got too cold - the hard and long swims kept everybody pumped up and warm! In the meantime, the beach became 'alive'. As the divers were dragging their gear through sand and driftwood back to parked cars, they were greeted by dozens of young families and bright-eyed kids who were participating in the Cadboro Bay 'beach clean-up bee'!



Alex and Aidan Returning from Search

Photo by: Jacques Marc

UASBC Presidents' message Spring 2019

by: Keith Bossons

Hi Everyone,

The warm weather of the past few days feels a lot like spring after a cold winter.

Our society has been busy over the winter months. The work for the Gulf Island project continued with the winter/spring dive schedule.

We completed a contract for the BC Heritage Branch to complete five Statements of Significance and an inventory of historic underwater resources. This was a lot of work and the proceeds make a major contribution to funding our operations. Thanks to everyone who helped out on this project.

We did a third printing of the Wreck Divers Guide to Sailing Ship Artifacts of the 19th Century. The cover got a refresh to make it look more current.

We have a number of upcoming events that I would like to encourage people to attend.

- **March 23:** The UASBC is running a NAS Intro Course in Victoria
- **March 27:** Lower Mainland Underwater Explorer Speakers Series and our Annual General Meeting will be held at the Vancouver Maritime Museum. Mark Artherton will be giving a talk on his participation in a recent expedition to the Blue hole in Belize with Aquatica Submarines. The AGM will immediately follow the talk and I promise it will be mercifully short.
- **April 6:** Shipwrecks Conference will be held this year at the Hellenic Community Centre. The theme is Mediterranean Maritime History. We have a great line up of speakers and I would love to see a good turn out from our members.
- **April 13:** Jacques Marc will be leading a dive expedition to the Gulf Island to search to the Cowpar.
- **May 13:** The UASBC is teaming up with the INA to conduct side scan sonar survey of the Okanagan Landing area of Okanagan Lake. This project will be using small personal boats so space is limited.

Information on all of these events can be found on our website.

As we move into the spring and better weather I am planning to be spending more time on and under the water. Hope to see you on the water or at one of our upcoming events

All the best
Keith Bossons
UASBC President

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

Victoria Chapter Exploration Speaker Series Spring 2019

Wednesday, April 10

UASBC EXPLORATIONS - YEAR IN REVIEW
Jacques Marc – UASBC Explorations Director

**The UASBC Victoria Chapter
meets at
The offices of Terra Archaeology
45 Bastion Square in Victoria
at 07:00 PM
The 2nd Wednesday of the
month**

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