

Mysteries of the Mary Hare and SS Del Norte

By: Leila Bautista



Del Norte Dive Group

Photo by George Silvestrini

On March 5, 2023, UASBC divers boarded the MV Ocean Quest in Maple Bay Marina for an 8:00 am departure to dive the 10:10 am slack on the SS Del Norte, located in Porlier Pass between Galiano and Valdes Islands. The trip to the wreck site was about 1 hour and 30 mins providing us with plenty of time to plan out the day and stay warm in the heated cabin. Divers included Jacques Marc, Jiri Kotler, George Silvestrini, Leila Bautista, Kristin Piche and Tiare Boyes representing a balanced team of veteran and emerging new explorers.

Sidewheel Steamer Del Norte struck Canoe Reef in October 1868 on a return trip to San Francisco from Sitka, Alaska. She was first discovered by Victoria-based sport divers in 1971 and was later investigated by UASBC during a preliminary survey in 1976. Since then, a lot of work has been done to preserve and learn more about the site -- an educational plaque has been placed and UASBC's Ewan Anderson has conducted photogrammetry work producing a 3D map of the wreck site.

Our visit had near-perfect conditions with little to no current and over 30 feet of visibility underwater as demonstrated by Tiare's underwater photography. The wreck remains in great shape though observably, had fewer plumose anemones

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than in the past, according to the veterans. While down there, UASBC divers also took the time to clean off the existing plaque and confirmed that known remaining artifacts of the wreck are still there. Towards the end of our dives, we were pleasantly surprised by a pair of friendly sea lions wondering what all the fuss was about.



Jacques & Jiri with Del Norte plaque.

Photo by Tiare Boyes

Once all remaining divers in the water had sufficient sea lion sightings, we had a light lunch and travelled to Reid Island in search of the mysterious Mary Hare. Unfortunately, I discovered a tear in my dry suit neck seal and was unable to join the team for the search! Around 12:30 pm, divers Jiri and George entered the water, shortly followed by Jacques, Kristin, and Tiare.

The search likely marks UASBC's fourth and final attempt at finding the steamer Mary Hare which struck a rock off Reid Island in 1896. The steamer was then reported to have caught on fire while crew members were ashore foraging for food. The official survey later found that the fire destroyed everything and only the machinery was suitable for salvaging.

No records exist that confirm that salvage efforts occurred. We can assume it did occur, as the UASBC has not successfully found remnants of the wreck. It has been forty-one years since the first search attempt for the Mary Hare wreck was done in 1982. Additional searches occurred in 2017 and 2019 with little success but we managed to pick up some trash this time, so our efforts were not in vain.

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

UASBC Hosts First-ever Conference on Indigenous Maritime Archaeology

By: Matthew Bossons

On April 15, the Underwater Archaeology Society of British Columbia (UASBC) hosted its first-ever annual conference focused exclusively on Indigenous maritime archaeology. The event, appropriately dubbed the Indigenous Maritime Archaeology Conference (IMAC), offered fascinating insights into the pre-settler history and lifeways of coastal First Nations in B.C. and other Indigenous groups across North America.

In addition to the in-person presentations held on the day at the Squamish Nation's Chief Joe Mathias Centre in West Vancouver, this year's lectures were also livestreamed via Zoom to accommodate interested individuals based outside of B.C.'s Lower Mainland.

More than 70 in-person and virtual participants attended the IMAC, including long-time UASBC members, professional archaeologists, members of local First Nations, and university students.



Shipwrecks 2023 conference at Joe Mathias Centre.

Photo by Holger Heitland

According to conference chair Tom Beasley, this year's conference was both the UASBC's first time livestreaming the annual event and its first time hosting a conference on First Nations' land — experiences that were “fabulous learning opportunities.”

“The conference was a first for the UASBC, as well as for archaeology in Canada. Maritime archaeology has largely focused on the colonial presence in the country,” says Rob Rondeau, a Ph.D. student and sessional instructor in the Department of Archaeology at Simon Fraser University.

“There is now a growing awareness of how First Nations people in the past used Canada's waterways and lived alongside them for many, many generations [...] After all, they were this province's first mariners, and theirs is a rich and meaningful history,” he notes.

The conference's daytime portion started with a blessing song by Squamish Nation's Chief Billy Williams. Rondeau, who helped organize the event, then took the podium to present new methods and perspectives for finding underwater sites.

Among the many IMAC highlights were Chris Arnett's introduction to intertidal rock art, Rob Field's presentation on SGAan Kinghlas, also known as the Bowie Seamount, and Elroy White's presentation on the Heiltsuk stone fish traps along B.C.'s central coast.

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Many of the presentations touched on archaeological work being done in the archipelago of Haida Gwaii, off the coast of B.C. Other lectures highlighted how far underwater exploration technology has advanced in recent years and how novel tech is assisting researchers and archaeologists.

“A consistent theme was how technology has improved over the years, which is allowing archaeologists to make new finds underwater and explore them in ways not previously possible. This includes advancements in underwater bathymetry, the use of remotely operated vehicles (ROVs), and even scuba diving itself,” Rondeau, who also acted as the event’s moderator, tells *The Foghorn*. “Diving gear has improved substantially over the last 40 years, allowing divers to stay down longer and dive safer.”

The IMAC’s keynote presentation was provided by Jessi Halligan, assistant professor of anthropology at Florida State University, and drew on her research and marine archaeology experiences to offer expert insights on the peopling of the Americas. She also shared stories from her diving adventures on underwater archaeological sites in Florida.

The UASBC’s next annual conference will be held in Victoria in the spring of 2024 and will focus on diving history & technology.

A version of this article first appeared in *DIVER* magazine.



UASBC Presidents' message

by: Keith Bossons

Hi Everyone,

Well, this will be the last Foghorn before the summer. It has been a busy spring for the UASBC.

We ran a very successful Shipwrecks Conference in April on the topic of Indigenous Maritime Archaeology at the Chief Joe Mathias Centre in North Vancouver. This conference is a continuation of recent efforts to expand our focus beyond settler archaeology.

We have been continuing our efforts to replace our very old and fragile website. We hope to award a contract to build a new site by the end of the summer.

Jacques ran a busy spring exploration schedule, and I am sure there will be plenty of details in this edition of the Foghorn.

We are also planning the return on in person speaker series events in the lower mainland starting this fall. We will share the details once things get finalized.

I hope everyone has a great summer and has a chance to get out on the water.

All the best
Keith Bossons
UASBC President

Diving for History at Becher Bay

By: Warren Bush

On the sunny and warm morning of Sunday 14 May 2023, seven UASBC divers met at Pedder Bay Marina intent on putting to sea and exploring the waters around Becher Bay. The team planned on making two dives: the first on the wreck of the Swordfish and the second in the area just west of Smyth Head to locate reef-net anchors known to be used by local First Nations. The team consisted of UASBC Exploration Director Jacques Marc, Jiri Kotler, George Silvestrini, Paul Spencer, Tim and Becky Butt, and Warren Bush.



Swordfish Dive Group on board Miss Emily.

Photo by J. Marc

After slipping from Pedder Bay Marina at 1015, the divers proceeded through Race Passage south of Cape Calver and past Church Point to the vicinity of the Bedford Islands. Initially the team had high hopes that a low tidal exchange might not produce the expected strong currents, which proved to be wishful thinking – a jaunty current passed over the first site, and the team waited it out. Eventually the team entered the water around noon and descended into twenty to forty feet of water to visit the broken remains of the sailing barque Swordfish.

T. Vernon & Son built Swordfish in Liverpool, England, and launched it in November of 1864. The details of Swordfish's operational history are vague, but it seems to have operated as a coastal freighter in European waters before sailing for the west coast of North America in May of 1877. On 6 November 1877, enroute from San Francisco to Vancouver, Swordfish collided with South Bedford Rock, tearing a hole in its stern and causing the hull to settle on the shallow rocks with its decks awash. The sailing ship lay impaled on the rocks and was heavily salvaged in the weeks following its loss. Eventually the vessel seems to have broken apart and sank against the south face of South Bedford Rock. Its jumbled remains are now strewn across a series of underwater ledges that extend south for several dozen yards from the intertidal zone down to about forty feet, before dropping off steeply.



Iron barque Valparaiso was a sister ship to Swordfish.

Photo Courtesy Port Adelaide Nautical Museum

In May of 2023, 146 years after Swordfish sank, seven UASBC divers navigated the twisted wreckage and kelp that covers the site. The wreck's bow is in twenty to forty feet of water, and highlights are a cannonade, toppled masts, and many frames. Bent I-beams are also found on the site, as are bower anchors and smaller bits of wreckage that are difficult to identify. Two hatch covers and other debris from the after part of the vessel have slipped down a steep slope, and rest in around 110 feet of water. The team enjoyed reasonable visibility, but heavy kelp and a strong unexpected current made exploring the site slightly challenging. After about forty minutes the divers surfaced after thoroughly covering the area, and enjoyed being but a handful of people who have visited the ghostly remains of the Swordfish in recent years.

Next, the team relocated just under half a nautical mile to the north, to a point a few hundred yards west of Smyth Head. Archaeologist Norm Easton began researching this site in the late 1970s and has produced several articles on Coast Salish subsistence, including reef-netting. Easton's MA thesis abstract notes that his work "is based on underwater archaeological fieldwork investigating pre-historic Straits Salish reef-net fishing locations in Canadian waters. Two substantiated sites were surveyed and chronometric estimates of their age statistically extrapolated from a sample of the number of reef-net anchor stones deposited on the site: one, at Bedwell Harbour, Pender Islands, is dated to the latter half of the 18th century AD; the other, off Smyth Head, at the eastern entrance to Becher Bay, Vancouver Island, is dated to AD 1500 +/- 50 years." It was latter reef-netting site that the seven UASBC divers found themselves floating over.

The divers explored the area in two teams – the first team entered the water due west of the known reef-net anchor location to locate other confirmed anchor stones (these other reef-net anchors have been the subject of photography, but divers have not recorded GPS coordinates of their exact locations). The second team descended at the location of the better-known reef-net anchor, and then transited west hoping to meet the first team somewhere between each team's point of entry.

The first team thoroughly explored the area but failed in locating other reef-net anchors. The second team succeeded in finding the best-known reef-net anchor, but found neither further artifacts nor the second team underwater! The landscape was mostly broken rock, shell, and sand, and the visibility was reasonable, and the protected waters of Smyth Head seemed to experience far less current than the more exposed outer channel where Swordfish lies.

After a solid day of diving these lesser known but still very enjoyable sites, the seven divers returned to Pedder Bay at around 1600.

Wreck Trek on the West Coast

By: Becky Butt

The West Coast is the best Coast, so they say, and I can tell you after spending some time scuba diving with the Underwater Archeological Society of BC (UASBC) over on the West Coast, I can wholeheartedly agree.

This was not my first time diving that area, but it was the first time I had joined a group from UASBC and specifically for a scuba wreck tour of the West coast. Our nine group members for the weekend, were Jacques, Jiri, George, Paul, Lee, Sophie, Leila, Tim and me, Becky. It's always a bit unnerving joining a group of divers that have known each other for a long time, you never quite know what will happen with the group dynamic. From the outset the old timers (not by age!) from UASBC make you feel very welcome from the second you arrive until the moment you say goodbye.

The plan for the weekend was to complete four wreck dives over two days and to survey and identify a potential new dive site. Because the West Coast weather can be unpredictable, we started with a list of wrecks which provided some bad-weather alternatives:

1. The Vanlene which sank at Austin Island on March 14, 1972;
2. Ericsson which sank at Leach Island on November 19, 1892;
3. HMCS Theipval which sank February 27 1930;
4. Tuscan Prince Ashore which sank February 15, 1923;
5. Orpheus which sank Tzartus Island on November 5, 1875;
6. and finally, our mystery dive.



Sophie, Leila and Becky from Vancouver Island Women Underwater (VIWU)

Our weekend began driving to Bamfield for a meet up time of 4pm for dive brief and supper. We decided to travel from Duncan to Port Alberni and avoid the potentially rougher road via Lake Cowichan. One benefit of driving towards Bamfield is losing cell coverage on the way. Switching off from the stress and strain of life is one of the reasons I scuba dive, and to be able to take a moment to reconnect with my surroundings without news and social media and such like is bliss.

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After arrival and meeting everyone we were treated to the first meal courtesy of Jacques, who was our chef for the weekend and how thankful we all were for that with delicious chicken fajita wraps and salad. We drew from a hat who was going to do clean-up for each meal throughout the weekend, which was a lovely idea and a chance for us all to get to know each other a little better working in teams of two. After supper we sat down for an outline dive brief for the weekend.



Jacques giving the Friday evening dive briefing.

Photo by Leila Bautista

The next morning after a good sleep and hearty breakfast, we loaded up the boat, which was located conveniently at the end of the dock to our cabin. Captain Erin provided a full and detailed boat safety brief before we headed out onto the ocean for a day of diving. The plan was to dive HMCS Thiepvall and the Second Immigrant ship.



Our team of divers

Photo by Erin Bradley

There is no doubt that HMCS Thiepval for those of us able to visit her possesses a romantic draw for the scuba wreck enthusiast. She was a 44-metre long “battle” class armed trawler built in Kingston Ontario in 1917 and commissioned into the navy in the last months of the conflict. She was capable of only ten knots and lightly armed with a 12-pounder gun. During her brief wartime career she guarded convoys and hunted U-boats off the Newfoundland coast. Its hard not to be romantic and get a little excited imagining this stoic little ship fighting for her country and hunting in vain the far more powerful German U-boats.

During peacetime she reverted to more traditional Canadian naval duties that included life saving patrols of the West Coast’s ferocious seas, and she pulled many a stricken vessel to safety. She was also involved in fisheries inspections, and even intercepted American rum runners! One of her most famous jobs was support of the ill fated Stuart McLaren “British round the World Flight” dropping aviation fuel in Petropavlovsk and meeting the small plane on Russia’s Kamchatka peninsula on July 24, 1924. She was the first Canadian warship to visit revolutionary Russia and successfully completed a grueling five month mission rescuing the small seaplane in Alaskan waters and radioing the sad news back to Britain that the flight had failed.

She lost her battle with the high seas on February 27, 1930 after hitting an uncharted rock in the Turret and Turtle Islands. Many attempts were made to save the little ship from sinking including support from her sister ship HMCS Armentieres but all were thwarted and the agony of her loss was hidden by nightfall as she slipped off the rock and sank beneath the waves laying upside down.

Our dive to this piece of Canadian history did not dissappoint at all, she is stunningly beautiful, covered in life, and we were able to find a piece of china plate that is still laying on the seabed. The plumrose anenomes between the wreck and the wall where she sits on her side are huge and beautiful white. As an avid wreck diver I enjoy all wrecks but to see this one beneath BC waters and imagine her searching in vain for those U boats, well it’s a privilege to step into her history even for a short moment.



Becky examines mess plate found on Theipval site.

Photo by J. Marc

After enjoying lunch and a quick dive brief we dropped back in to dive the Second Immigrant Ship. This was one of the options available with the weather.



Our leader, Jacques and Captain Erin making sure we are headed to the right dive location

Photo by Sophie Sanfacon

Little is known about this immigrant ship other than that it is one of four similar ships used to smuggle desperate immigrants in deplorable conditions across the Pacific, fetching up on BC's coast in the summer of 1999. The wreck appeared huge underwater and the dive was a great way to wrap up the dive day.

UASBC had been tasked to find out what was located in an area that looked like a potential new dive site, possibly a dive mast or something of interest. Lee and Paul graciously agreed to do the what I like to call the "What is it dive?". You never quite know what you will find and the excitement on the boat was palpable as they prepared for the dive.

As Lee and Paul came back onto the boat, laughing loudly, they told us they had in fact had great fun riding in full scuba gear on a beautiful fir tree at the bottom of the ocean. Although the dive ended in jokes, I am reminded of the sheer possibility of exploration and the unknown of what could have been found and remains to be found in our BC waters.

Following an amazing day of diving we headed back to the cabins for some more home made food courtesy of Jacques, a hot tub relaxation and another great night's sleep, but this time the kind of post diving sleep that only a full day of exploration diving can achieve.

An early start the next day saw us head out to the Vanlene to attempt to dive the wreck. Unfortunately rolling seas and tough conditions meant we had to abort the attempt on this occasion. Dissapointing for sure but without doubt the right decision. Our alternative dive was to do two dives on the Orpheus. She did not dissappoint.

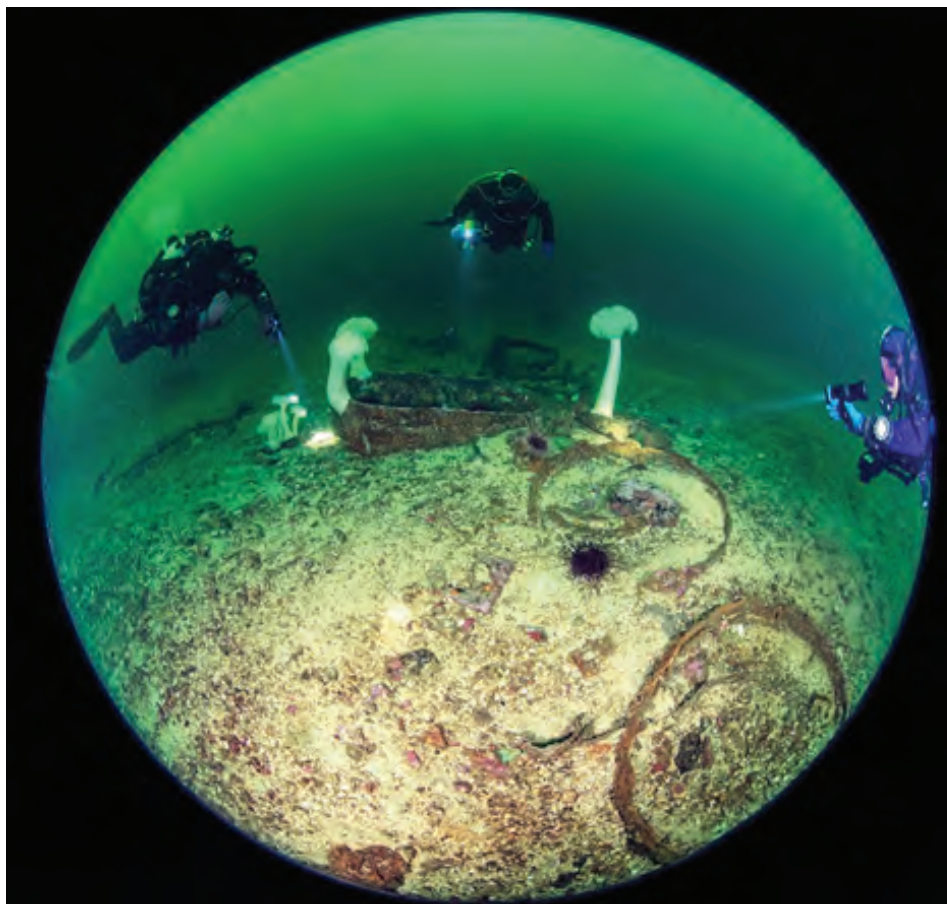
The Orpheus was a three masted ship of 1,067 tons with a length of 191 feet, breadth 38 feet built in Massachussets in 1856. She sank on the West coast on November 4, 1875 a day after colliding with sidewheel steamer Pacific. The Orpheus with captain and his wife and a crew of twenty were bound for Nanaimo when the collision occurred. The Pacific, grossly overloaded with more than 600 tonnes of freight and between 250 and 300 passengers, had a lonely 19 year old boy at the helm steering passage through dangerous West coast waters. Mistakes made the two boats hit each other and within an hour of the collision the Pacific was sunk, panic reigned onboard and the Pacific had insufficient lifeboats. The boat was

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later deemed unseaworthy by the courts. Only two survivors were alive to tell the tale of the Pacific.

Meanwhile the Orpheus unaware of the tragedy on board the Pacific, toiled to save their own boat, which was still seaworthy and continued on its journey. They were not to complete their journey though, sadly making their own unfortunate navigational mistake thinking they were headed into the Juan de Fuca and instead they headed into the rock strewn Barkley Sound: the graveyard of many ships. All lives aboard were saved but over a matter of days the Orpheus, abandoned and bereft of her felled masts sank beneath the ocean waves. Many divers have seen this wreck over the years and on April 10, 1986 UASBC placed a commemorative plaque at this site, which can still be seen today and we were able to visit on our dive.

We were able to complete two dives on this wreck as some divers missed the initial site as it is strewn over quite a significant area. Due to this fact, we were able to gather a real appreciation of the history of this wreck; it is a beautiful dive site and with the added interesting history makes for a great experience.



Divers examine mast rings on Orpheus.

Photo by Sophie Sanfacon

The final dive of the day completed, we headed back to the cabins to pack up and head home. What an extraordinary weekend, with amazing company and steeped in maritime history!

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

Wreck Site Deterioration

By: Bill Meekel

This report is about an April 2023 trip to dive and inspect the condition of several wrecks located in Kootenay and Slo-can Lakes.

Procter Box Car Site

On April 8, 1901, fifteen railcars carrying coal were lost from a CPR barge near Proctor, BC on Kootenay Lake. The barge was being used to move the cars from Kootenay Landing to Procter where they would be put back on the track enroute to Nelson. The Procter site contains 6 of the 15 cars that were lost. Four of the cars landed upright and two are upside down.

It was more than railcars that were lost. Unknown to the tugboat crew, there were three men riding on the railcars. After the loss of the cars only one man surfaced and was saved. A detailed report of the loss can be found in the UASBC publication, *Historic Shipwrecks of the West Kootenay District, British Columbia* (UASBC 1999).

Railcars in the early 1900s were made mostly of wood. Their age and wood construction makes the Procter cars very fragile. Any anchoring at the site could snag one of the cars and cause damage. To prevent anchoring near the site, a mooring buoy has been in place for many years and is used by divers' boats. However, the original mooring was missing after its chain had corroded through. Our objective was to install a new mooring buoy and chain. This was kindly donated by Copper Island Diving of Salmon Arm, BC.

After installing the new mooring and tying up to it, a dive was made to inspect the rest of the site. In years past, the wooden framework of the cars at the site were still mostly intact. However now the upper section of two of the cars has seriously deteriorated. This may have been caused by many factors such as timber weakening, wave action, corrosion (of the metal fasteners of the car), anchoring and floating debris (logs) impacting the cars. For example, there is currently a 10 m long log stuck in the side of one the cars. See the photo below.



Note the fragile condition of this upside-down rail car and the log in the car.

Photo by Submerg.ca

SS Kuskanook Site

The SS Kuskanook paddlewheeler was built by the CPR in 1906 at Nelson. Her wooden hull is 59 m long x 9.4 m wide and 2.1 m deep. She mainly worked on the route between Nelson - Kootenay Landing ('The Crow Run') and also on the Nelson - Kaslo run. With the on-going development of highways and rail routes, the CPR ended the Crow Run in 1930. Then in 1931 the CPR retired the Kuskanook, removed her boiler and engines and sold the hull. The hull was used as a floating hotel until 1936 and was then parked at her current resting place on the beach at Kootenay Landing. Over the years parts were scavenged from the abandoned vessel and all that remains is the lower part of the hull. However the Kuskanook is still an interesting site to explore and the bow section (usually underwater) is still very impressive.

The Kuskanook site is located on the West Arm of Kootenay Lake. On the day of the visit, the visibility in the water was quite good and the level was low. Most of the hull was visible. The wreck condition looks fair however as can be seen in the photo below there was a 2m x 4m section of floating dock hung up on top of the starboard side of the hull of the Kuskanook. This dock section probably became free from somewhere on the lake during a storm. It appears that this dock may also have caused a break in the hull as can be seen in the photo below. No attempt was made to remove the dock section due to its weight. The spring runoff has started and as the West Arm water level comes up, the dock section should float away from the wreck. The situation is being monitored.



Note the floating dock section sitting on the wreck.

Photo by Bill Meekel

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Silverton Ore Car Site

On December 23, 1916, four wooden rail cars were lost from a barge located at the Standard Mine concentrator site on the north side of Silverton, BC located on Slocan Lake. The cars were being loaded with a lead – silver concentrate. The load on the barge was probably not balanced adequately as the cars were being loaded while still on the barge. The barge tipped and dropped the cars into the lake.

One of the cars is an open gondola type car. It broke in half as it went into the lake. It is sitting upright on the lake bottom. The other three cars are box cars. The two shallow box cars are still three dimensional. One of the box cars lost its roof (see the photo below) and has a 45-degree tilt sitting in 20 m of water. It is only a matter of time before gravity takes over and the upper wall of the car falls onto the floor of the car. The other box car still has its roof and is sitting in 26 m of water also at a steep angle. The fourth car has collapsed and is partly buried in 45 m of water.



Divers inside the roofless box car at Silverton, BC.

Photo by Submerg.ca

All these sites are slowly deteriorating. If you want to visit these sites, the sooner the better. The best time to visit is March or April or late Fall.

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