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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

July 2008

Greetings from the Salish Sea. We are happy to present you with our second edition of the Newsletter thanks for the great feed back and support on the first edition. We have mixed some interesting stories along with current events and some details of our current dive offerings for the fall and next year. Enjoy ! Andy & Peter

The orange-peel nudibranch



No matter the reason (or reasons) for becoming and remaining divers, virtually all of us develop a special fondness for nudibranchs. Although there are many other colourful, bizarre and fascinating creatures to be found beneath the surface, there is something special about nudibranchs. An amazing bond between diver and nudibranch seems to form immediately and often matures into lasting relationship throughout ones diving career.

The orange-peel nudibranch *Toquina tetraquetra* is the largest Pacific Northwest species, measuring up to 50 cm (18 in.) in length. It thrives at comfortable diving depths from southern California to northern Alaska and Siberia. Here in the Salish Sea, we have found several specimens that weighed in at just less one kilogram (over 2 pounds)!

Most nudibranchs are fussy feeders and seek specific dietary items. The orange-peel nudibranch is no exception. When found upon sandy or gravelly bottoms, it particularly targets the fleshy orange sea pen. If cruising over rocky substrate, this bright orange and white predator focuses on orange cup coral as well as various soft corals and gorgonians. At many of our regular feature dive sites in the Porlier Pass area, several of these food sources are particularly abundant. Consequently, the orange-peel nudibranch is a frequent sight for our guests.

Like other nudibranchs, the orange-peel is a hermaphrodite (both male and female organs present). Again, as other species do, specimens pair up and copulate to exchange genetic

material. The eventual result of this mating is deposition of distinctive egg ribbons. The orange-peel nudibranch egg masses are large and resemble coiled white yarn spread in concentric oval patches. Indeed, an experienced diver can recognize the egg ribbons even if the perpetrator has fled the scene.

Come join us and together, we can search for this magnificent monster.

The Wreck of the *Robert Kerr*



Since January of 2005, our corner of the Salish Sea has become famous for the Pacific Northwest's only aircraft artificial reef. Large numbers of divers, enthusiastic about the sunken Canadian naval vessels, are drawn by the novelty of a submerged Boeing 737. However, the plane is really a 'drawing card' for much more.

Highlighting a plethora of excellent dive sites within a



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short radius of our base on Thetis Island, are a number of historic shipwrecks. For many divers, the allure and mystery associated with stories of sunken ships is their *raison d'être*. The Wreck of the *Robert Kerr* represents much of what "wreckies" prefer to explore.



Originally a British bark, the *Robert Kerr* was built in Quebec in 1866. After long service between Great Britain and India as a merchant ship, she arrived in the Pacific Northwest in 1885. The wooden sailing vessel, 190 ft. (58 m) long, was converted and essentially utilized as a barge by Canadian Steamships to transport coal. For more than 20 years, many successful voyages ensued but on the night of March 11, 1911, the end arrived while under tow by the tug *Coulti*. The tandem wandered off course and the *Robert Kerr* hammered the shallow reef between Miami Islet and the Ragged Islets, off the northern end of Thetis Island**. It quickly sank and the next day was designated a total loss. It was soon sold to Vancouver Dredge & Salvage.

After recovering some quantity of coal, the company abandoned the wreck.

In 1960 Shipwreck historian/diver Fred Rogers and several others dove the wreck, which they found at depths between 30 and 50 ft.

Apparently in these early years, some resourceful Thetis folk actually salvaged some of the remaining coal to heat their homes. Encouraged by the Underwater Archaeological Society of B.C. (UASBC) and other interested parties, the Provincial Government in 1994 established legislation* forbidding the removal of items from historical wrecks in British Columbia waters. To this day most of the hull remains as well as the large mast and a special plaque, courtesy of the UASBC. Much coal debris also remains scattered about the site.

Currently, as a recreational dive site, the *Robert Kerr* is truly appealing. Specifically it is a safe dive with little entanglement issues and located in shallow water with no current problems.

Equally important, it not only appeals to wreck diving enthusiasts but also has much to offer underwater naturalists who enjoy observing marine life. A wide array of seaweeds, invertebrates and fishes live on or adjacent to it. Most

impressive is the variety of crabs and nudibranchs.

* The British Columbia Heritage Conservation Act 1994 forbids removal of all items from naturally occurring shipwrecks sunk for more than two year.

News and events. It has been a busy spring we have had some terrific diving including revisiting the Del Norte on a number of occasions. We have found a couple more interesting dive sites including Ruxton and Hall Islands as well as the excellent dive at Governor rock which we are trying to match up with another dive in the vicinity to make this a regular day trip.

It is time to start contacting us for New year and spring bookings we have a number of weekend openings we would like to fill. We have decided to recognize the months of April and May as not great viz months but still with some great diving and are offering May 1st to June 1st at 10% off for 6 or more divers. Give us a call for details. We look forward to seeing you all again and showing some of our new dive sites as well as new area's of old sites that you may not have seen.

Happy Diving,
Andy, Virginia, Peter & Simone

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