

The HangLine

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Top 10 Technical Dives

On Vancouver Island

We asked you and you replied. We solicited the public opinion on what they felt was Vancouver Island's top 10 technical dives. These are not your run of the mill recreational dives; to qualify as a technical dive, a site must require some form of advanced diver training or equipment. We also polled our visitors for Canada's Top 10 List of Technical Dives published the next edition of *The HangLine*.

10 - Snake Island Wall - Nanaimo

Nothing majorly distinctive about this one. A good sheer wall to 260 feet with octopus and massive cod on the wall. A good deco platform due to the plethora of playful seals that come tug on your fin and take your mind off the numbing cold. We figure it made the list because of its proximity and easy access to Nanaimo.

9 - Bath Gorge Cave - Port McNeil

A short windy but picturesque cave by Canadian standards. What makes this one a reward is the triumphant feeling one gets when they actually get past the 2 foot boil

of rushing water that makes it near impossible for any diver to get in. Think of it like trying to swim into the opening of a power washer hose. Most give up.



Once past the rushing boil of water the cave presents many alternative routes and winding passages. **Left:** David Sawatzky prepares his sidemount kit for the next traverse. **Right:** Bill Nadeau and Sawatzky update their survey in a tiny air pocket.

8 - Vivian Island Sponge Wall - Campbell River - Comox

Another typically phenomenal wall with tons of life - straight to the bottom. Unexpected current and upwells can make this a challenging site but if you can get past the shallow water currents this wall presents a busy zoo of rockfish, lingcod, starfish, nudibranchs and of course, some of the most unique sponge formations on the Island. Of particular note are the giant boot sponges at depth. We highly recommend a





DPV to get around this one and beat the current and expansive landscape.

7 – Elephant’s Butt - Malaspina Galleries - Gabriola Island

If nothing else, Vancouver Island is famous for its deep walls and drop offs - almost like a cold water Caymans. Elephant's Butt is not filled with a lot of life - until you get to the bottom. Named after an eroded sand stone carving high up on the Malaspina Gallery Cliff that looks like an elephants head and trunk. About 20 meters to the north is the 'Butt'. Follow this arse to the bottom (about 310 feet) and you are suddenly floundering amongst massive logs and a field of the largest shrimp in the world - so many of them that the bottom appears to be moving. Shine your light on the million of these tiny beasties and their little red eyes shine back at you – it’s very eeeerie.



The head of the elephant is on the left, the butt 20 meters south where wild limestone formations drop straight 300FSW below the surface. At the bottom is a jungle of crustaceans!

6 - Barry's Isle - Port Hardy

A hump that sticks up out of Gordon Channel not far from where it collides with the Goletas Channel. A steep wall that is filled with cloud sponges so large a diver can get lost inside of them. The prize is really the hard Gargonian corals at depth - one of the few spots in Canada where you can find hard coral.

5 - Cape Breton - Nanaimo

We hate to give too much to Nanaimo - but it really is a convenient location for Tekkies to find a lot of sites over a very short distance. The HMCS Cape Breton is the world’s largest artificial reef. Sunk in 2001, this 120 meters, 10,000 ton vessel was the last of the Canadian Victory Ships which served as vital supply links for allied forces during World War II. Despite it's massive size the HMCS Cape Breton sunk in three minutes, 37 seconds. Listing as it sunk, the Cape Breton settled squarely on its keel on the ocean floor. The mast is 10 meters below the surface and the bottom of the six-storey ship is over 40 meters below the surface. There are major penetration opportunities on this boat with depths of over 150 on high tide - if you know where to go.

4 - MV Gulfstream - Dinner Rock - Lund

The maximum depth of this ship is 180fsw, rolled over on her side and the base of a wall. After hitting the small rock she rolled over the ledge and down to the bottom taking a few lives with her. A beautiful ship with 'rusticles' dripping off of her keel, this





wreck used to offer china and other souvenirs to the old fashioned wreck hunter. Today she is still cluttered with massive sponges, giant ling cod and probably the best visibility of any west coast wreck. Reports of 80-100 feet visibility are common.

Bill Nadeau cruises over the starboard side of the wreck. Visibility here is commonly 80 to 100 feet or more. Photo by Greg Mossfeldt.



2 - Transpac - Butedale

Technically not a difficult dive (although very very cold and deep) and the wreck itself is really not penetrable, and technically not really on Vancouver Island. But the remoteness of this site brings technical divers in from all over the world. This 173 foot fishing trawler sank in November of 1986 after being struck on the starboard side by the Sunmar Sea. After the collision the Chief Engineer attempted to run her aground before she sank however the shoreline was a sheer wall to over 1500 feet of sea water. The only thing that stopped the Transpac from making it to the bottom was a small ledge at 300fsw where her stern got hung up on. Today she sits nearly upright with her large screws wedged into the ledge.

3 - Hunt Rock/Browning Passage (tie) - Port Hardy

Similar and different in so many ways, both of these sites are incredibly littered with life. Hunt Rock maybe famous for the dozens of friendly and playful wolf eel, however the real and often undiscovered beauty is all the other life around it. Hunt Rock is like an oasis in the middle of nowhere drawing every species of marine life around. Browning Passage is no different. These sites are very popular sites for the recreational diver however get below 150fsw on these gems and you'll get to the really good stuff. Both are subject to high tidal flow changes and need to be dived at slack. Watch your bottom time or you'll be doing deco in 2-5 knot current.



1 - Devil's Bath - Port McNeil

Probably one of the most difficult and challenging dives in Canada. Very high flow water, cold cold water, limited to no visibility, and the tightest of restrictions make this diveable by only the most experienced of technical divers. Even its access is difficult, which begins with a long drive through windy forest roads, a long hike through thorny black berry bushes infested with cougars and bears and then a small repel down a cliff face. Your gear donning area is a 2 foot wide shore of deep mud. There are portions of this cave that open up with good visibility and are beautiful but the draw of this dive is the challenge it presents. ~ *Safe Diving*

