

The HangLine

Issue #07-04

Posted June 15th, 2007



Top 10 Canadian Technical Dives

We carry on the spotlighting of great technical diving broadening the scope now to include all of Canada. Visitors to our

site entered their votes and this is what they said about the best advanced diving canucks had to offer ~ Bill Nadeau

10 - 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 no-where 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 150_{FSW} on these gems and you'll get to the really



Above: The deep waters around the Forrest City were as cold as any ice dive I have done but it made the visibility outstanding!

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.

9 - Forest City Wreck - Tobermory, Georgian Bay

This is a wooden three-masted schooner later converted to steam power ship. Located off of Bear's Rump Island, in Tobermory's famous Fathom Five Marine park. The 212' Forest City, built in 1870 lies upright down the side of a steep slope at a

steep angle in 145' of fresh water. Although she sunk in 1904 the cold fresh water continues to preserve her majesty today. The Forest City is one of the premiere dive sites in Tobermory. And it's popularity amongst the large Ontario population of divers makes it a great entry dive for technical divers. She starts rather

disappointingly as a wide band of twisted metal, a collection of timbers and





broken decking at around 55' but her condition improves with depth to the point when you reach her boiler at approximately 108' she looks great.

8 - Belle Island Wrecks - Conception Bay, Newfoundland

Conception Bay is also the graveyard to World War II shipwrecks. A plethora of upright, intact wrecks (over 400 feet in length) are covered in marine life and scattered along the bottom up to depths of 160 feet. The spectacular Shipwrecks are a diver's dream and are amongst the best preserved WWII shipwrecks in existence.

7 - Cape Breton - Nanaimo

The HMCS Cape Breton is the world's largest artificial reef. Sunk in 2001, this 120 metres, 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 metres below the surface and the bottom of the six-storey ship is over 40 metres below the surface. There is major penetration opportunities on this boat with depths of over 150 on high tide - if you know where to go.

6 - Belle Island Mine #2 - Newfoundland

The mine was worked until the middle of the last century and now most of its several thousand metres of passages are flooded. These passages extend to depths beyond the operational limits of both open circuit scuba (OCS) and closed circuit Rebreathers (CCR). They also spread out several kilometers from the main entry point, putting the maximum potential penetration beyond the endurance of divers using any conventional equipment. In other words, the possibilities for exploration are limitless.

5 - 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 it's 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.

4 - Canada Arctic - Saguenay Fjord

Jeffrey Gallant, regional director of the Shark Research Institute of Canada and



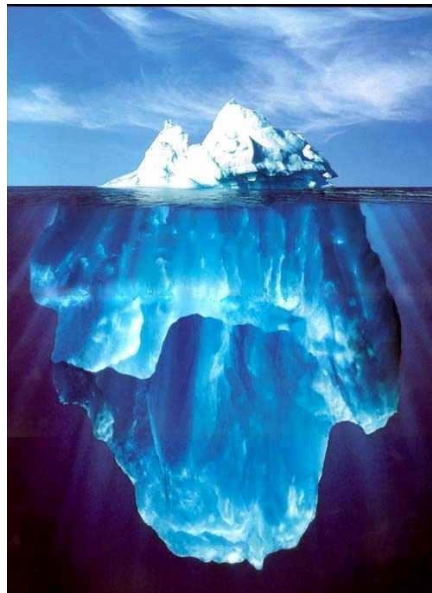
Above: An expedition to survey the Devils Bath and surrounding cave systems was sponsored by Vital Air.





experienced Arctic diver has these comments about diving in the Saguenay fjord in search of Greenland sharks;

"Diving in these conditions requires careful planning and mental preparation. You peer down into the depths, you see nothing but darkness and you get your first taste of the water, the taste of adventure! The thermohalocline is where the brackish surface layer meets the seawater layer at a depth of about 10 metres. The thermohalocline is a fuzzy zone where there is an abrupt variation in salinity and temperature. This creates a one-metre-thick layer of water that has the reddish appearance of grenadine. You can see your dive computer but you can't read any of the numbers. There is a lot of life down there. In fact, small jellyfish are encountered throughout the saltwater column and myriad lifeforms cling to every bit of solid substrate on the bottom. The Saguenay is a spooky place. Diving in total darkness when you are massively baiting for a possible seven-metre shark, you always wonder what's ahead or even worse, what's coming up behind you. Diving under the ice in the Saguenay is much more challenging than diving in a lake. Darkness and especially strong currents dramatically increase the risk factor. All of our dives were planned at specific times between tidal movements. That left



us with only two short dive windows per day."

3 - Leopard's Frog Sump - Bruce Penninsula

A 1.4 mile long underwater passageway near the dive community of Tobermory, Ontario. Explorers have recorded dives not reached by any other sump hole divers on the planet! The controversial sage of competitive cavers have made this one of the most famous and infamous dives in Canadian Technical Diving History. A Stephen Weir puts it; "A sump hole is not a cave. It is a passageway underground that has filled with ground water (whereas caves are formed by running water and have both a source and a exit point). Water filled sumps tend to be stagnant, dirty, small and often don't have much of a beginning or end. Sump hole diving, is neither hygienic or inviting. And, although the name of this particular system sounds adventurous, it refers simply to a type of frog that is found more dead than alive inside these flooded tunnels." Explorer Terry German describes sump hole diving as swimming inside a coffin for hours and hours and hours. Canadian Cave Record holder David Sawatzky labels it one of the most challenging projects of his life.

2 - Iceberg Alley - Newfoundland, Northern Peninsula.

Iceberg Alley—the stretch of frigid waters running south from western Greenland and the Davis





Strait to the shores of Newfoundland and Labrador. Celebrated for whale-watching and iceberg-spotting, Newfoundland's coastal waters are also dotted with shipwrecks. Iceberg-diving in May and June has got to be one of the most spectacular and unique cold water dives. The trick is meeting up with the bergs. Their paths are erratic; they'll appear suddenly and vanish just as quickly, disappearing with a change in wind or tide. They are pinnaced or tabular, crystalline, electric blue, slowly turning, tumbling, melting in the heaving North Atlantic swell. The ice is ancient—layers of compressed snowfall and air some 3,000 winters old—and so pure that its meltwater is used to distill Newfoundland's premium Iceberg Vodka.

1 - Empress of Ireland - St Lawrence River, Quebec

Forget the Doria, this wreck is cold, dark and current driven not too mention a real disorientation when it comes to navigating

around. The Empress' sailing tenure ended on May 30, 1914, at around 2am. There were 1,477 passengers and crew and a newly promoted captain. Only 465 survived after a coal freighter, the Storstad, emerged suddenly out of the fog, less than 100 feet (30 metres) away and bore down on them at a fast speed. The Empress was struck violently mid-ship. The Storstad then reversed, opening up the damaged area and letting the icy waters of the St. Lawrence flood the Empress. The Empress is considered a very dangerous dive due to it's cold water temperatures, limited dark visibility and ripping currents. This ship is perhaps considered the most tragic ship accident most people have never heard about. When you first descend upon this sleeping giant it appears as if it is literally melting into the bottom of the St. Lawrence. Over the years the river has taken her toll and all of the upper decks have collapsed and have slid down the starboard side of the wreck. The challenging nature of this wreck and its environment epitomizes Canadian Technical Diving - why we have

chosen it as Number 1. ~ *Safe Diving*



Left: The Empress was as great a tragedy as the Andrea Doria or the Titanic.

