

# The HangLine

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## Project Deep BC – A Wreck Expedition

By Bill Nadeau

It began with an idea to help promote some of the diverse deep wreck sites we have on the west coast and to help promote extended range diving which had just begun {1997} to make a presence in the area. I, along with wrecker Greg Mossfeldt, originally conceived the idea of the expedition. Both of us have done a number east coast deep water trips and were involved in developing the technical diving community on the west side of Canada. Greg in fact was actively involved in running many trips to the deep American east coast Atlantic wrecks including the Andrea Doria, a large Italian luxury liner that sank, taking hundreds of lives with it.

To date very little had been done to really promote the unexplored deep-water sites in British Columbia, so this just seemed like an ideal opportunity. Greg brought along Rob Laurie, an experienced trimix diver who had accompanied Greg on a number of trips to the Doria and was in charge of a lot of the blending and coordinating. Hamish Tweed, one of the most active west coast technical Instructors I know, joined us

and was a crucial part of the crewing of the vessel. He also assisted on the expedition as one of the Instructors supervising the checkout dives for two other team members. These were students of Hamish's completing their final requirements as Trimix Divers and helped show that with the training and experience, deep sites are accessible to those willing to dedicate time and effort. We were also joined by Bruce Partridge who held a strong background in computer sciences and was always researching new ways to improve upon the management of mixed gas decompression profiles. Five days of diving with five other experienced Trimix divers was the best exposure any student could hope for.

Assembling such a team and addressing the logistics of this kind of trip was challenging, and surprising considering that it really was only meant to be a preliminary outing. The objective of the expedition, slated as 'Project Deep BC', was to accomplish a number of goals. First we hoped to demonstrate to our diving community that a great deal of marine life





and wreck history exists below the 40MSW (132FSW) range. We also wanted to show that through careful training, planning and preparation, divers can safely dive to



**Above: Greg Mossfeldt and Bradley Sheard prepare to dive the Gulfstream.**  
**Below: The author services after a 75 minute of 'scootering' around the shipwreck.**

depths beyond 40MSW (132FSW) and explore and film some unique sites including giant cold water hard coral, giant sponge and of course, a number of natural and historic wrecks. We also wanted to research what kinds of logistics are involved in organizing an expedition of this nature. The project would involve four to six separate excursions along the British Columbia coastline and interior of Vancouver Island. This particular trip



focused on the shipwreck Gulfstream, a 197' coastal passenger freighter that ran ashore over fifty years ago on Dinner Rock in the Strait of Georgia, killing six people. After ramming into the island, the ship's stern flooded, creating enough weight to drag her beneath the surface. The shipwreck lay on the edge of the shallow ledge bow forward for many years before a salvage team used explosives to remove the props. The charges rolled the ship off the ledge until she finally came to rest on the sloping wall at 55MSW (180FSW) below the surface, her bow pointing away from the wall.

Getting there was an adventure in itself. For hours our boat crashed across the Strait, throwing froth twenty feet or more on both sides. The wind had unexpectedly picked up to a good 45 knots since our departure and was blowing in from the southeast. The Mamro, a 55-foot live-aboard dive charter that we contracted to run this expedition did not take the following seas well. Head on she can plow through 15 footers without any problems but when following a nasty gale force that is bucking a strong tidal flow, the stern wallows created an uncomfortable pitch. On this particular trip, the Mamro was loaded down with five thousand cubic feet of mixed gases, eight sets of twins, eighteen stage bottles, a compressor modified with a portable continuous blending system, hyper-clean filters and six trunks of expensive camera equipment. It was a rough start but by the time we made anchor at Dinner Rock, the weather had broken and the sun turned the water into a clear inviting emerald green. It took a full day to set up our gas blending system and camera equipment. Imagine all that gear scattered across 200 square feet of deck





space - this was not a lot of room. However the team managed to establish an impressive blending station and by day two we were diving.

At 57MSW (185FSW) beneath the surface, the ambient light still lit up the bow of the sunken shipwreck. I lead the initial assault with Greg filming. The first glimpse was the bow, leaning to on her port side with 'rusticles' dripping from the bulwarks. As we swung in front of the wreck about thirty feet off the amidships, the ambient light revealed nearly the entire length of the ship. It was like an artist's impression of what a large ship would look like in unlimited visibility. With no effects of narcosis (we were breathing a 18/35 trimix) the ship became a detailed memory we will probably never forget.

The remainder of the trip was spent exploring this ship inside and out, and getting some video that was absolutely awe-inspiring. It was hard to imagine that only a very small handful of divers had ever visited this resting beauty. Hopefully with the footage we got, others will discover that this kind of site is more accessible than we think - especially with the training that is available today. The trip was a great kick-off for the project with all team members agreeing

conclusively that future stages of the expedition would be equally exciting. On the long trip home, we sat around the wheelhouse sipping hot chocolate and gabbing about the next outing. After such an adventure it became apparent that our endeavour may in fact be an ongoing expedition for many years to come. The trip itself was not really any kind of trailblazing event, but the shipwreck of the Gulfstream has since been dived by thousands of divers. Although our team cannot take credit for the discovery of the wreck, we may have contributed to promoting its wonder.

~Safe Diving



**Just some of the gear on the Transpac Expedition of 2000.**

