

SHIPWRECKS 2022

MARITIME ARCHEOLOGY ON THE WEST COAST

By: John Middleton



Speakers Tom Bown and Rob Field receive their gifts of appreciation.

Photo by J Marc

It took two years, but *Shipwrecks 2020* finally came to pass as *Shipwrecks 2022* on March 26th. The venue at the Royal Colwood Golf Club was first class with free parking to boot. The day started at 9 am with master of ceremonies Ewan Anderson welcoming everyone and pointing out the location of the all-important washrooms.

Ewan then introduced the first speaker of the day session, John Harper, a coastal geomorphologist. In 1995, while mapping B.C.'s 110,000 km of coastal habitat for oil spill contingency planning, he noticed features in the intertidal zone he couldn't explain. After years of research and interviews with first nations people he concluded that what he was seeing were ancient clam gardens built by indigenous peoples. By stacking rocks at the low tide line, they had created a garden habitat for clams. It was interesting to learn that radiocarbon dating of barnacle scars on the rocks could be used to date when the clam gardens were built.

After coffee break Jacques Marc, Explorations Director for the UASBC, took us on a tour of the "Historic Shipwrecks of the Southern Gulf Islands". Coal being one of B.C.'s main exports starting in the 1850's, accounted for many of the shipwrecks such as the *Panther* off Wallace Island and the *Robert Kerr* off Thesis Island. Several tugs also met their watery fate such as the *Henry Foss* with the sad loss of six crew, and the *Point Grey* in Porlier Pass. The sinking of the *Zephyr* in a snowstorm off Mayne Island in 1870 and the UASBC recovery of two sandstone columns destined for the San Francisco mint was particularly interesting to hear about as was the 1868 sinking of the paddlewheel vessel *Del Norte* in Porlier Pass.

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Next up was Alex Lausanne, a cultural heritage officer with Parks Canada who gave us a technical overview of “Drowned and Elevated Cultural Landscapes of Coastal B.C” which highlighted the variable sea level histories of sites on the B.C. coast. From indigenous cultural sites on Quadra Island, now well above sea level because of rebound from the last ice age 12,000 years ago to sites hundreds of feet below sea level off Haida Gwaii due to rising sea levels and landform depression.

After lunch, archaeologist and technical diver Ewan Anderson gave a talk on reef net fishing. We learned about the fishing techniques used by the Strait Salish people using weirs and traps and were shown interesting examples of anchor stones and fish gorges (a type of hook which lodges in the throat). The next time you are diving and come across a pile of stones on the bottom, look more closely as you might just be looking at an ancient reef net site. Ewan also highlighted the importance of involving local First Nations and getting permissions before working on their cultural sites.

A neighbour from south of the border, archaeologist Scott Williams, brought us up to date with the work MAS (Maritime Archaeological Society) is doing in Oregon and Washington to locate and document the over 3,000 shipwrecks in those states. It was gratifying to hear that MAS was modeled on the UASBC. Particularly interesting was the story of the yet to be located “Beeswax Wreck”, believed to be a Spanish Galleon and so named because of the blocks of beeswax and pieces of porcelain which keep washing up on the Oregon coast.

The last speakers for the day session were archaeologist Rob Field and RBCM researcher Tom Bown who brought us up to date on the “Excavations and Resulting Finds in Esquimalt Harbour”. Rob took us on a video tour of the huge dredge and hopper/processing barge, the size of a football field, that was used to clean up toxic deposits in the harbour. Tom then entertained us with a sampling of the some of the historical finds dredged up, such as Admiral Bertram Chambers telescope, egg shaped bottles (used for carbonated drinks) and blue glass bottles (indicating poison). Due to Covid 19 there are still more than 110 bins of artifacts in storage waiting to be studied and catalogued. It was also gratifying to hear that sea life is now returning to those areas cleaned up by the dredging.

The talks during the day session were interesting and entertaining and after a brief open bar we all tucked into an excellent meal choice of salmon and chicken with all the trimmings and desserts.



Jonathan Moore Keynote Speaker about to start his presentation

Photo by J Marc

The Woodward Lecture and keynote speaker had been keenly anticipated and the wait did not disappoint. Jonathan Moore is the acting Manager of Parks Canada's Underwater Archaeological Service (UAS). He gave us an update on the interior excavations which took place during the 2019 expedition to the Franklin expedition ships *Erebus* and *Terror*. The two vessels and 129 crew were last seen in 1845 and it wasn't till a 170 years later that the mystery of the lost expedition was finally solved when the vessels were found in their Arctic resting place. The 32 m *Erebus* was found in 2014 by Parks Canada. It was sitting upright on the bottom in 11 m of water and surprisingly well preserved thanks to the -2C water and absence of teredo worms. In 2016, the *Terror* was found 90 km away, also sitting upright in 24 m of water in Terror Bay off King William Island. While the *Erebus* upper deck is partially deteriorated exposing the interior, the *Terror* is in a much better state of preservation thanks to the deeper water. It was amazing to see detail of the *Terror's* interior bulkheads and furnishings filmed by the micro-ROV *Deep Trekker*, much as it had been when abandoned by Captain Crozier and his crew. Due to the pandemic, excavations had been put on hold since 2019, but Parks Canada plans to head up there again in August 2022 to continue their work in the short 5 – 6-week weather window. What is waiting to be discovered in Franklin's well preserved and un-opened desk? Stay tuned!

A great time was had by all, so mark your calendar for *Shipwrecks 2023* – “Indigenous Maritime Archaeology” scheduled for April 23 in Vancouver with keynote speaker Dr. Jessi Halligan presenting on Paleoarchaeology and the Peopling of North America.

Please refer to WWW.UASBC.COM

Congratulations UAD Graduates

If you have been following the Foghorn, you will be aware that the UASBC has created its own unique underwater archaeology for diver's course. We held our first inaugural UAD course on April 2 & 3, 2022. There were eight participants in the course: six divers and two non-divers. Participants came from Kamloops, Vancouver, Duncan, and Victoria. To start, each student completed eight on-line course modules in the week preceding the course.

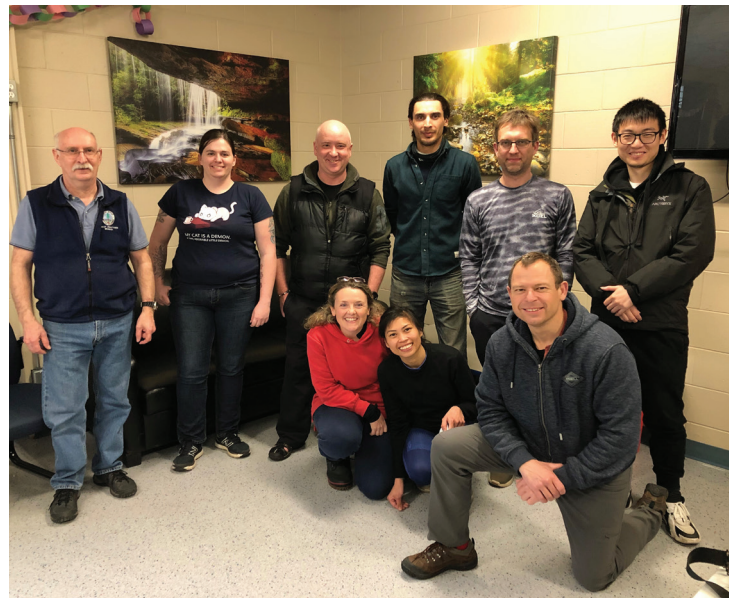
On Saturday April 2 survey techniques were reviewed and practiced on dry-land. In the late morning, the students moved to the pool and spent 2 hours in the pool collecting measurements. These were plotted in the afternoon and the students learned firsthand some of the challenges in taking measurements underwater. On Sunday April 3rd everyone traveled to Deep Cove near Swartz Bay to do a survey dive on the PGE #2 a rail barge that sank in the 1970s. In advance of the course Jiri Kotler and Jacques established a baseline on the wreck.

Each buddy team was assigned a section to survey. Once everyone completed their dive, we traveled back to the Crystal Pool to plot the survey results. Like the pool session some measurement issues were encountered. The day concluded with the students learning about conservation and drawing artifacts. At the conclusion of the course each student was awarded a Certificate of Achievement for completing the course.

Congratulations go to the following participants for completing the course: Craig Bellamy, Raven Bingham, Leila Bautista, Gabe Hill, Zezheng Ming, Jazmane Guy, Tim Butt, and Rebecca Butt.



Listening to Course Dive Briefing



Graduates of April UAD Course

Photos by George Silvestrini

The next UAD course will be offered in late September or early October at the Crystal Pool in Victoria. Course Cost is \$200.00 for UASBC Members and \$240.00 for non-members.

**For more information or to register contact: Jacques Marc at 250-474-5797
or e-mail jmarc@shaw.ca**

UASBC EXPEDITION UPPER ARROW LAKES

APRIL 2022

By Bill Meekel

In the Fall of 2021 John Pollack, Harry Bohm and Bill Meekel spent some time scanning with a magnetometer to look for the remains of several shipwrecks at the east end of Beaton Arm. The known shipwrecks in the area are the tugs *SS Yale* and *SS Whatshan* and the paddlewheeler *SS Revelstoke*. A number of magnetic anomalies were found, and a plan was put together to return during the spring of 2022 with divers to check out the targets. The plan was for the search team (Paul Jenkins, John Pollack) to side-scan and place floats on the targets. These downlines would then be used by the dive team (Brian Nadwidny, John McCuaig, Bill Meekel) to confirm what the targets were and to begin the target documentation process with photography and measurements.

In early April 2022 a group of UASBC members met at Shelter Bay to continue the project. John Pollack and Paul Jenkins loaded their two inflatable boats with search and camping gear and headed out. However, they returned after about 2 hours!

How come? What was wrong?

It turned out that Beaton Arm was still frozen over with winter ice making boat travel up the Arm impossible! We had arrived too early! This is a problem when working in Beaton Arm because the best visibility occurs shortly after the ice is off the Arm but before the Spring run-off. The nearby Fish River can add a lot of silt to the water of the Arm which can mean poor visibility during diving.

The UASBC team next went to Plan 2 which was to investigate other historical sites on the lake. The dive team traveled south 20 km to the Pingston Creek site on the west shore of the lake. This area was an active logging / sawmill site in the early 1900's. The steam tug *SS Irene* was abandoned at the site and located by UASBC divers in the early 1990's. The objective was to find and assess the current condition of the wreck. We had a good idea where to search but all that was found were a set of bollards which may have belonged to the *Irene*.



Photo 1 - A set of tugboat bollards possibly belonging to the tug *SS Irene*.

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We also had an underwater look at some of the remaining logging infrastructure of the Pingston Lumber Co. (PLC) such as the log dump shown in Photo 2. There is a lot more of the log dump remaining underwater. The log dump was used to get logs into the water during a time when the lake was a lot lower. The logs would then be boomed together and towed to the sawmill at Castlegar. The company also ran a sawmill at the site.

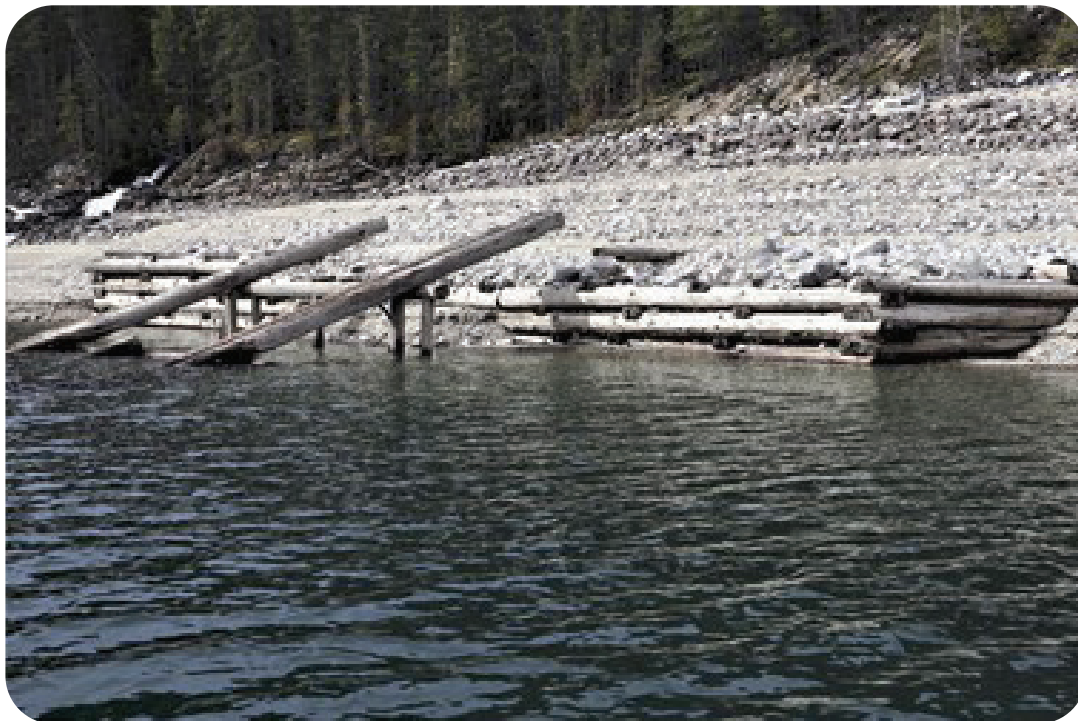


Photo 2 -The remains of the Pingston Lumber Co. log dump, Upper Arrow Lake. Photo by John McCuaig

The next part of the backup plan was to check out the remains of the wharves at the townsite of Arrowhead, located at the north end of the lake. The town of Arrowhead was an important Arrow Lake transportation hub from around 1890 to the 1930s. The CPR ran a train from the mainline in Revelstoke to Arrowhead, from where passengers and freight could travel south by paddlewheeler to Castlegar. Arrowhead had a population of about 300 persons and had a sawmill on the waterfront of the town. The town also served as a supply site for the mines located at the end of Beaton Arm.

The Big Bend Lumber Co. built a mill on the Arrowhead waterfront. In the spring there was a problem with flooding of the Columbia River, so the mill was built on a series of pilings. These were never completely removed when the town was abandoned to allow for the flooding of the lake by BC Hydro in the early 1960s. It appears many of the pilings were broken off about 1 m above the lake bottom as shown in the Photo 3 below. Now during low water, these pilings can be a hazard to boaters.

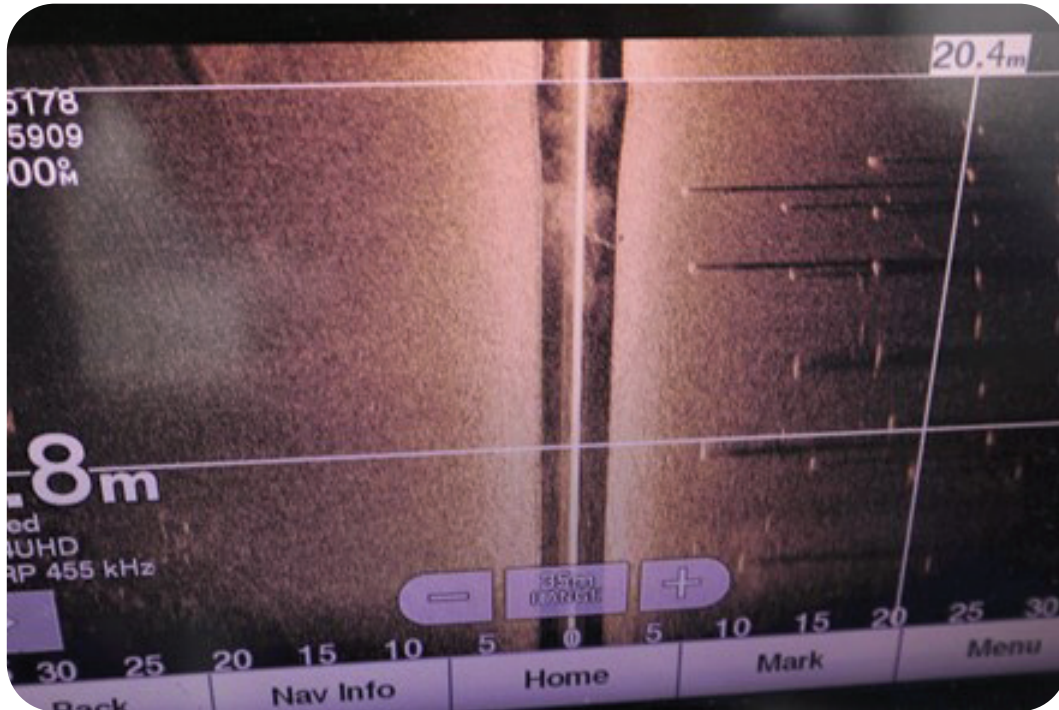


Photo 3 - Sidescan image of the pilings below the water at Arrowhead, BC.

Photo by John McCuaig

Barkley Sound Expedition 2022

By: Warren Bush

On the evening of Friday, April 8, 2022, seven divers assembled in Bamfield for the UASBC's first expedition to the west coast of Vancouver Island since May of 2013. The group planned to visit several sites throughout Barkley Sound, ideally the *HMCS Thiepval*, *Vanlene*, *Orpheus*, *Ericsson* and possibly *Tuscan Prince* (conditions altered the plan so the team visited the immigrant shipwreck instead of the latter two wrecks). Erin Bradley of Emerald Ocean Charters supported the expedition with the trusty *Reef Island*, a 30-ton vessel more than up to the task of braving the area's regularly treacherous conditions. The team consisted of Jacques Marc, Jiri Kotler, Paul Spencer, Ewan Anderson, Jeff Cholak, Darius Pomeroy and Warren Bush.

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After an early breakfast on Saturday 9 April UASBC personnel boarded the Reef Island, which slipped out of Grappler Inlet into Trevor Channel and then into Imperial Eagle Channel, where the conditions were lively. The team conceded that they would only be able to dive the more protected sites until conditions relaxed, so Erin pointed towards Thiepval Channel, near the center of Barkley Sound. An hour later, the team found themselves descending into 12 m of water to the broken remains of the *Thiepval*.



Group Shot on Reef Island

Photo by J Marc

The Canadian Navy ordered the Battle Class armed trawler in 1917 in support of the First World War effort. The 44 m long *Thiepval* had a maximum speed of ten knots and a single 12-pound gun. It participated in the tail end of First World War hostilities in the North Atlantic on both convoy duty and anti-submarine patrols, but the cessation of hostilities in 1918 came shortly after its launch. The vessel transited to Esquimalt via the Panama Canal in 1920. The next chapter of *Thiepval*'s life saw it frequently engaged in 'life saving patrols' along the west coast of Vancouver Island, prohibition and fisheries enforcement, and regular naval duties. The ship enjoyed a noteworthy adventure in 1924 when it transited north along the coast of British Columbia and Alaska and then into the Bearing Sea, eventually reaching Copper Island and the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia, which had recently been rocked by the Bolshevik Revolution – interestingly, *Thiepval* is remembered as the first Canadian warship to visit Russia. Sadly, in January of 1930 the hardy *Thiepval* hit an uncharted rock in the channel now bearing its name in the Broken Group – a scenic but treacherous series of islands and shoals in the middle of Barkley Sound. *Thiepval* remained stuck on the rock despite the best efforts of the crew to dislodge it, and as the tide receded it began to list dangerously, eventually rolling off the rock and sinking. Historian Duncan McDowall remembers that “the *Thiepval* is a rusting symbol of what were still pioneering days along the BC coast when men pitted their wits and luck against the elements.”



Darius Pomeroy swims along the keel of the *Thiepval*.

Photo by J Marc

After a brief period of searching the seabed to locate the wreck, the teams swam along the upper decks and superstructure and enjoyed reasonable visibility. *Thiepval* rests on its port side, and the interior of the vessel has spilled out across the seabed. The wreck is slowly collapsing, but the site was not materially different from the UABSC's last visit in 2013. The experience of exploring a 'natural' wreck versus an artificial one is exciting for divers, and the team enjoyed a thorough and long visit to the site.

Next, Jacques directed Erin to Sechart Lodge, located in Sechart Channel at the north end of the Broken Group. Near this location between the shore of Vancouver Island and Canoe Island lies the wreck of one of four immigrant ships. Information on this vessel is limited, but it was a 38 m long Korean freezer ship that was one of four vessels seized in 1999 for trying to smuggle over 600 people from Asia to Canada. The Alberni Reef Society purchased all four vessels after their seizure to sink as artificial reefs. They sank two off China Creek. A third ship, the *Black Dragon*, was still seaworthy enough to be towed to Vancouver, but sank enroute, in Haro Strait. The fourth ship was sunk as an artificial reef near the Sechart Lodge at the back of Barkley Sound.

As the site is not marked in any way, the team first had to search for the wreck using the Reef Island's sonar and echo sounder, which turned into a lengthy process. However, eventually the ghostly outline of a wreck emerged on the sonar plotter, and the team deployed a weighted line. As divers descended the line reaching to the seabed 30 m below. On their decent they noticed plumose anemones seemingly floating in the distance beginning at around 21 m – the weighted line was separated from the wreck by a short distance. The teams swam to the bow of the wreck, which was significantly larger than everyone expected. Although largely stripped of fittings and machinery, the sizable vessel still gave the divers much to explore. The teams visited the wide holds leading aft, and then swam around the raised superstructure located just before the quarterdeck. The stern of the vessel rests at about 30 m, and the teams explored the area before swimming forward again and ascending the line and completing a safety stop.

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The *Reef Island* made its way back to Grappler Inlet around 4 pm, and the team enjoyed dinner and discussion about British Columbia diving and shipwrecks. All hands were asleep early, as the next day's weather would dictate which sites would be explored. Luckily, conditions had calmed considerably overnight – the team awoke on 10 April to relatively calm waters and light airs. The team quickly loaded the *Reef Island* which set sail for Austin Island to the site of *Vanlene*, one of the more iconic shipwrecks on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Originally named the *African Maru* and launched in Kobe, Japan, in 1950, the *Vanlene* was a 144 m, 10,500-ton freighter. In March of 1972, the vessel departed Japan carrying 300 Dodge Colts and crossed the Pacific Ocean with very little in the way of navigation equipment. At 8:40 pm on 14 March 29-year-old Captain Lo sighted breakers, but astern propulsion couldn't prevent disaster – the *Vanlene* went hard aground, and photos from that scene in 1972 are quite spectacular. Lo's distress call placed the vessel on the coast of Washington state, when he and his crew of 37 were in Barkley Sound. Salvagers worked the wreck following the disaster, and eventually the *Vanlene* broke apart and spilled down the rocky slope off Austin Island.

The UASBC divers entered the water at the site of the *Vanlene's* engine, which stands high on a seabed about 12 m deep. Divers are immediately treated to a very large field of wreckage and can easily navigate the site using the vessel's propeller shaft, which descends a series of undersea cliffs all the way to the vessel's stern in around 40 m of water. Essentially, the large freighter has broken into several pieces which rest on increasingly deep plateaus of a large undersea cliff, which makes for an excellent dive.

The teams descended the propeller shaft to the *Vanlene's* stern, which offers many opportunities to explore and marvel at the sheer size of the wreck – one could spend dozens of dives and not see the entire thing. After checking out the deeper sections at 27 to 30 m, the different teams ascended the propeller shaft back to the engine, and then swan forward on the wreck in around 15 m of water to explore the bow and forecastle sections. The large site offers abundant exploration opportunities and marine life. The divers made the most of the occasion, with average dive times of around 45 minutes.

Safely on *Reef Island's* deck and lucky to have sunny weather, the team had lunch while transiting to the east shore of Tzartus Island, just south of Marble Cove, to place divers on the wreck of the *Orpheus*. Launched in Chelsea, Massachusetts in 1856, the *Orpheus* was a 58 m long, three masted, 1067-ton clipper ship with an impressive history including 11 westbound voyages around Cape Horn, and a handful of speed records. Shipowners began liquidating their clipper fleets in the 1870s, and the *Orpheus* changed hands in 1875 and made two northbound voyages from San Francisco to British Columbia. On the second voyage while sailing in ballast and intending to load coal at Nanaimo, the *Orpheus* collided with the paddle steamer *Pacific* off Cape Flattery during the evening of 4 November. The damaged *Orpheus* continued sailing after the collision, and its captain mistook Cape Beal Lighthouse for Cape Flattery, and turned starboard into Barkley Sound thinking it was the Strait of Juan de Fuca. The proud clipper went aground on Tzartus Island shortly thereafter, and the crew abandoned ship while the wrecked vessel slipped below the waves. One hundred and forty-seven years later, the *Reef Island* took station over the wreck site, and the divers geared up for their last dive of the expedition.

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Jeff Cholak with Orpheus Capstan.

Photo by Ewan Anderson

The *Orpheus* lies between 15 and 27 m of water, and the hull has deteriorated and collapsed. The UASBC has visited the wreck many times since it was found by modern divers in 1976 (a Society plaque was installed on the 10 April 1986). Dive teams searched the area for the site for several minutes as the exact GPS coordinates had never been recorded, but eventually they came across the wreck. The main features of the site are a large ballast pile, the ship's capstan, a kedge anchor, and the rudder. Divers also had the privilege of coming across several deadeyes and ceramic objects, which are very exciting artifacts to see. The divers conducted safety stops along the rocky shore that the clipper had initially hit, and then boarded the *Reef Island* for their transit back to Grappler Inlet.

The seven UASBC divers quickly departed Bamfield and braved hail, snow, and rain to reach their communities, while the cold and clear waters of Barkley Sound lapped over the sites that had been visited only hours before. The area still offers abundant opportunities for both archaeology and exploration – the UASBC is sure to return.

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