

Howe Sound, British Columbia

Trip organised by Dan Reynolds.

Trip Report by Dan Reynolds.

The Divers

- > Dan Reynolds (CUUEG)
- > Peter MacLean (Coquitlam Scuba)

Photos here:

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Details

Most places you find diving, there are a few favourite diver-friendly spots where it's always possible to get in the water. For us, faced with rough weather and strong tides, that means certain inland quarries. In Vancouver, the mountainous landscape and intricate coastline keep the water calm, and the tides are relatively gentle, so fun and straightforward diving is literally a stroll on the beach.

I only had a day to play with, but an hour's drive from town, you can be seeing things you never even imagined existed. There's no continental shelf to speak of, and nutrient rich water from the depths comes up to meet the sun. Deep sea life is found near the surface, things that are usually small grow huge, while some familiar creatures are entirely absent, and other things have evolved to fill the gap.

Kelvin Grove

This is a little rocky beach who's secret is revealed if you look behind you: the near vertical hillsides behind continue underwater. After a short swim round the right side of the bay, we found ourselves next to a vertical rockface, which we followed round as the bottom dropped away. A greenish surface layer soon gave way to clear, salty water beneath, with iridescent comb jellies and other plankton scooting around the dividing line.

The wall is populated by crinoids & monstrous anemones with crabs climbing around the bases. The hermit and spider crabs were familiar, the turtle crab (which looks like a discarded clamshell with the legs hidden underneath) is not. Like the Emerald City, all looks green until your eyes adapt or you use your light, when the true rich colours of red and gold are revealed. There are no wrasse here, but there are colourful rockfish and greenlings, which are related to scorpionfish. The prolific marine growths are grazed on by a colourful variety of nudibranchs. These include tiny, colourful things, blobby sea-lemons, and the ridiculously large Giant Dendronotus, a foot-long anemone killer.

In terms of the diving, current was minimal and the only challenges I faced were due to borrowing unfamiliar gear and having to juggle a large light and camera while fiddling with my buoyancy. We reached 30m on this dive, and with different life at each level, you could occupy yourself at any depth. The wall clearly went down a lot further, so you could pay a visit to the deep while staying close to shore, and have a solid reference for any necessary decompression. Temperature was 8°, and I was wearing a wetsuit, which was bearable but pushed my oxygen use up to 2 litres per minute.

Porteau Cove

This site is Vancouver's "equivalent" to Gildenburgh - it's an easy, flattish dive and has lots of wreckage put in as an artificial reef, with marker buoys on the surface to help you navigate. Unlike Gildenburgh though, the visible species cannot be counted on one hand. The bottom is carpeted with starfish: dustbin-lid sized sunstars, knots of ochre stars, bat and leather stars which are like our cushion stars but much bigger, and the giant pink star, which has a central mass bigger than a grapefruit and arms to match. The wreckage, including boats with accessible holds and a metal girder structure, is covered in plumose anemones similar to those found in the UK.

The standout fish species here was the ling cod - neither a ling nor a cod, this is another toothy scorpion fish relative, and a big one. Several feet long, this leopard patterned creature lies propped up on the seabed. Little surf-perch also flitted by, looking unsurprisingly nervous, and none hung around long enough for a photo.

This was an extremely easy dive, with interesting and colourful sights at every turn. The sea was millpond flat, and once it was time to return, it was fun to swim back in the narrowing layer of clear salt water between the halocline and the seabed, rather like flying under a cloud. Piles of crab parts occasionally indicated the leftovers of an octopus. Temperature was 9°, deepest was only about 12 metres, and the beach was flat and smooth, with a staircase up to the carpark. Definitely recommended.

This site makes you wonder what similar-looking places in the UK might in fact be diveable. It looks nothing special from above, and the surface

layers are murky and brackish, but immediately beneath it is a different world.

Logistics wise - both these places are easy to drive to; they both have washrooms for getting changed, Porteau even has showers. Neither has a dive centre though, so you have to bring your own cylinders.
