CANADA

Vancouver Island, reachable by air or ferry from Seattle or Vancouver, BC, is a remarkable wilderness destination, both on land or in the water. A traveler may encounter anything from eagles to orcas, sea lions to bears, while viewing a remarkable range of critters in the cold, clear water. This is dry suit country. Victoria is a small, charming English town.

Abyssal Dive Charters, July 2007, Douglas Hansen, San Jose, CA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 40 Feet. Water: 54 to 57 F, calm, currents. Abyssal Dive Charters promptly responded to e-mails, and were willing to go out with only my wife and me as passengers. They were also kind enough to lend me a wetsuit at no charge since I did not bring my drysuit to save luggage weight and space (my wife dove in her drysuit). Due to the strong currents in Discovery Passage, diving is only done during the slack tide. These are drift dives: the boat follows your bubbles and picks you up at the end of the dive. They provide 80 cubic foot aluminum cylinders and weights. They did ask to see our C-cards, but there was no safety briefing, and I had to request a dive site briefing. They seemed perfectly happy to let us jump off the boat without telling us what to look for, which direction to go in, etc. I also had to request specifics on how they wanted us to dive from the boat, for example, how to exit the boat and how to reboard. We found the water temperature to be warmer than what we are used to in northern California, and the visibility was quite good on a couple of the dives. We could feel the current picking up near the end of the last dives. Copper Cliffs is a wall dive that was alive with nudibranchs, anemones and other macro critters. Some areas were covered with white metridium anemones, other areas had orange metridium anemones, there were metridium senile anemones, and we found an area with large northern feather duster worms. Large ling cods were not uncommon. The other sites were not as good. A couple were actually rather poor, with muddy bottoms, poor visibility and limited macro life, although we did manage to find a couple of nudibranchs we hadn't seen before. If you intend to dive with this outfit, do your homework and present them the sites you would like to dive, and then insist on them taking you there.

Aquarius Divers, August 2007, Jack Gullo (jgullo@carr.org), New Windsor, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 50 to 75 Feet. Water: 72 to 75 F, calm. Nice enough, but no planning. Had a boat that didn't fit the entire group (a six pack when the group we booked was 13!) No permit to work in Canada so part of the group missed one day of diving after the Canadian authorities had a chat with the operator. While the diving in this area is great, the operators need improvement. The best operator we used to supplement this misadventure was Sea and Sky Scuba in Brockville. Professional, go the extra mile, have-their-act-together types. This is all wreck diving in current but the temps and viz make it easy for all levels of diving. Drift diving to find artifacts a blast — have reel and float with you! .

Browning Pass HideAway Resort, August 2007, John and Edith Summey (summey11@aol.com), Carbondale, IL. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 40 feet. Water: 42 to 52 F, tidal currents. Picked up a car in Vancouver and

took the ferry from Horseshoe Point to Departure Bay at Nanaimo and drove the next morning to Port Hardy, where we met John deBoeck at IV's Pub/Restaurant next to the Quarterdeck Inn. Took a two-hour ride on MV Striker V to the Browning Pass HideAway Resort on Niegi Island, 15 miles north of Port Hardy. The HideAway is situated ideally in Clam Cove just minutes from Browning Pass and some of the prime diving sites of the Queen Charlotte Straits including the North Wall, 7-Tree Island, HideAway Island, Franks Rock, Eagle Rock, SS Themis, Rock of Life, and more. The HideAway is a collection of rustic buildings that have been converted into a combination of a bunk house, a couple of cottages, and a main house where home-cooked meals and family living are available. There is plenty of good food to support the cold water activity, and we were quite comfortable. John operated the MV Clavella live-aboard for years in the Vancouver Island area and knows the diving there intimately. He understands the tides and knows not only when to dive each site, but how: what depth, for how long, and in what direction. Some of Johns regular friends came in their own boats. They were both divers, local to the area, and full of information, stories, and interesting experiences to share. The setting was tranquil. There was an abundance of wildlife: gulls, sea birds, eagles, otters, humpback whales, orcas, seals, and we even saw a wolf that came within sight of the HideAway, John said the first in 27 years! The diving was spectacular! We saw the wide selection of Northwest marine specialties including rockfish of several kinds, sculpins, kelp fish, red Irish lord, sea stars and sun stars, anemones, crabs, all sorts of sponges, corals, shrimp, and the wonderful wolf eel! I even had an encounter with a giant octopus! The brilliant colors all around were awesome. And, the kelp provided convenient lines for descent and ascent. We used Nitrox. Photo facilities were flexible with space as needed. We spread out our gear in the bunk house. We got plenty of good advice and assistance from veteran dry suit divers who had good ideas and took time and patience to help us. We were able to dive on a flexible schedule with time to relax in between. There were areas nearby for hiking, exploring, and observing nature. For this, other trip reports, and photo albums thereof, check out my web page: http://e-diver.spaces.live.com

God's Pocket Resort, September 2007, Sandra Cohen, Seattle, WA. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 48 to 51 F, calm, no currents. This year we visited God's Pocket both in September (as we do every year) and also in May. Previous trip reports from 2004 and 2005 give details. We saw hundreds of dolphins, dozens of orcas, several humpbacked whales, and even a lone sea otter. If you own a dry suit (or are comfortable in cold water in your wetsuit), you won't find better diving or hosts anywhere. Some new guest cottages are under construction and may be ready for the 2008 season.

Ocean Exploring Diving, December 2006, Jim Wick (Jimewick@yahoo.com), Ventura, CA. Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 60 Feet. Water: 40 to 41 F, calm. Almost no sea life. Sunken boats only areas for fish to congregate. Vancouver has best marketing program possible. Cannot see any reason to go there.

Torpedo Rays Scuba, Nautilus School of Diving, May 2007, F. Rattray, Elora, ON. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 60

to 70 Feet. Water: 34 to 35 F, calm, no currents. I made two drysuit dives: One a morning dive with a local diver that Nautilus Divers was able to find for me, the other an organized dive shop evening dive with Torpedo Rays Scuba in Dartmouth. The morning dive was to Paddy's Head, St. Margaret's Bay north of Peggy's Cove. Great viz, lots of color in the kelp, a school of young pollock, crabs, moon snails. Lots of things to see, relaxed dive. Dive op was helpful in getting me into the water on my day off. The evening dive was to Terence Bay, south of Halifax. Saw my first wolf eel in nine years of diving. cool. Torpedo Rays was professional, a larger shop, tech-oriented as well as recreational. A fun group dive.

CHILE

Easter Island

Orca Diving Center, Iorana Hotel, January 2007, John Sommerer (john.sommerer@jhuapl.edu), Silver Spring, MD. Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 100 to 200 Feet. Water: 73 F, choppy. Not a dive destination, but worth an afternoon if you're on Rapa Nui, especially if it's raining. Good, solid dive operation, with good staff, accommodating to visitors. Water is on the chilly side; good hot showers back at the dive shop. We had our computers with us, which was good, because they only had depth gauges and bottom timers to rent. Another diver was told by the guide, "don't go deeper than me, and you'll be OK." Otherwise, the gear was in good condition and was reasonably new ScubaPro stuff. The big question is, why would Henri Garcia, a former Calypso crew member, set up a dive operation here? Sure, the vis is unbelievable! But hardly any fish, and like two species of coral. The scenery around Motu Nui is fantastic, but that's one dive. I find it hard to believe that sharks represented any risk to the competitors in the Birdman competition, since the largest fish I saw out there was an endemic butterfly. The reefs near Hanga Roa are pretty boring. Clearly, fish are being fed here, since some large jacks spent a whole dive with us. Small boats, but short runs to dive-sites. Good rinse tanks at dive shop.

Orca Diving Center, January 2007, Doris and Bob Schaffer (seamom@earthlink.net), Fallbrook, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 100 to 150 Feet. Water: 72 to 74 F, calm, no currents. Easter Island diving is good. Orca is an outstanding dive operation with lots of attention to safety, excellent equipment and reasonable prices. December through February is best time to dive these waters and visibility was 100+ feet. No soft corals and not a great variety of hard coral but its healthy and no evidence of coral bleaching. Interesting underwater topography and rock formations. Not a lot of fish. Easy and enjoyable diving. We dove each morning and saw the archaeological sites of the island in the afternoon.

ORCA Dive Center, Manutara Hotel, January 2007, Lamont Sage, San Diego, CA. Experience: Over 1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 50 Feet. Water: 74 to 75 F, choppy, no currents. We hauled our dive gear from the US knowing we would only be diving for 2 days. Boats were basic pangas. Orca dive shop is well equipped, with brand new equipment and a clean operation. Warm showers provided after diving and rinse tanks also. $45 dive includes all your equipment, from BCD to wetsuit, regulator, etc. Free lockers provided for your valuables. All equip-