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## **LIVE-ABOARDS**

### **CANADA**

#### **British Columbia**

***Clavella*, October 2000, LeRoy Anderson (leroy@sisna.com) Salt Lake City, UT.** Vis: 50-150 ft. Water: 45-50 F. Dive restrictions enforced: 130 ft. Superlative diving, in terms of marine life and healthy, pristine reefs. Absolutely stunning sponges, hard coral, soft coral, fish life, wolf eels, etc. Walls to die for. Brisk waves, wind, rain, and misty forest covered mountainous island archipelagos add a sense of adventure to the area. Extreme topside beauty. Cold water, strong currents and the need to manage your own gear make this a more advanced destination. The owner, John, and his divemaster (Brad) are very familiar with the sites and quite helpful. **(Ph: 250-753-3751; fax 250-755-4014; e-mail [clavella@nanaimo.ark.com](mailto:clavella@nanaimo.ark.com); website <http://clavella.com>)**

***Clavella*, Vancouver Island, September 2001, Ralph Baker, Las Vegas, NV.** Experience: 101-250 dives. Vis: 30 to 80 Feet. Water: 46 to 49 F. Lots and lots of wildlife — both above and below the water. Wolf eels (and they will play with you). Pacific octopus, metridium anemones, Puget Sound king crabs, decorator crabs, decorated

warbonnets, budding anemones, lemon peel nudibranchs, (lots of nudibranchs). Scuba dive with pacific whitesided dolphins, watch gray whales “slurp” mud on the bottom, be within 30 feet of humpback whales bubble-netting herring, so many bald eagles you get blasé, harbor seals and stellar sea lions. If you dive southern California in a dry suit be sure and bring long underwear in addition to your usual undergarments. Everybody needed extra insulation. Strong currents. You dive the slack tide, so diving time varies. We normally got 3 dives per day and occasionally 4. There are 4 slack times, often one at 5:30 A.M. or 9:00 P.M. so diving wasn’t possible at those times. Visibility varied depending on the current. The sky was overcast most of the time, therefore underwater the light was more like dusk than noon. Bring a light. The *Clavella* holds 8 divers. Space is very limited. The boat was built in 1937 by the Boeing Company, but it is well-preserved gem. You will need to search for places to work on your camera, but they are available. You must pump the toilet to flush it and it can be heard throughout the sleeping area. John is an excellent captain. He knows the dive sites and finds the optimum places, regardless of conditions. He has a superb ability to maneuver a 20-foot skiff very close to the whales and other wildlife, without interfering with their activity. he is very laid-back and not overly communicative about dive locations and times. But he knows the tides, and when diving time arrives you will be diving in spectacular

settings. He also can find you any critter you want. Most of the best diving is near the mainland of Canada. You should be an experienced dry suit diver. If you like surfacing from your dive and seeing calm water swelling up and down like thick molasses, evergreen trees lining the shore, whales blowing their wet breath in the distance, misty mornings drinking your coffee while listening to the cries of bald eagles echoing in the trees, hearing the snorts of stellar seal lions surfacing in the bay, macro photography, seeing 40 foot whales up close and personal, and swimming with schools of 500 or more dolphins, then this is for you.

**Mamro, September 2000, Paul Rosenthal, (divmaestro@webtv.net) Butte, MT.** Vis: 20-40 ft. Water: 48-52 F. Dives: 350. Very experienced captain and crew, lots of good, wholesome food, 3-4 dives per day, only six divers per charter, Nitrox available, incredible u/w life: wolf eels, octopus, sea lions, harbor seals, ling cod, cabezon, nudibranchs, anemones, crabs, giant barnacles. One head and shower, limited water supply, small salon for video viewing. Excellent diving, great value, not a luxury live-aboard. This was my 3<sup>rd</sup> trip. (Ph: (250) 756-8872; fax ; e-mail adventures@mamro.com; website www.mamro.com (boat is under new management - ed.)

**Nautilus Explorer, March 2001, Frank Zegler (frankzeg@aol.com) Idledale, CO.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 20 to 50 Feet. Water: 39 to 44 F, calm. I was amazed at the prolific invertebrate life along

Vancouver Island — especially at Port Hardy. The octopus alone were worth coming back to. Had two of these beasts grab my video camera for some interesting shots. Puget Sound king crabs and wolf eels abound. The Nautilus Explorer is a 116 ft. steel-hulled, long range custom motor yacht built from the keel up as a diving mothership. This boat is obviously Mike's (the owner) dream machine and it makes diving in this potentially tricky place as effortless as practical. Diving is from a 30 ft. aluminum skiff which is winched onto the main boat when underway. All gear is stored on the skiff — you have your own spot and never moved thereafter — or disassembled for fills either. The skiff is fast and mobile, enabling Mike to get you to precise spots at a precise time to match the slack current. Nitrox is available as is Argon. Ample areas for gear storage and for dressing — drysuits are essential. Hot tub, large salon and dining area and darn good food. The boat could cruise anywhere on the planet and would have left the Calypso crew envious. Cabins are relatively small but each has its own head and shower. Stability was amazing even during one rough passage. Number of divers is something like 24 max — we had 16. The areas are sheltered from ocean swell and can only be dived at slack current. Visibility is optimal due to the lower temps and lack of algae bloom which occurs later in the year. Yes, it does rain about 40% of the time but the remainder of our days we had beautiful blue skies and little wind. Orcas were seen one morning. Surface

conditions at every site were essentially calm. Briefings are detailed and timing for everyone to be ready is made clear. There are few restrictions placed on divers. Since all diving must be done in synchrony with tidal flows this limits diving to 2-3 dives per day. Very large photo table on main boat, suitable for 2-4 people to work simultaneously. Stowage space for dry boxes etc. Dual TV's for the videographers. Multiple outlets for charging and power is on at all times. (Ph: 888 4 DIVE BC; fax (604) 266-3285; e-mail [mike@divebc.com](mailto:mike@divebc.com) ; website [www.divebc.com](http://www.divebc.com) )

***Nautilus Explorer, August 2001, Ian T. Ogden ([iogden@home.com](mailto:iogden@home.com))***  
**Abbotsford, BC.** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 50 to 80 Feet. Water: 45 to 50 F, choppy. Great conscientious crew, helpful hints with the photography. Diving from the skiff was the best. Lots of room for equipment and lots of elbow room for putting on gear. Skiff picks up divers at the end of every dive. Skiff has a jet outboard so no worry about getting cutup by the props. Most dives were drift dives. Food was plentiful and varied. Interior space is huge which is important in colder climates as laying outside is not an option. Dive briefings are the best. The most important thing was you having a good dive and not having to cover everything off for liability reasons. Had to bring own towels and toiletries. Could use an outside head. Diving in Canada's cold west coast emerald sea is some of the best diving that I have ever done with abundance of life unmatched in the

Caribbean. Large camera tables, processing done every night.

***Nautilus Explorer, August 2001, Nikki Mahan, Bellevue, WA.***

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 30 to 40 Feet. Water: 48 to 51 F, currents. One of the best live-aboards in the world. The soft corals are the best, the macro diving sublime. Port Hardy is my favorite diving destination whether tropical or cold.

***Nautilus Explorer, September 2001, Tom Schaefer, Seattle, WA.*** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 Feet. Water: 49 to 55 F, calm currents. While the boat nearly lives up to its fame as the premier dive boat in the area, Captain Mike Lever comes up short. It appears that he has become convinced that the boat sells itself, so he need not try hard to please his customers. Lever anchors the "mother ship" in one location for an entire day, so that he visits only sites that can be reached via a short skiff ride. On one day in the legendary beautiful waters off northern Vancouver Island, we dived one site three times, despite proximity to numerous spectacular dive sites. On a trip with 16 dives, this seems a poor use of time. Another selling point is the ability to visit mid-island sites en route between Vancouver and the far end of Vancouver Island. While we did make three dives in the Campbell River area, two were at one site, and all three were poor in comparison to other sites I have visited in that same area. (Mike Richmond of Dyna-Mike Charters does a much better job in those waters.) Lever allows 50

minutes from the time he gives clearance to enter the water. Since it takes time for 25 dry suited divers to enter the water via two gates, some divers end up with significantly less bottom time than others. While he claims that this rule is a concession to the notoriously strong currents at some sites, he applies it universally regardless of currents or any other considerations. Another attraction is the opportunity to swim with Pacific white-sided dolphins. On a previous trip with a different live-aboard operation, the captain worked hard to get us that memorable experience by communicating with other vessels that had found dolphins. If Lever made any such effort, it was not evident. No equipment — including photo equipment — that has been taken into salt water during the trip is allowed in any interior area of the boat, even if the equipment has been rinsed and dried. Any deviation from this rule — or any other rule — is potentially subject to stern reprimand. No facility for rinsing gear other than photo equipment (with the exception of an outside shower intended mainly for hair rinsing). This might be due to the fact that the water maker was out of commission, but it was not clear whether the boat normally has a designated gear rinse station. The capacity of the ice maker is inadequate for the number of passengers; we frequently had to do without ice in our beverages. While a trip on the *Nautilus Explorer* does provide memorable diving experiences, I have had much better trips on much lesser vessels with operators more dedicated to their customers.

***Nautilus Explorer, October 2001, Clinton Bauder (gecko1@apple.com), Cupertino, CA.*** Experience: 501-1000 dives. Vis: 40 to 80 Feet. Water: 43 to 48 Fahrenheit, calm currents no currents. Repeat trip. Mike and Mary Ann are great and run a very nice operation. The diving is simply sensational with big wolf eels, giant octopus, huge lingcod, incredible walls, etc. Different but about the same overall adrenaline effect as big animal places like Cocos or Galapagos. There is no substitute for the Giant Pacific Octopus. Way too much fun. Water temp no big deal for drysuit divers. Diving is generally pretty easy if you pay attention to the dive briefings. The food is pretty average and tends too much towards the steak and potatoes. They make you bring your own towel. isn't a big deal unless you missed the fine print before arriving. Big, comfortable boat, nice cabins, excellent skiff for diving, great crew. Can't beat the price either. Nitrox and Argon. Helium is coming soon (and if you're willing to do your own blending could be arranged for right now). Have a look at my website: <http://www.metridium.com> or my dive buddy's website: <http://www.kelpdiver.com> for movies and images from this trip. Taking the Alaska to Vancouver trip next year. Great setup for photographers, Lots of room for gear, chargers etc. E6 processing, light table available. Our trip had an Optiquatics photo seminar with experts on hand for photo tips. 2 big TVs for video.

## **COLUMBIA Malpelo**

***Inzan Tiger, April 2001, John M. Andrea, Zurich.*** Experience: Over