

### CANADA

#### British Columbia

**Hideaway, July 2003, Karen Elaine Bakunin, Venice, CA.** John de Boeck divers are housed in ingenious and cozy floating cabins crafted by an old logging man. John's beautiful lady friend, Noelle, was up before the rest of the house, making tea, coffee, and any special breakfast requests such as plenty of fresh fruit. MIDDAY meals included hot soups (much needed after our 40 to 70 minute dives in 42 degree water) and Noelle's homemade sweet breads. Dinners featured everything from lamb, to barbecued beef, chicken, pork, mashed potatoes, salads, steamed and boiled veggies, bread and butter. Desserts are homemade. We enjoyed 13 dives in four days around the Queen Charlotte Strait. Dive #1 was off of the skiff at Rock of Life in Browning Passage. John is an expert at reading the tide charts and the water movement. We were briefed on what to expect and where we should surface. I shot images of jellies floating on my rest stop. Our second dive began at 9:15 pm — still bright and sunny on Nigei Island: Hideaway Wall. Easy drift dive. Browning Wall — colorful anemones, invertebrates, and schools of rockfish and the basket starfish (*Gorgonocephalus arcticus*). The next day, we motored in the heated and sheltered dive boat *Striker* to Dillon Rock. Saw a feeding frenzy: three giant bald eagles, dozens of seagulls, rhinoceros auklets were diving and feeding on a bait ball of herring. Minke whale swam by! Dillon Rock; ratfish, beautiful cousins of

sharks swim in pairs, hovering above the bottom, bobbing along at a laid-back pace. Italian photo guru Alessandro Tommasi was one of the four divers. During our rest interval, we were treated to a sighting of two enormous bears on the shore. We saw a handsome octopus at Dillon (Wolf Eel condos), whose mantle had to be 10 inches in length. Very curious wolf eels wind themselves around divers, and will lay in front of you, head lifted, to receive a gentle rub under the jaw. A pod of porpoises played in the wake of the boat. After an early dinner, we dove 7-Tree Island in Browning Passage. John planned this dive just 20 to 30 minutes before the currents changed, the plan being that when we reached the far side of the island, we allow the current to push us along the shallow inner passage for our rest stop. The ever ready Mr. de Boeck was there as we surfaced. Male painted greenlings in their mating colors, acorn barnacles, tubeworms, posing rockfish, and of course the carpet of nemones. Night dive at Rainbow Reef in the Browning Passage — starting at 10:45 pm and out at 11:15 pm, we swam with small octopi, looked at the kelp blade dwelling purple snails, and of course enormous metridians. Next day, S.S. *Themis* is home to giant orange sea pens (everything you see in southern California diving is magnified by 10), lingcod, orange peel and lemon peel nudibranchs, a magnificent black and white striped nudibranch (*Armina Californicus*) and a playful wolf eel that would swim over to us, disappear, swim back, till we followed him to his den where he slowly emerged and offered up his chin for a rub. We also saw dis-

membered limbs of octopi — evidence of sea lions. Next dive, Eagle Rock. Magnificent fields of Spanish shawls, black-eyed gobies, anemones, rockfish, and florescent glowing seacomb jellies. Browning Wall — stiff footed sea cucumbers (*Eupentacta quinquesemita*), Puget Sound king crabs that had decorated themselves with anemones, basket starfish, metridians. Hideaway Wall — beautiful cluster of black sponge coral, schools of fish chased by a couple of sealions at 65 feet, hermit crabs nestled in anemones. Night dive at Hideaway Wall. A red Irish Lord let me stare at him for about 15-minutes, we followed an enormous Puget Sound king crab, and were treated back at the house to Kerry's original lyrics as John mixed rum and cokes! Four day, double occupancy stay at the Hideaway with spectacular diving, food and housing came to \$1669.34 Canadian. Getting to Port Hardy from the city of Vancouver: #1, Pacific Coastal Airlines (800) 663-2872 one way ticket is \$200.97 (no discount for round-trip), and the flight is approximately one-hour fifteen minutes long. Summer schedule flights run between 7:00 am to about 5:00 pm. If the flight is full and you are carrying more than 40lbs of luggage, you will be given the option of paying a discounted seat fee for your scuba bags. Otherwise, the airline will send the bags up on the next flight — me, I prefer having all of my stuff with me, so paying a little extra was no problem. Cab ride from the airport to Ivy's Pub at the harbor will come to about \$15 Canadian. Option #2, take the Gray Line of Victoria from Nanaimo to Port Hardy for \$25.20 Canadian one-way. The trip is about 5-

hours long, but it was smooth ride in a very comfortable bus. The bus terminal in Port Hardy is only one-mile away from the harbor, so you will have a nominal fee for the cab ride. A meal for two at Ivy's Quarterdeck Pub came to \$31 Canadian (two salmon Kaiser sandwiches, two spinach salads, a bowl of clam chowder, and a pot of hot tea). John de Boeck's Hideaway Resort — here it is: **(877) 725- 835 or (877) 714-8076. [www.clavella.com](http://www.clavella.com).**

**Ocean Explorers, Buccaneer Inn, June 2003, Tom Liles ([tliles@pnm.com](mailto:tliles@pnm.com)), Albuquerque, NM.** Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 5 to 50 feet. Water: 48 to 52 F, calm. This was our first Pacific Northwest diving and it met all our expectations. The water was cold and visibility ranged from 5-10 feet to 40-50 on our best dive. Was normally bad until down about 50+ feet. We were wearing Moby's Twin Shell drysuits with thinsulate undersuits: kept us fairly warm, though colder towards the end of the week. But much better than wetsuits! The invertebrate life was incredible: all sorts of anemones, nudibranchs (huge!), starfish (huge!), flying scallops, jellyfish, sea cucumbers, sea pens. Everything was large! 8 inch nudibranchs! Most of the small fish we saw were different varieties of rockfish, some greenlings. Larger fish included lingcod and cabezon. Only saw one wolf eel, no octopus. Forests of plumose anemones (metridiums). Did two dives on the *Saskatchewan*: first was lousy w/ 5-10 ft vis, second was great with 40-50 ft vis. Ship is covered with invertebrates! Other dives we enjoyed were around Snake Island

(metridium forest, nudibranchs), Jessie Island (metridium forest), Clark Rock (tube anemones, basketstars), 4 Fathom Reef (swimming scallops) and Neck Point (sea pens, huge nudibranchs).

Terry the divemaster was helpful: put on our fins after we waddled to the rear ladders. The larger boat was nicer, with a nice heated cabin. A smaller boat had small cabin, both had heads. Two days there were only 2 or 3 of us, so the small boat was used. The divemaster normally doesn't dive, so you are on your own. Need fairly good navigation skills to get back to the anchor line, otherwise difficult to do safety stops in that 0-5 foot soup at 15 feet. The Buccaneer Inn was nice and a great value! Diver friendly with a monitored storage room for gear and an outside rinse station. Lots of good places to eat in and around Nanaimo. Camera rinse bucket provided on boat on request. No separate camera table or facilities.

([www.oceanexplorersdiving.com](http://www.oceanexplorersdiving.com),  
[www.thebuccaneerinn.com](http://www.thebuccaneerinn.com))

**Ocean Explorers, Buccaneer Hotel, July 2003, Karen Elaine Bakunin, Venice, CA.** The Buccaneer Hotel is a barely better than Motel 6, with linoleum floors and scratchy bed sheets. Buccaneer Dive package is pricey. Deal directly with the dive shop (Ocean Explorers will store your dive gear. They have ample cleaning bins and are a first rate shop with boats at the ready a few yards away). Zougla's restaurant. Greek and American food — good wine, good fish, great view of Nanaimo harbor, and right next door to Zougla is a modest hotel. Because rivers converge,

fresh water and salt mix, resulting in lower vis; much warmer water on the surface (68 degrees) met an oily looking thermocline at one atmosphere that dropped to 52 degrees. The tour we were given by Captain Ian aboard the dive boat *Venturer* was spectacular, especially considering the dive shop in Nanaimo keeps a 9 am to 5 pm work day. We showed up at about 4:00 pm, and weren't ready to dive until after 5 pm. Still, we had a detailed description of the hidden treasure to look for on the *Saskatchewanànò*. Luck, we didn't find the metal disc that will find the bearer a brand new solar powered dive watch. We did have a wonderful time cruising the decks with bronto-ichthian sized lingcod, beautiful crinoids, and swimming clams. An hour later we were in the water at a pair of pinnacles that mark another row of wolf eel dens. Florescent comb jellies, schools of rock fish facing into the current with us as we held on to the bull kelp for our rest stop, and a school of surfperch escorted one female that was quite pregnant. Surfacing from our last dive at 8:56 pm, we were greeted by a beautiful sunset! I dove nitrox. One of the package deals that Buccaneer Inn offers is the 2-night stay, 5-dives (double occupancy) for \$770.40 Canadian. Meals are not included.

**Shallon Marine Service, February 2003, William Sledge ([william.sledge@yale.edu](mailto:william.sledge@yale.edu)), New Haven, CT.**

Experience: 251-500 dives. Vis: 20 to 60 feet. Water: 42 to 46 F, calm. Kevin VanCleemput, the owner operator of the day boat, *Shallon*, together with his

mate, provided some of the most exciting of shore based day trip diving I have experienced. The area is full of interesting possibilities with wild life unique to the area such as the Pacific giant octopus, the “cloud sponge” formations, and dolphins and killer whales. We did not see killer whales on my trip but there was a profusion of animals at all levels and sizes. There are the artificial reefs of the war ships *MacKenzie* and *GB Church*.

VanCleemput is knowledgeable of the area and on a first name basis with the giant octopuses as he used to study them. It is cold water diving (I was there at the end of Feb) and it is hard to imagine doing it comfortably without a dry suit though some do. VanCleemput is supportive and ran the trips with only one diver, me! He serves an excellent hearty hot soup and bread for lunch which is perfect for the coldness. I learned a great deal about cold water diving despite my experience in the North Atlantic. The boat runs out of Sidney, B.C., and the prices were reasonable. Budgeting enough time for the Vancouver Island area. (250-479-4276)

## COLOMBIA

**Buzos de Caribe, Dive Bandara, Decameron Marazul, December 2002, Ken Robertson, Calgary, Alberta.**

Dives: 300+. Vis: 50 to 100 feet. Water 81 to 83 F. A very popular charter destination for Canada’s eastern cities of Montreal and Toronto, and for Europeans. We stayed at Decameron Marazul from Dec. 19 to 27. At the San Andres airport, we were met promptly by a World of Vacations

agent and sent to the hotel in a prepaid taxi. We were ushered into the hotel’s main hall, given a welcome cocktail, our keys, a quick briefing, and it was off to the rooms. We ended up with a room right under the main air conditioning unit for our building, no vibrator bed required — the whole room seemed to vibrate. So it was off to the front desk to request help with a room change. The next day we were moved to a nice room overlooking the lush grounds. Our hotel had an office for Buzos de Caribe (“Caribbean Divers”), staffed by a very nice young lady named Miriam. I missed the group and the first dive of the day, but as I was doing the required sign-up paperwork. Miriam kindly (and quickly) got on the telephone and made arrangements for me to meet the boat on the other side of the island at Cove Bay when they dropped extra tanks off, so that I could get one dive in that day. There I met five Canadians who had been diving together for the past week and had really gotten to know the area. After the customary environmental group dive with three Colombians from Bogota to get the feel of things, I joined the five Canadians for most of the week. Buzos de Caribe’s pick-up truck picks the divers up and takes them to the downtown shop location where the boats were. The divers ride on bench seats. Our DM was a NAUI Instructor named Jaime Andres Vinasco. He came to the hotel each morning to get the group together and handle any problems before leaving the hotel. He is a great chap to dive with — very attentive to detail in assisting people and getting the people around