

Shore Dives: Vancouver Area

******Whytecliff Park**

Location:

Not far from the Horseshoe Bay Ferry Terminal in West Vancouver at the start of the Squamish Highway.

Above Water:

Whytecliff park has reasonable parking (but it still gets full on summer weekends) a picnic area and concession, washrooms, tennis courts and some open field space.

Underwater:

Whytecliff is Canada's first "marine protected area" and as such no removal of anything from beneath the water is allowed. This is also a VERY popular training site so be prepared for crowds especially on the weekends. There are two main dives at Whytecliff, one on each side of the bay. The right side or "cut" is mostly a wall dive with depths deeper than you can go (Howe Sound, where Whytecliff is a true fjord so its deep) which shallows and turns to sand as you enter the bay. There is nice field of Plumose anemones at the cut that hide a all kinds of life. You might find rockfish, dogfish (at night), seals, sponges, perhaps octopus or maybe a grunt sculpin. The second dive on the left side called the "islet" does not drop quite as quickly (but still does drop off). Life is similar to the "cut".

Warnings:

Not too many problems here, a easy beach entry unless the tide is real low. Some current possible at the cut but it is usually localized. Since this is a new marine sanctuary some areas still have lots of fishing line on the bottom so remember that knife.

******Lookout Point**

Location:

Not far from the Horseshoe Bay Ferry Terminal in West Vancouver at the start of the Squamish Highway. The other side of the point from Whytecliff.

Above Water:

Lookout Point is within walking distance of Whytecliff. Very limited parking (illegally parked cars towed). No change areas. The beach is very rocky and log covered.

Underwater:

I dive this site by going around to the left side, a rock wall steps down to ... deep. Lots of Boot sponges, anemones, Lingcod, crabs. Lots of life on the walls. You may encounter an old cable which if you follow to around 100 feet deep you will find large boulders that hide big things like large lingcod or octopus. The bottom of the bay is covered with boulders that hide many small animals.

Warnings:

This is one of the few places in Howe Sound where I ALWAYS check the tide tables, currents at the point can be very strong and often vary dramatically with depth. The beach has those rocks that are just the wrong size and thus it is easy to fall. Also B.C. Ferries sail by the mouth of the bay generating a big wake. This site also points up Howe Sound towards Squamish which means it can be effected by "Squamish winds" which are strong winds that funnel down Howe Sound.

****Caufield Cove

Location:

Caufield Cove is located along the West Vancouver shore past the DFO West Vancouver labs.

Above Water:

There is a dock in Caufield Cove and this is where many people dive from, I however usually start my dive to the east of this where you will find a small parking area and a garbage can. There is a narrow trail to a small cove where I enter the water.

Underwater:

Caufield Cove does not have the best visibility in fact it is usually one of the murkier sites in the Vancouver area. There is however some nice things to be seen here, including lots of small octopus and the occasional large one. I've also had good mollusks luck here with things like swimming scallops and moon snails. The bottom terrain is boulders or rock outcroppings surrounded by sand and silt so because of this I find it a good spot to do a night dive. At night you never know what will come up out of the sand. You are usually sure to see lots of shrimp here at night and a good selection of sand dwelling fish like plainfin midshipman and snake pricklebacks. On one dive here I had one of my 3 skate sightings so that makes this spot stand out for me.

Warnings:

Poor visibility and odd bottom contours make navigation at this site challenging, be sure to use a compass. If you go the wrong way you could end up out in the Vancouver harbour shipping. Also the entry point is sometimes full of large logs which are floating and can pin a diver.

****Kelvin Grove

Parking at Kelvin Grove is now next to impossible due to restrictions placed there by Lion's Bay Council in response to resident complaints, something to think about when you visit other dive sites.

Location:

North of West Vancouver on the Squamish Highway to the village of Lions Bay and turn left on Kelvin Grove Road.

Above Water:

Above Water:

An exclusive residential area that likes its peace and quiet. A good parking lot so do not park at the end of the road under the no parking signs. Seasonal washrooms.

Underwater:

Again two dives, go left or go right. If you go right you will be on sections of wall or sloping sand, again you can get quite deep. Lots of boot sponges here, some cloud sponges, deep water decorator crabs, sea pens on the sand, rockfish and maybe an octopus or wolfeel. To the left is shallower with small walls broken by rubble fields where rock slides have come down from the slopes above. I've found several octopus in crevices here, also usually some interesting nudibranchs, sea pens and anemones. A good spot to find painted greenlings (convict fish).

Warnings:

Nothing major, occasionally some current around the point to the right and some boat traffic overhead. Basically don't annoy the locals and don't get your car towed.

****Porteau Cove

Location:

If you continue north on the Squamish Highway from Kelvin Grove you will come to Porteau Cove Provincial Park.

Above Water:

This is a provincial park so there are camp sites, showers and washrooms, lots of parking, a boat launch, picnic tables and a seasonal outside gear rinse.

Underwater:

Lots of "stuff" has been sunk at Porteau. The biggest thing is the 100 or so foot ex minesweeper "Nakaya" in 60 to 100 feet of water. Its a bit of a snorkel or you can climb over rocks to shorten the snorkel. Lots of small tube worms, some rockfish and lingcod. In shallower depths there is a wealth of stuff to explore including tire reefs, concrete reefs, an old tug hull (the "Granthall"), a small work barge and a ferro-cement sailboat hull. All in less than 60 feet. There are now lots of lingcod and other fish and I have had good luck finding octopus here. I should also say that most major underwater attractions are marked with buoys or floats so finding them is not hard.

Warnings:

Not many, stay inside the dive area or you will be exposed to boat traffic (its marked with buoys). Occasionally there is a surface current. Just a note about diving the Nakaya, in the eighties there was a death on the wreck and since then a permanent penetration line was installed and an addition exit cut in the hull. Now however the wreck is starting to deteriorate badly, much of the after deck has collapsed and I would not advise penetrating the wreck at least not the lower decks.

****Whiskey Cove

Location:

Near Belcarra park on the shores of Indian Arm.

Above Water:

This site is located in a quiet residential area but the is the park close by for washrooms and relaxing.

Underwater:

There are two dives here snorkel out of the narrow bay and go right or left. To the left is a wall that gradually gets deeper as you continue along, there is also a small island that you can dive around. You are likely to see lots of crabs and shrimp, small sculpins. I've seen octopus, and often find cockerel's dorids there (which are one of my favourites). If you go to the right there is a similar wall but also an offshore reef with large boulders. Often lingcod, perch, plumose anemones and various flatfish.

Warnings:

The cove is VERY narrow watch out for boats in the area, there are many private docks in the cove. a free permit is required for night dives here, a sign at the site tells you how to get one.

****South West Indian Arm

Type:

Shore/Boat free dive. For people who like a little swim.

Location:

Indian Arm is the large body of water running north from Vancouver Harbour. Despite popular opinion visibility in Indian Arm can be up to 80 feet during the summer. The trick is to dive north of Woodlands after the spring plankton bloom has ended.

This dive involves a round trip between Woodlands and Camp Jubilee. To reach Woodlands take the Indian Arm road north from the base of Mount Seymour. Follow the recently paved road to the end and park. Walk out onto the government wharf at Woodlands and take the water taxi to Camp Jubilee. Swim back.

Underwater:

The best free diving is between Camp Jubilee and Brighton Beach. In many places there is a small shelf at 40 fsw and then the bottom drops steeply to beyond free diving depths. Below the shelf there are small caves formed by vertical outcroppings in the rocks. A light is handy for these.

Warnings:

Boat traffic can be heavy in the summer time as can the large cyanea who lurk for divers in the dirty water above the thermocline. It's best to work up to this dive as it involves some 4 hours of continuous swimming.

****Sasamat Lake

Location:

Sasamat Lake is the beautiful clear lake located along Bedwell Bay Road. Take Bedwell Bay Road from Ioco. Turn off at White Pine Beach and park. Another approach is to park at the south east corner of the lake and swim from the floating bridge (about 1.5 km). This avoids the crowds at White Pine Beach.

Underwater:

Enter the water at White Pine Beach and swim along the north shore of the lake. About 200 meters along the shore you will encounter a complex of submerged logs. There is an amazingly large school of 3 spine sticklebacks here late in the summer. Careful inspections will also find sculpins, crayfish and small fresh water sponge. Other spots on the lake may reveal the odd nudist. In August wetsuits are optional but recommended.

Warnings:

The main danger is small children who insist that you fetch them starfish, octopus, sharks and other memorabilia from the lake.

******Bedwell Bay Minesweeper**

Location:

On the east side of Bedwell Bay on Kelly Road

Underwater:

This is said to be the wreck of a WW II minesweeper the "Cranbrook" scuttled intentionally in 1948, it seems possible I don't know for sure. The bottom is pretty boring until you find the wreck. The wreck is very decayed and can not be penetrated, only exposed ribs remain in some spots. The last dive I did here stands out for two things: crabs and nudibranchs. There were lots of alabaster and golden dironas, we also saw several dendronotus rufus, a nudibranch I think of as quite rare, along with opalescent and lemon nudibranchs. the wreck also supports a big population of large Dungeness and red rock crabs.

Warnings:

Boats, watch out for water-skiers. also there is a lot of private property around, stay off it, including the docks.

**** **Belcarra Bay**

Location:

From South of Vancouver's Second Narrows Bridge, head East on 7A for about 14km, parallel the Burrard Inlet. Wrap around Port Moody by taking a left on Ioco Road. In 4.5km, take a right on 1st Ave, and in 0.7km turn left on Bedwell Bay Road for another 5km. You'll see the park on your left.

Underwater:

An excellent park for the kids, with picnic and playground facilities. For you divers, expect a rocky reef just off shore with all the small marine creatures you'd expect!

Warnings:

None.

******Woodlands**

Location:

From Cates Park, head North on Dollarton Highway for 1.3km, then left onto Mount Seymour Parkway for 1.1km, then right onto Mt. Seymour Road for 0.6km, then right onto Indian River Road. If you've made it this far, congratulations! Follow the signs to Woodlands as you wind through the forest for 4.8km to the stop sign below.

Underwater:

Rapid drop off, lots of small life.

Warnings:

None.

******Strathcona**

Location:

From Cates Park, head North on Dollarton Highway for 1.6km, then right onto Strathcona. Wind around for less than a kilometer until you find the parking below.

Underwater:

This is a nice suburban park with very easy access to two small islands. Take time to circle the islands, watching for boat traffic. You won't find facilities here, but you will find a relaxing atmosphere!

Warnings:

Fly a flag and watch out for boats.

****Cates Park

Location:

From Vancouver, take the Trans Canada Highway into North Vancouver over the Second Narrows Bridge. Make an immediate right, and head East on Dollarton Highway for 5.3km.

Underwater:

Cates Park is an easy dive for beginners and those with a keen eye. There is not much variety in the life, but there is some unique life if you take the time to look for it. You can find Bay Pipefish, Moon Snails, and a good variety of crabs and fish. The nice thing in the winter time, for wetsuit divers, is that the washrooms are heated and the locals are not picky about divers in them, not like other sites. This is a nice picnic area in the summer for BBQ's in between dives.

Warnings:

Fly a flag and watch out for boats.

****The Cove

Location:

Located on the Southwestern tip of West Vancouver, access is via Marine Drive. From Vancouver, take the Lionsgate Bridge North and exit on Marine Drive West and drive about 11km. The entrance to the Cove is located immediately East of Lighthouse Park. Turn left on The Dale, then left again on the one-way Piccadilly Street. Drive slowly, and make a right on Pilot House Road. After 500 meters, you'll see the parking below.

Underwater:

This site is usually explored for artifacts of years gone by, as this was once a major marine thoroughfare. If you enjoy the thrill of treasure hunting, this spot's for you!

Warnings:

Boat traffic, fly a flag.

****Point Atkinson

Location:

Located on the Southwestern tip of West Vancouver, access is via Marine Drive. From Vancouver, take the Lionsgate Bridge North and exit on Marine Drive West and drive about 11km. The entrance below will be on your left.

Underwater:

Good viz in the winter and a pretty good variety of marine life. If you take your time and look you will find Octopus, a wide variety of crabs and fish, and lots of small invertebrate life. This dive is probably better as a night dive and on the weekends parking is hard to find.

Warnings:

None.

****Bonnie Bay

Location:

Drive South on Marine Drive 1.4km from Horseshoe Bay. Turn right, after the Glen Eagles Golf Course, onto Glen Eagles Drive. Stay on the upper road and wind your way 0.6km to the end of the Drive.

Underwater:

A more user-friendly, easy-access park, you'll find Bonnie Bay a quiet dive with wonderful scenery. There are no facilities here, just a nice, grassy trail and park.

Warnings:

****Telegraph Cove

Location:

From the Copper Cove dive site turn-off on Marine Drive, continue heading down Marine Drive past the entrance to Whyte Cliff Park. Turn left on Cliff Road, and continue to the trail head below.

Underwater:

Here is really good place to dive for beginner scuba or snorkelling. You can see animal/plant life depending upon visibility. If you go there with NW winds, you will find clear water and will enjoy a lot of pretty diving. Happy and safety diving.

When Whyte cliff is too busy for your liking and you don't mind a site with no services and a relatively difficult entry, drive the extra 2 minutes and try this dive.

Note: There is almost no parking near the trail head. The dive itself isn't bad, but the entry is slippery and there is a lot of driftwood to climb over (can be difficult with 100+ lbs. of gear strapped to you). When you finally get into the water I think you'll most likely be the only people in the water. There is an abundance of plant life, many fish, crabs and the usual stars and sea-cukes. Go at or near high tide to ease entry.

Real nice site. Be cautious at low tide! the rocks at entry are round and very slippery. Nice 20 ft wall on left side followed by deeper wall around corner. Current can be strong around corner. Watch for ferry (on entry/exit) waves from wake. Nice 20 ft bay with sand bottom, great for skills/refresher.

Warnings:

Boats, fishing lines, and fishermen

****Copper Cove

Location:

Located due West of the Horseshoe Bay Ferry Terminal, the following is a minor detour through the scenic Horseshoe Bay. Take the Upper Levels Highway (1) to Horseshoe Bay. Do not get into the ferry lines, but head down to the water, and turn left on Bay Street. Beautiful, eh?! In 0.3km turn left on Nelson Ave. In 0.5km turn right on Marine Ave. Wind your way down 0.6km to the intersection below.

Underwater:

Good area for training.

Warnings:

None.

****Lions Bay

Location:

Heading North from Horseshoe Bay, after about 11km, take the second exit into Lions Bay. Head West toward the water, until you see the tracks below.

Underwater:

Lions Bay offers an easy access dive for those interested in seeking out smaller creatures to observe. Shallow and rocky, you'll have plenty of time to explore.

Warnings:

A dive flag is very important in this area. Give the marina a call (604-921-7510) before you decide to show up. Diving is restricted to certain times of the year.

*****Britannia Beach Dock**

Location:

Heading North from Horseshoe Bay, after about 32km you'll see a large mining facility to the right, and the railroad crossing below to the left.

Underwater:

Britannia Beach Dock is the site of the old Customs House of years gone by. The area has a lot of history due to the large copper processing plant just across the street, which makes the waters perfect for treasure hunters.

Warnings:

None.