

Shore Dives: Victoria/Southern Vancouver Island

*****Ogden Point Breakwater**

Location:

The breakwater is on Dallas Road, about 2km west of Beacon Hill Park.

Underwater:

Probably the most popular dive in Victoria, the Breakwater is good for all levels of diving. It is a designated marine sanctuary, which means that divers cannot remove any life from the water, although fishermen are allowed. It is essentially an 800m long structure made of stacked granite blocks and concrete. It is home to an amazing amount of life. The Breakwater is divided into 5 sections called "flags". These are dive flags painted on the Breakwater with plaques sunken at the bottom under each flag. The plaques are an overview of the site and have marine identification keys on them. The first flag is at the first elbow of the Breakwater. The water is about 25 feet deep here, with a sand bottom. The flags are progressively deeper, with a maximum depth of around 110 feet. Entry can be off the beach or off the Breakwater itself.

Beach to First flag.--The beach is mixed cobble and sand. It gets deep at a slow rate. Most people snorkel past this area. Watch the sand while you snorkel for small flatfish such as Pacific Sanddabs and baby Starry Flounder. Juvenile Lingcod also hang out here, and the occasional Kelp Greenling is seen also. Once I saw a 4 Longnose Skate in about 6 feet of water. As you get towards the bend and the first flag, the water gets about 25 feet deep. There are often floats here, and on Sundays the place is crawling with Open Water Classes. Because of the easy bottom it is a training site of choice. It is a very good place to begin your dive.

1st to 2nd flags.--If you follow the bottom from the 1st flag, you descend along a stairway of granite blocks. Not far past the first flag (about 30 kick cycles) is an octopus den under the bottom block. Look for the crab and scallop shells outside. It is usually inhabited by a large octopus. As you get towards 40 or 50 feet, look up to see schools of Puget Sound Rockfish mixed in with the Perch and Quillback Rockfish. There are fallen blocks just off the wall that are home to large Plumose Anemones and small Longfin Sculpins that look like tiger-painted clowns. Explore under the

rocks for the more elusive sculpin species and tons of Blackeye Gobys. Also in evidence are several species of Gunnels. As you approach the 2nd flag, the area is covered in a virtual forest of white Plumose Anemones. Look for Decorated Warbonnets curled around the base of the anemones. Also resident in this area are a few monstrous Lingcod. Watch for egg masses, and avoid these normally placid fish during March and April while they guard their eggs.

2nd to 3rd flags--The depth here is about 60 feet at the bottom. The breakwater is a steep hill of rubble below about 30 feet. In this rubble lives thousands of Brittle Stars, and you can see their legs waving all over the place. Also around you is the orange frilled mouths of Burrowing Sea Cucumbers. Explore these rocks carefully to see Grunt Sculpins and Hairy Lithoide Crabs. On the rocks Swimming Scallops abound.

3rd and 4th flags--Getting deeper to 70 or 80 feet at the bottom, this area is rarely dived because it is such a long walk or swim from the beach. Virtually virgin territory for divers, this is a good place to find Wolfeels and Octopus. Schools of Black Rockfish and Yellowtail Rockfish are everywhere.

5th flag--An extremely long walk in full gear and a bit of a climb, this dive is for the very experienced only. The bottom varies 90 to 110 feet, and is mostly mud and sand. But there is 100 feet of tumbled granite blocks and rubble with the most amazing colony of Metrudium anemones. It is all here. A night dive in this area is spectacular, with lots of Tiger Rockfish and sleeping Canary Rockfish. Octopus are always found, and large Decorated or Mosshead Warbonnets stick out of cracks or shells. Puget Sound King Crabs can be seen, purple and orange tanks that are more than 20 inches across. Harbour seals are a common visitor here, and Dogfish and Ratfish are de rigueur.

Watch out for fishermen's lures and tangles of fishing line when diving the Breakwater. It is very hard to get lost here, and exit points are many. I have done maybe 100 dives here, and I swear I've seen something new every time.

How to get there: The Breakwater is located on Dallas Road just west of beacon Hill Park. Drive up Douglas St. from downtown and hang a right at Mile Zero. Then go till you see the Breakwater. Parking is allowed on the

street and there is ample angle parking. There is also parking on the other side of the Breakwater, but costs \$0.50 for 2 hours.

Warnings:

Be careful when climbing on the blocks because the sharp barnacles can slice open your suit. Remember that it is illegal to dive the west side of the Breakwater because of boat traffic.

*****San Jose Crescent**

Locaiton:

Just a block away from Ogden Point Breakwater is a series of small rocks off the intersection of San Jose and Dallas Road. There is a set of stairs going to the water. This is both entry and exit point for the dive. Parking is angle parking along Dallas Rd. There are no bathrooms at this site, so make sure you relieve yourself beforehand.

Underwater:

This dive is quite shallow, with a maximum depth of about 45 feet, do be sure to do it at high tide. During low tide it is an excellent place to snorkel, perhaps after a dive at the Breakwater. Snorkel out to the rocks from the stairs and descend on the far side of the largest islet. The depth here is about 30 feet. The bottom is a myriad of small boulders and rocks embedded in the sand. There are beautiful Rock Greenling around, and often skate and rays are seen here. Look for Starry Sole and Arrowtooth flounders on the sand. Buffalo sculpins bury themselves with just their eyes showing, and bright orange Sea Pens are in the sand off the islets. Explore the bottom to your heart's content and then take a North heading to get back to the sea wall. The water near the wall is quite shallow, and you should have no problem getting back to the stairs. This is a dive for all levels of diver, but be sure that the water is calm for this dive.

Warning:

It can be quite dangerous here in choppy or stormy weather.

***Clover Point

Locaiton:

Clover Point is a jut of land on the west side of Ross Bay, near the Ross Bay Cemetery. It is part of the Dallas Rd. Park and is a popular place to fly kites and watch sea storms. To get there, turn left off of Douglas St. on to Dallas Rd., and drive till you see a cul-de-sac lookout jutting into the water. This is Cover Point, located at the intersection of Moss St. and Dallas Rd.

Underwater:

Once in the water, swim southeast through the path in the kelp to the edge of the kelp forest. It is about a 5 minute snorkel, and the water is about 8-10 feet deep here. Watch for Pacific Tubesnouts and various Kelp and Spider Crabs as you snorkel. Kelp Poachers and Sea Dragons are sometimes found in this kelp, but are extremely hard to see due to their amazing camouflage. Once outside the kelp bed, look down to see sand.

Descend and you will be in about 35 feet of water. Swim along the margin between rock and sand for a great dive. About 10 feet off this margin is the edge of a huge garden of Sea Pens, bright orange creatures that look like feather pens and stand about 18-24 inches tall. There are more than 1000 sea pens here, and Buffalo Sculpins, Skate, Ratfish and Dogfish are abundant. This is a great place to find some of the more elusive small sculpins, and it is a haven for Red Irish Lords. Try to keep your general heading to the west or north to get around the point, where there is another boat launch that you can come up.

For the more intrepid or advanced diver, there is a wreck of 4 railroad boxcars off the point. I have been unable to determine how they got there, and they are hard to find. The shipping channel is about 1 km off Clover Point, so divers doing this dive should use a flag or float. From the edge of the kelp forest there is a reef curving off to the right that starts in about 40 fsw. Follow the reef out (quite far) and then locate the boxcars off the south end of this east-curving reef in about 60 fsw. They are inhabited by a large octopus and many dogfish. They are a bit hard to find, and have not to my knowledge been mapped. Very few people I know have been out to them, but don't get discouraged if you don't find them the first time. I had done about 25 dives there before I discovered them.

The Clover Point dive is an excellent place to go for a second dive of the day. It has limited depth and lots to see.

Some people may tell you about the sewage plant here, but it is merely a pumping station and the outfall is some miles away at Saxe Point, so do not be concerned.

Warnings:

Watch your step because the anglers sometimes grease the slats on the ramp so their boats will slide up easier. Be sure to check your current tables before diving here, because the tide can really rip through off the point.

***McMicking Bay

Location:

To get there drive Out Fort St, heading east out of downtown. Turn right on Cook St. and continue to Fairfield Rd. There is a Shell Station at Fairfield. Turn left and follow Fairfield all the way to the water, where it merges into Beach Dr. The bay here is McNeill Bay, and look for the cut out and gravel bar about 300 m to the left. There is a blue concrete wall, and the gravel bar is beyond the end of the wall, where a green metal railing is.

Underwater:

McMicking bay is a small adjutment off of McNeill Bay. It is a fabulous dive that is virtually unspoiled. I would not recommend diving it in the summer due to an excess of kelp that makes it hard to navigate. In the winter the kelp dies off, leaving a system of reefs with amazing life. Parking is along Beach Drive, with a small cutout off the road. Stairs lead down to a gravel bar that connects to a rocky point.

There are two dives here. One is off to the left of the bar. Enter on the left side of the bar, and snorkel out about 150 feet. Descend to find yourself on the beginning of a system of reefs that lead to the east and northeast. Dive the outside of the reefs, and come back on the inside. You will find the biggest stands of Staghorn Bryozoans in the area, with the biggest, fattest Kelp Greenling I have ever seen. Also large Lingcod and Blue Barred Perch. There are a few Sea Pens, and I have found neon orange Nemertean Worms here. I once found a 10 foot Octopus here, and I have seen juvenile Wolfeels in and around the reefs. There are a lot of Rock Scallops and Red Abalone here, and their empty shells are home to Grunt Sculpins and Scaleyhead Sculpins. Watch your depth and find a maximum of around 70 feet, though it is possible to find depths exceeding 130 in the channel, which is not recommended unless you have a boat.

The other dive is off the south and south west part of the gravel bar. There is a system of small islands that are fun to explore. Juvenile Wolfeels have also been seen here, and Pacific Staghorn Sculpins hide out here. Puget Sound King Crab and Heart Crabs are in the rocks, and this is the one other place I have seen Rock Greenling in the Victoria area. I have also seen a California Sea Lion here and once I saw a Baird's Cormorant swimming under the water. Amazing! Take care on this side of the bar. Although for

the most part you are sheltered from the current, ebb tides create a back eddy that can push you toward the main current.

Warnings:

This is a rarely dived spot for more advanced divers. The currents here can be tricky and very fast, so be sure to dive it near slack tide.

Smuggler's Cove

Location:

Directions I will give here, but ask at a dive store, since it is easy to get lost in this area. Drive out Blanshard St. from downtown, and hang a right at Hillside Rd. Drive out Hillside for about 10 minutes till you come to Cadboro Bay Rd., where you turn left. You will reach a 4 way stop at Sinclair Rd. where there is a small mall and a couple of Pubs. Continue straight, and the road does a couple of twists, first right, then left. Just after the left twist, turn right onto the road marked Seaview, and follow it as it curves left. Follow this road past a sharp left curve, and then turn right onto McAnally Rd. At the end of McAnally, where it turns left, is Smugglers Cove.

Underwater:

Part of the Ten Mile Point Ecological Reserve, Smuggler's Cove is an underrated dive. Easy entry is off the beach, and there is parking for a number of cars. It is a small, shallow bay past which a very fast current is present during flood and ebb. To the right of the bay is an extremely shallow (15-25 feet) dive full of current loving critters such as crabs, Ochre Stars, and Barnacles. Octopus can usually be found here at night. On the left side is a series of small shelves that get deeper. I have been to 65 feet here, and I probably could get deeper. A large number of Sea Urchins, California Sea Cucumbers (*Stichopus*), and Gumboot Chitons live here, along with Rock Sole, Flounder, and Red Irish Lords. There used to be a Wolfeel here, but I have not seen it for a few months.

Warnings:

Make sure you check the current tables for this dive, since the current off the bay is one of the fastest around. Divers have often been caught in this current and rescued by boat. If you stay near the shore, though, the current is usually manageable.

******Ten Mile Point**

Location:

Directions are best found at a dive shop, but if one were to continue to the left from Smuggler's Cove (above) and turn right at the next intersection, go to the end of that road (Baynes) and turn left onto the Ten Mile Point cul-de-sac, the site is there.

Underwater:

Climb down the rock where there is a brown fence to your left. Enter the water at the fence. Usually this is done as a drift dive. Get down as soon as possible when you get in, and find the bottom at around 100-120 feet. Of course, you don't have to go this deep, and the best area is between 70 and 90 feet. Drift along to the right to find an amazing array of life. Sunstars that are more than a meter across. Every type of cool sculpin. This is the best place to see Red Irish Lords, who seem to own the area. Painted Greenling poise on vertical surfaces, and large Christmas Tree Anemones share room with the *Metridium*. Decorated Warbonnets nestle in shells and around anemones, and once we saw 10 octopi on one dive! Wolfeels live here, and the opportunities for macro photography are incredible. This is the favourite dive site of many local divers. Last year a friend of mine turned around during his safety stop to see an Orca not 10 feet away.

Two popular exits are around the corner to the right. One is a path/boat ramp below a house. The other is a groundwater drainpipe on the rocks. Both offer an easy exit. If you drift past the boat ramp, there is a small beach that is just a block from the cars...not too far.

Some intrepid divers (very experienced only) do a drift dive at high current times that takes them all the way to Smuggler's Cove, where they leave one car in advance. This takes a lot of skill and experience and lasts about 50 minutes.

Warnings:

Ten Mile Point is a wall dive in a high current area. With particularly tricky and unpredictable currents, dive here with a local your first few times.

***Spring Bay

Locations:

Again, ask for directions at a dive shop, but Spring Bay may be found by following the directions to Smuggler's Cove, except that instead of turning right onto McAnally, you continue on straight. The road continues until you see it split around a tree growing in the middle of the road. Just past that tree is Spring Bay

Underwater:

Visible from Ten Mile Point, Spring Bay is essentially the same area. It is a series of shelves dropping about 10 feet for each one. There is tons of parking here, with stairs to the beach, which is a small bay. Because of shallower depths, Spring Bay is much better suited to beginning divers than Ten Mile. Much of the same life is extant here, with many sightings of Octopus, Wolf eels, and Grunt Sculpins. The shallow area is home to Pacific Clingfish and Marbled Snailfish. Also found here are the odd Kelp Poacher and Spiny Lumpsucker. Sharpnose Crabs and Decorator Crabs are everywhere, and sea urchins fill all the cracks.

Entry is off the beach. Use your buddy to stabilize yourself getting in, and swim as soon as it's deep enough. The cobble here is of larger size, and because it is covered in slippery algae it carries real potential for twisted ankles. Do not drop gear at this site. It has a reputation for "eating" equipment, since the leaf kelp on the bottom and silt in the shallows makes recovery of dropped gear virtually impossible. OTOH I once found a USD Monitor 2 computer here...

Make your dives down the shelves, but be sure to take a heading for the beach when you descend. It is easy to get turned around at this spot. If you get lost, follow the shelves up, and eventually you will get to shore, though you may be a long swim from your entry. It is easy to climb onto the rocks anywhere along here.

Warnings:

Check the current before diving. It can be quite strong and pull you all the way to Ten Mile. Generally, the current is at the surface only, and disappears or even reverses direction at depth.

***Telegraph Bay

Location:

To get to Telegraph Bay, drive out Blanshard to Hillside, hang a right and go till you meet Cadboro Bay Rd. Turn right and follow Cadboro Bay past the village and through a few twisting curves to its terminus, a gravel parking lot and beach access.

Underwater:

Not a popular dive site, Telegraph Bay is a calm, shallow dive that is good for novice divers. The bay is quite large, and there is an interesting wall on the right side that descends to about 50 feet. The Annual Underwater Easter Egg Hunt used to be held here, but has moved to another site this year because of limited parking. Entry is very easy.

Telegraph sports large numbers of Dungeness Crab, Red Rock Crab and Pacific Sandabs. The wall to the right is an underrated dive. Look for rare species of sculpin and limpets in the eelgrass on the wall. Large schools of Silversides, Anchovy, and Oolichan can often be seen here. High coliform counts have scared divers and swimmers away in the past, but recently the counts have fallen drastically, making this once again a safe dive site. The area is popular for training on choppy days since it is usually very calm and sheltered.

Warnings:

The current can get quite strong past the mouth of the bay, and it is recommended that only experienced divers go here.

***Spindrift Cove

Location:

To get to Spindrift, go out Cadboro Bay Rd. as per the directions to Telegraph. Just before the lot at Telegraph, turn left onto Queenswood Dr. and follow it to Cranford Pl. Another potential dive site is just a few blocks farther along Queenswood, off of Guinevere Pl. I have not yet explored there.

Underwater:

A rarely dived site, Spindrift is known by many names. We call it Spindrift after the name of the mansion at the access. It is a shallow cove slightly north of Telegraph Bay, and it drops off just outside the rocks. Like all the dives in this area, care should be taken with regards to tidal current movements. I have only dived Spindrift 4 times, this is what I know of it.

Entry is at the end of Cranford Place off of Queenswood Drive. It is a bit of a climb to the beach, but not too bad even in full kit. There is a shallow lagoon surrounded by rocks. To the left of this lagoon is a bottom of mostly sand and rock to a max. depth of about 17 feet. There is a bit of a wreck here, a thrashed 16 ft. fishing boat lying upside down. It is in a different location every dive. To the right is very shallow boulder bottom, maybe 8 feet deep. During slack tide you can dive outside the lagoon on a series of shelves much like Spring Bay. The max depth I have been to here is 75 feet, but it may get deeper. The area is covered in different species of Nudibranch, including Nanaimo Nudis, Yellow Cadlinas, Sea Lemons, Clown Nudis, Alabaster and Opalescent Nudis. Also a few more that aren't skimming off the top of my mind. I saw a Wolfeel here, and I have heard tell of Blue Sharks (*Prionace Glauca*) off this location.

Warnings:

If you dive here be sure you use a float, and keep good track of where you are.

***Saxe Point

Location:

To get there from downtown, cross the Johnson St. Bridge (going out Pandora St.) and find yourself on Esquimalt Rd. Continue straight past Lampson St. and the Esquimalt Rec Centre and Mr. Grocer. Just past this complex, turn left onto Fraser St. Drive to the end of Fraser St where you will see a sign for Saxe Point Park. The site is at the end of this road. There are washrooms here as well.

Underwater:

A small memorial park in southern Esquimalt, Saxe Point is a popular training site and a good dive for beginning divers. There are two dives here. One is directly off the south end of the point. It is mostly sand bottom, and has all the life associated with such an area. In the rocks is an inordinate number of Octopus, and one expert I know says that it may be the best place in Victoria to see Octos. But I have yet to see one here...perhaps I don't know where to look.

About 1.5 km out is the sewage outfall. I have heard that the outfall has an amazing amount of life, but I have never been out there. Currents are usually mild here, and the rocks off to the left offer quite an interesting dive. Dogfish and Ratfish are common here, as are Sea Pens and Sea Urchins. Usually only seen at deeper depths, I once saw a Basket Star here as well.

The more popular dive is down a path to the right of the point. There is a beach here and a dive around the point to the left of the beach can be quite rewarding. The bottom is sand and silt, so be careful with your buoyancy here. It takes hours for the silt to settle. This is another mecca for Nudibranchs, and there are plenty of macro opportunities. The dive is fairly shallow, with a maximum depth of around 50 feet. I rarely dive here because of it's out of the way location, but it is a popular spot for crabbing as well as diving.

Warnings:

None.

******Cattle Point**

Location:

Located in the Uplands Park of the District of Oak Bay, you'll see the entrance to Cattle Point off Beach Drive.

Underwater:

Cattle Point is mainly used for dog walkers and boat launchers, but if you are careful, you can slip down the boat ramp and explore some very scenic coastline.

Warnings:

The current is, of course, an issue, so check with your local dive shop for the seasonal conditions.

******McNeill Point**

Location:

Located 0.4km West of the Victoria Golf Course on Beach Road.

Underwater:

This area is not well-sheltered, but the open-water aspect allows for greater chances of seeing the local marine life. McNeill Point is an exciting spot to explore, but only during ideal conditions.

Warnings:

The tidal currents through here could ruin your whole day if you're not careful. Check with a local dive shop about seasonal and hourly conditions at this site!

******Ross Charles Park**

Location:

From the inner harbor of Victoria, drive South 1.5km to the end of Government Road, and turn left on Dallas for 3.7km. After you pass the cemetery on your left, prepare to turn right on St. Charles Street.

Underwater:

For a relatively easy entry and dive, try Ross Charles Park. There are several rocky outcroppings to explore, and a flat bottom otherwise. Search the kelp just off-shore for the local marine life.

Warnings:

This is a gentle entry, but watch for current and tidal eddies.

******Esquinalt Lagoon**

Location:

From Victoria Harbor, take the Trans-Canada Highway (1) to the North. In 9km go South on Highway 14 (Old Island Highway). In 1.8km turn left on Ocean Blvd and travel for 1km until you reach the bridge below. Heading down the hill and over the lagoon bridge, there is a sign that will point you into the lagoon area. You'll want the beach just to the left.

Underwater:

For an easy dive, without the hazards of rocks, kelp and strong current, Esquinalt Lagoon offers the chance to see the bottom dwellers you'd expect on a sandy stretch of coast.

Warnings:

There are no facilities in the immediate area, so bring water and warmth!

******Alberta Head Lagoon**

Location:

From Victoria Harbor, take the Trans-Canada Highway (1) to the North. In 9km go South on Highway 14 (Old Island Highway). In 4.5km turn left on Metchosin Road and travel for 3.6km until you reach Albert Head Lagoon Regional Park.

Underwater:

Albert Head Lagoon is another wonderful no-current dive for searching out crabs and skates. This site is really off the beaten path, so bring everything you need for a comfortable day. Perfect spot for beginners and for checking out new gear.

Warnings:

No night diving is allowed.

SAANICH INLET SHORE DIVES
*(Vancouver Island, all sites within 45 minute drive
of Victoria)*

******Deep Cove Mystery Wreck**

Location:

To get there drive out of town towards the ferry terminal (Swartz Bay) along the Patricia Bay Hwy.(#17) Shortly before you reach the ferry terminal, take the exit onto Wain Rd. (heading west) and follow it all the way to Madrona Drive. Turn right onto Madrona and find Setchell Rd just off to your left. About 500 ft down the road. Turn onto Setchell, and the lot is at the end of the road. To get to the marina, follow Madrona past Setchell Rd. around the corner. There is a sign for the marina another 500 or 600 ft. down Madrona. Travel time from Victoria is about 45 minutes

Underwater:

Sometime long ago, a train barge struck a reef just outside Deep Cove. It limped in, and sunk in 65 fsw smack dab in the middle of the cove. No one knows who owned it, who was on it, and exactly when it sank. There is no name on it. It is known only as the Mystery Wreck.

It is 152 feet long, and home to a huge number of Perch and Lingcod. Fat Kelp Greenlings also hide in the shadow of rotting timbers, and Buffalo Sculpins shelter underneath the bow. For a while there was a carved pumpkin on the bow, but a storm washed it away.

There used to be a dive shop here, but it is now just an air station. There are two entry points, one off the dock (for which you have to pay \$3) or off of Setchell Point. I always use the point. There is limited parking on the point, but there are rarely other divers here. A path leads from parking to the water.

As you enter off the rocks, take a compass bearing for the wreck, which is marked by two metal buoys. Take care not to head for someone's mooring by mistake. If you decide to snorkel out to the buoy, it is tied to a concrete block just off the bow. Usually, we descend at the entry point and swim to the wreck. It seems like a long way, but just as you think you missed the

wreck altogether it looms out of the emerald water. The bottom along the way is mud, and it is strewn with shoes and bottles. There was a very old Chinese settlement here, and unusual and valuable bottles are often found in the area. Look for small Sea Pens and many many Tube Dwelling Anemones. Feeding on these are Giant Nudibranchs (*Dendronotus iris*) and Stubby Squid hide in the mud.

Watch out on the wreck. It is fragile and there are many places to get snagged on. The bow is metal and has a few places with penetration possibility, but I do not recommend it. It is not worth the trouble, and despite appearances, it could be quite dangerous. Because of usually murky water (viz 10 to 30 feet) this wreck appears very spooky. It is a good place for divers of all levels, and easy to find. Depending on the height of the tide it is in 55-70 fsw, and there is rarely any current to speak of. Leave the wreck at about 800-1000 psi for the swim back. Simply find the bow and head back on a reciprocal direction. With a 3 minute safety stop you'll be on shore with 500 psi.

Warnings:

Watch for boat traffic. If you decide to dive from the dock, simply go to Deep Cove Marina and head directly out off the dock.

***Henderson Point

Location:

To get to Henderson Point, drive out Blanshard St. and it turns into Hwy #17 (Pat Bay). Drive until you come to Mt. Newton X Rd., where there is a Quality Inn and a MacDonald's. It is the first intersection past the row of billboards. Turn left onto Mt. Newton X Rd., and follow it past several sets of stop signs. Keep going straight and eventually you will reach West Saanich Road. Cross West Saanich onto Senanus Rd. Senanus has a few sharp turns (one left, one right) but follow it to its terminus where there is a small parking lot. Be sure that your vehicle is between the signs, as irate residents have been known to call tow trucks. The path is at the end of the lot, between two stones. On your way back, consider stopping at the Prairie Inn (along Mt Newton X Rd.) for a meal. The (in)famous Belly Buster Burger awaits the hearty of appetite, and the Skookum Burger is a good alternative for those of us with smaller ambitions. Good vegetarian food as well, and the specials cannot be beat.

Underwater:

This is my favourite Victoria shore dive. Located at the northern end of Brentwood Bay, this site best shows the unique diving in the Saanich Inlet. Because the mouth of the inlet is shallower than the rest, much of the deeper waters get little circulation. Only the upper waters of the inlet are churned by the tides, and there is visible layering of the waters from top to bottom. Henderson Point has a series of shelves, each in a different layer of water and with a different series of species. There are two basic dives here, although there are many places to explore. The first of the two dives is recommended for all levels of diving. Entry is down a path from the limited parking. A bit of a climb is necessary to get onto the beach, and the dead oak provides a handhold to this end. There is a wall to the right of the small bay, with a flagpole. The flagpole makes a very good surface reference. Descend from about 30 feet west of the flagpole, or even a bit further. You will find yourself in 20-30 fsw at the top of the first reef. Descend down the shelves till you meet a sand and shell plain that slopes away from the bottom of the reef. Most of the reefs lead in a northwest direction from the descent point. Be aware that a few reefs curve around to a more northern direction, so keep an eye on your compass. Go along the bottom till you reach about 1500 psi. You have probably come much further than you think, so ascend to the top of the reef, or perhaps the next one, and come back in a southeast direction.

At around 60 fsw look for hordes of Copper Rockfish. Painted Greenlings are everywhere, and at night 15 Scaled Worms can be found on the rocks. Also at night Plainfin Midshipmen are at the bases of the reefs, and Juvenile Wolfels come to shallower depths. This is a good place for Sturgeon Poachers day or night, and Great Sculpins feed on the Coonstripe Shrimp that are everywhere. On the shell plains Halibut, Rock Sole and other flatfish may be seen, including the C-O Sole. Giant Nudibranchs are common here, feeding on the Tube Dwelling Anemones. As you come to shallower depths, look for baby Octopus and Opalescent Squid. There are a few Plumose Anemones that aid navigation, and juvenile Plainfin Midshipmen hang sleeping at night, a few feet off the bottom. Night dives here usually find Sailfin Sculpins and large Red or Brown Irish Lords. There is a covey of Buffalo Sculpins on one reef, and Grunt Sculpins may be found day or night. The extreme shallows (10-20 fsw) are covered in Hydroids and Perch are everywhere. Northern Sculpins and Tidepool Sculpins hide in the rocks along with Longfin Gunnels. Once we found a Bay Pipefish (close relative of seahorses) in the shallows.

The second dive is recommended for advanced divers only, as it is a deep dive. From the flagpole, snorkel a goodly distance out directly south. Descend and find yourself in 60-80 fsw. Continue south at the bottom, and you will find a steep drop off and wall. There is a shelf at 100 fsw, and another at 130 fsw. After that, the bottom slopes off steeply to a maximum depth of around 380 fsw...needless to say, too deep for us! As you traverse the plain towards the wall, you will likely find a Giant Nudibranch or two. Flatfish of all types abound, and I once saw a Halibut in excess of 100 lbs. here. Keep your eyes open for Longnose Skate as well. As you come over the wall, look for monstrous Lingcod, which lay tons of eggs in the springtime. Cabezon live here as well. Canary Rockfish inhabit the depths along with large Boot Sponges of ancient age and the odd Cloud Sponge. Galathoid Crabs known as Squat Lobsters hide in cracks, and Feather Stars can be found here and will crawl right up your arm. A rare species in these waters, the Long Rayed or Fish Catching Sea Star (*Stylasterias forreri*) can sometimes be seen. Keep your eyes peeled at deeper depths, because this is one of the few places in the world that Six Gill Sharks have been sighted, and occasionally Blue Sharks are sighted in the surface waters. Dogfish can be seen on the plain at night, many of the larger size.

Proceed in a north direction along the wall, and then head north-northeast from the top of the wall to get back to the entry point. Do your safety stop

in the shallows while rooting around for Grunt Sculpins. A fabulous dive.

Warnings:

In the summer months, watch for Cyanea jellyfish (known as Lion's Mane or Sea Blubber) that can be a problem. Often 2 feet across the bell and having tentacles up to 70 feet long, these jellies pack an uncomfortable sting. Usually one is only stung across the face in the unlikely event that you run into one, but remember to be careful of any leftover stinging cells on your exposure suit.

This is a heavy boat traffic location, so diving with a float or flag is recommended. Try to get into the shallows before surfacing, and this will prevent any potential problems with boaters.

There is an excellent map of Henderson Point in Frank White's Scuba Shop behind the counter. Perusal of this map can help immensely with navigation.

******Mckenzie Bight**

Location:

Take Wallace Drive south from West Saanich Road, and turn left onto Willis Point Road. Follow Willis Point Road up through Mount Work Regional Park, and into Willis Point. At the T- intersection, turn left, and follow the road until the pavement ends.

Above Water:

A vehicle with some clearance is required to get into the furthest sites, but, with careful driving, almost any vehicle can make it to the closest site. The sites are unmarked, but obvious trails lead down from the side of the gravel road to the beach.

Underwater:

Theses sites are very similar to Henderson underwater. You can find a large variety of invertebrates, including large sponges down deep. The fish life in the inlet is less dense than at other sites near Victoria, but there is still a good variety. I have encountered sailfin sculpins, saddleback gunnels, ling cod, red Irish lords, starry flounders, and a big skate here. Others have reported encountering some very spectacular marine life at McKenzie Bight, including wolf eels, stellar's sea lions, and orca's.