

# The Status of Submerged Cultural Heritage in the Victoria Region



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## **SITUATION BRIEF # 51**

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Long before the European explorers arrived off Southern Vancouver Island, the area was home to the Coast Salish peoples made up of the Songhees, Esquimalt, Tsartlip, Tseycum, Pauquachin, Scia'new, Tsawout and T'Sou-ke, nations. These groups have called Southern Vancouver Island home for millennia and have used the waters off Southern Vancouver Island extensively for transportation, collecting shellfish, harvesting crabs and fishing. Evidence of First Nation maritime activities are difficult to find as organic material does not generally survive underwater unless buried in an anoxic environment. Reef netting sites are a First Nation feature where underwater artefacts can be found.



Smyth Head Canoe Anchor. Ewan Anderson Photo.

The Hudson's Bay Company founded Fort Victoria in 1843. Three years later it became the company's district headquarters and main supply depot. Goods mainly from Britain and commonwealth countries were distributed via Victoria to all HBC forts in the region. In return, products from the trading posts were exported through Victoria. By the mid 1850s, shipments of salmon, coal and timber were exported daily to distant ports. Much of this trade, too, funnelled through the harbours of Victoria and Esquimalt. Even ships destined elsewhere in the colony stopped at Victoria to pick up a pilot and report to customs. This made Victoria the first contact for almost all ships entering the Pacific North West in the mid 19th century.

With so many ships sailing to and from the city it was inevitable that some would come to grief on South Island shores. Between 1849 and 1951 more than 116 vessels had grounded, foundered, or been driven ashore along the southern tip of Vancouver Island. Some wrecked vessels were visitors from foreign lands, but the majority were local coastal schooners, tugs, and freighters.



"Wreck of the SS San Pedro aground on Brotchie Ledge in 1891." Courtesy Royal BC Museum HP301.

## Resource Description

The submerged cultural heritage resource of Southern Vancouver Island consists of shipwrecks, plane wrecks, train wrecks, dock structures and First Nations sites. One of the earliest wrecks was the barque Albion lost on Brotchie Ledge in 1849 and one of the most recent wrecks is the migrant ship Black Dragon that sank December 9, 2003, off Zero Rock, while under tow.

A cross section of vessels are represented and include small wooden schooners, large sailing barques, side wheel steamers, iron sailing ships, coastal tugboats, and large screw steamers. The trading schooner Surprise built in 1859 and lost off Sooke in 1874 is historically significant. It traded all over the BC coast, rescued shipwreck mariners and provided news on First Nation settlements. The loss of the shelter deck steamer Iroquois was a particularly tragic event. It departed Sidney on April 10, 1911 and foundered one mile from the dock with the loss of 26 people. Her remains were found by the UASBC in 1977 and the site was designated a Heritage Site January 27, 1978. The sidewheeler Enterprise was in a collision with the R.P Rithet off 10 Mile point July 28, 1885. Badly damaged the Enterprise was towed into Cadboro Bay where it sank in shallow water.

The UASBC has searched for this vessel on numerous occasions, and it has eluded us. The largest vessel lost off Southern Vancouver Island is the SS San Pedro. This large iron 331-foot screw steamer piled on to Brotchie Ledge after coming in too close to shore to drop off the pilot.

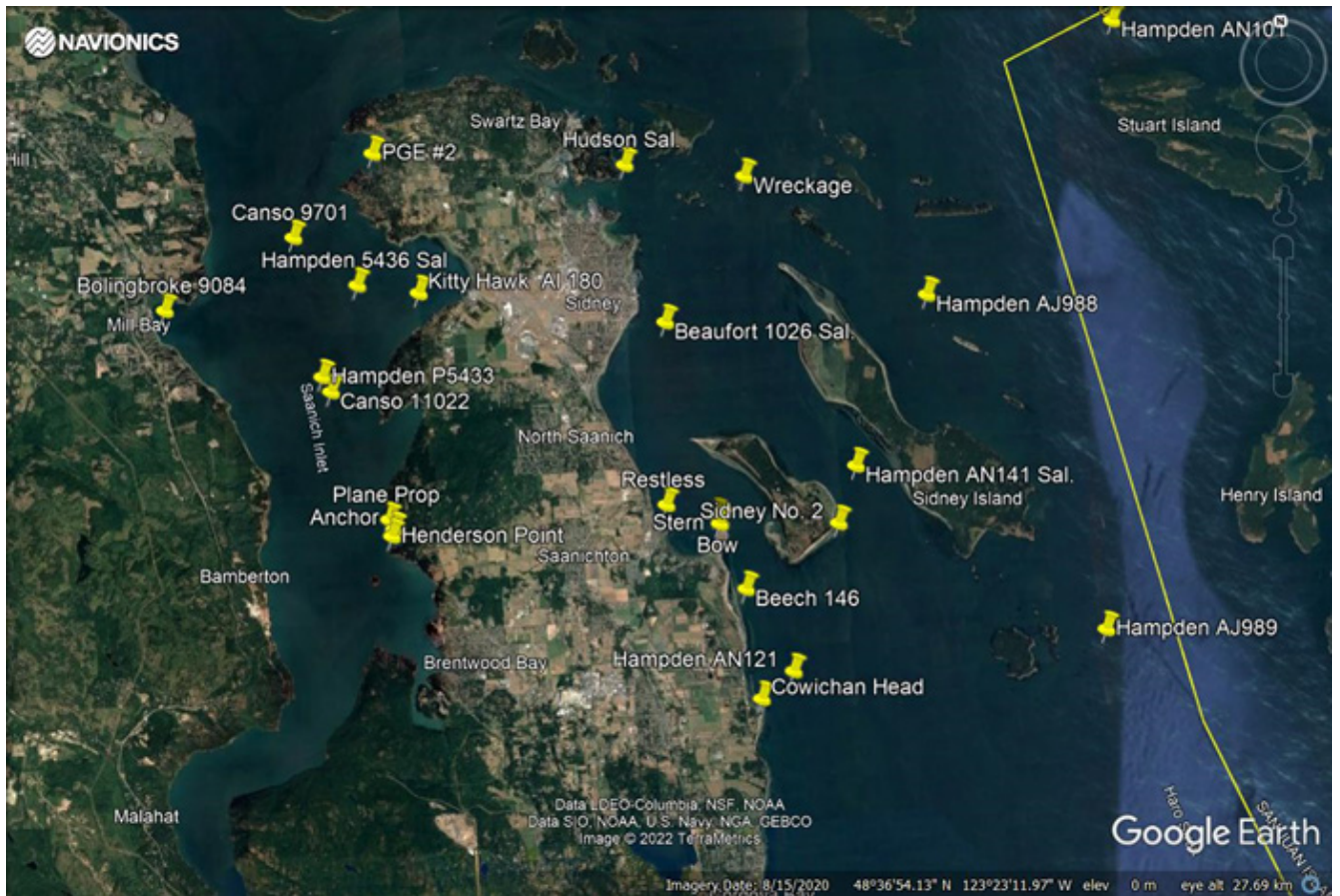
During the second world war Patricia Bay (Victoria Airport) was a training base for commonwealth pilots. Numerous planes were lost each year because of mechanical failure or pilot inexperience. As a result, the waters in Saanich Inlet and the area in front of Sidney contain the remains of numerous crashed aircraft. Some are unique. For instance, no complete or partial Hampden aircraft

were retained for museum display at the end of WW II. In 1985 the remains of a Hadley Page Hampden Bomber were recovered from 180 meters of water in Saanich Inlet and taken to the Canadian Museum of Flight in Langley to be restored. Most of the crashed aircraft remain to be found, with many lying in deep water.



Daily Colonist Headlines: loss of SS Iroquois April 11, 1911, and SS Sechelt lost March 24, 1911

As mentioned earlier, evidence for First Nation maritime activities is difficult to find, as organic material does not generally survive underwater. The 1980's work done by Norm Easton on reef net sites has revealed that evidence of these sites does remain on the bottom and can be found.



Google Earth image showing aircraft wrecks off the Saanich Peninsula.

## Legalities of Protection

Prior to 1995 there was very little protection for historic shipwrecks in the province.

A site had to be designated as a heritage site through a BC Government Order in Council to receive protection. In 1995 the Heritage Conservation Act was revised to include very strict protection for Shipwrecks and Plane wrecks. Essentially any vessel or aircraft that is older than 2 years and abandoned is protected by the Heritage Conservation Act. A permit is required to damage or alter a heritage wreck or remove any heritage object from a heritage wreck.

Unfortunately, the HCA does not cover all submerged resources. Features like dock sites locomotives and rail cars are not included in the protection.

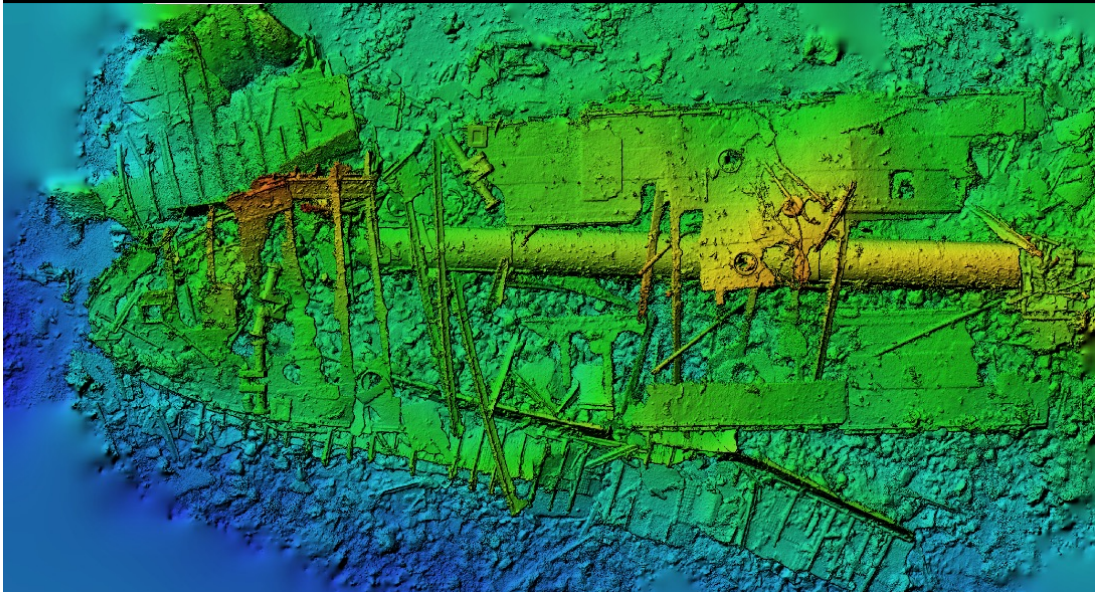
Also, the Heritage Conservation Act only applies to provincial waters, it does not apply to offshore waters which are Federal jurisdiction. In 2019 the Federal Government enacted the Wrecked, Abandoned or Hazardous Vessels Act (WAHVA). Section 131 of the new act enables regulations to be written to protect and preserve heritage wrecks and issue permits for certain activities. At this date no new regulations have been written, so there is no federal legislation to protect heritage wrecks outside National Parks.

First Nation sites pre 1846 are automatically protected under the Heritage Conservation Act when in Provincial waters.

### **Exploration, Documentation & Preservation work completed in Victoria Region**

The UASBC has been the principal organization documenting the submerged cultural resources in the South Island area. Our work is done on a volunteer basis assisted with occasional small grants for specific projects. Our first formal work began on the wreck of the SS Iroquois that sank off Sidney BC in 1911. The UASBC found and surveyed the site in 1977 and nominated it for provincial heritage designation status in 1978. In 1987 the UASBC returned to the South Island to conduct an inventory of historic shipwrecks off South Vancouver Island area. The result was a published report documenting 17 shipwreck sites off Southern Vancouver Island in 1990.

We returned to the South Island in 2020 and are currently working to update our 1990s work which included using new technology and examining new sites.



Photogrammetry Model of SS Barnard Castle. Courtesy Ewan Anderson

In 1985 Norm Alexander Easton examined the First Nation reef net fishery at the Becher Bay and in Bedwell Harbour while doing his master's Thesis at the University of Victoria. He was able to confirm the location of reef net fishing sites and confirmed that hundreds of abandoned anchor stones lie on the seafloor at places like Becher Bay. The UASBC hopes to further Norm's work by collaborating with First Nations in areas with Reef Net sites.

In 2000, Transport Canada commissioned a survey of heritage resources in Esquimalt and Victoria harbours in preparation for transferring various facilities to the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority. This report identifies 14 potential wreck sites, but only 5 locations were verified.

In 2002 Maritime Heritage Consulting (Charles Moore) completed an Underwater Archaeological Investigation at Rodd Point Jetty, Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Site.

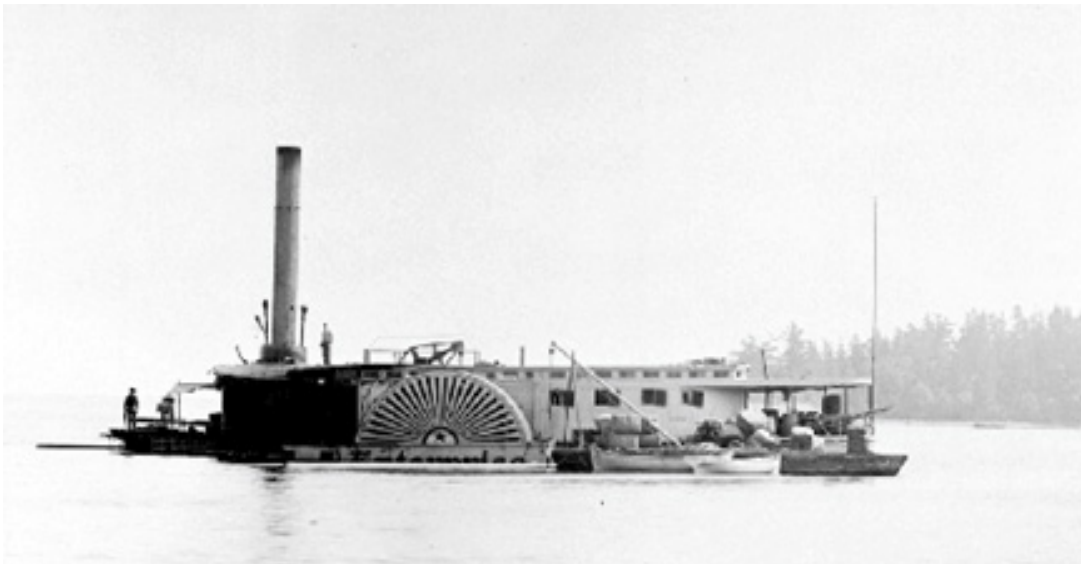
The area beneath a proposed dock development was investigated to ensure no pre-contact material might be contained in the inter-tidal sediments and no historic structures would be impacted.



In 2005 Millennia Research Ltd. Completed and Archaeological Overview Assessment of the Underwater Routing for a proposed Juan de Fuca Transmission Line running from Victoria to Port Angeles. No cultural features were found along the proposed route.

In 2011 Charles Moore and Andrew Mason experimented with side scan technology to try map reef net sites in the Becher Bay area. In less than three hours the survey successfully mapped a reef-net site recorded in 1985 by diving archaeologists over many hours.

Most recently the Department of National defence contracted Golder & Associates to document potential submerged cultural resources in Esquimalt Harbour in advance of dredging operations. Archaeologists have been on site during the actual dredging process and have recorded what and where cultural material is found.



“Wreck of the SS Enterprise off Ten Mile Point near Victoria.” Photograph by Maynard, July 1885. BC Archives Call No. A-00070. Courtesy Royal British Columbia Museum Corporation.

## Observations

The British Columbia Heritage Conservation Act should be amended to provide protection for submerged cultural resources that are not currently listed, such as locomotives, rail cars vehicles, wagons, mine sites etc.

Parks Canada is the agency responsible for writing the WAHVA Section 131 regulation to protect and preserve heritage wrecks and issue permits for certain activities in Federal Waters. This work was started in 2019 but has not progressed. It should be finished in a timely manner.

The UASBC has installed underwater interpretive plaques on several South Island shipwrecks but there are more to do. The UASBC also installed an underwater interpretive trail on the Barnard Castle wreck. The brochure is out of print and some of the plaques have deteriorated. The damage plaques should be replaced, and the brochure reprinted with the new photogrammetry graphics.

There is a definite need to raise awareness about the South Island submerged cultural heritage.

A few ideas include:

- Developing a museum exhibit to showcase the stories of local shipwrecks.
- Include shipwreck sites on eco and whale watching tours.
- Develop a school program for students on submerged cultural heritage.
- Continue adding wreck sites to the UASBC wreck map.
- Not discussed above, but much more research is required to fully understand how sea level changes have affected people, for example Esquimalt Harbour would have been dry land prior to 4500 years ago.
- There is a need for a regional archaeological facility to showcase recovered artifacts, provide some assistance to preserve items recovered from salt water and act as a repository for key artifacts.

## Resources

- Claxon, Nicholas. *To Fish as Formerly: A Resurgent Journey back to the Saanich Reef Net Fishery*. Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at University of Victoria 2015.
- Easton, Norm. *The Underwater Archaeology of Straits Salish Reef-netting*. Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts at University of Victoria 1985.
- Eldridge, Morley et al. Juan de Fuca Transmission Line. *Archaeological Overview Assessment Underwater Routing*. Victoria: Millennia Research Limited 2005.
- Marc, Jacques. *Historic Shipwrecks of Southern Vancouver Island*. Vancouver: UASBC, 1990
- Moore, Charles. *Underwater Archaeological Investigations at the Rodd Point Jetty, Fort Rodd Hill National Historic Site*. Coquitlam: Maritime heritage Consulting 2002.
- Moore, Charles & Mason, Andrew. *Demonstration Survey of Prehistoric Reef-Net Sites with Sidescan Sonar, near Becher Bay, British Columbia, Canada*. Portsmouth: International Journal of Nautical Archaeology 2012 41.1: 179–189

A history of the area around Victoria

<https://communityfoundations.ca/ahead-of-allin2019-understanding-the-area/>

Coast Salish Reef-net Fishery, Part 1

<https://www.historylink.org/file/21237>

The Haultain Valley 14-meter Ocean Standstill

<https://staff.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/2019/01/17/victoria-underwater/>