



Diver observing marine life near *Annapolis* in Howe Sound (right); HMCS *Annapolis* arriving in 2008 (below); Divers enjoy easy wreck access to *Annapolis* (lower left)

Text and photos by Barb Roy

For the local diving community, it is hard to imagine a full year has already passed since the sinking of the HMCS *Annapolis* in Halkett Bay, off Gambier Island in British Columbia, Canada. It only seemed like yesterday when crowds of onlookers gathered to watch the sinking on 4 April 2015. In little over two minutes, the ship was on the bottom, and Howe Sound had its first substantial wreck at 371ft (113m) in length! Divers joined in from around the northwest to be one of the first to dive the new underwater reef of steel, keeping local dive charter operators busy for months to follow.



*Annapolis Anniversary*  
**British Columbia's newest wreck celebrates first year**

ready have many bookings for 2016 and visibility has really been good since last summer.”

Breckman also agreed the new wreck has without a doubt contributed to the local economy by attracting new divers to the area, similar to other artificial reefs put down around coastal BC by the Artificial Reef Society of British Columbia (ARSBC). “Yes, for sure it has contributed as the media attention on the *Annapolis* has let divers know that there is a great artificial reef in close proximity, which is very inviting to new customers from Washington and Alberta,” said Breckman.

Over the past year, Sea Dragon Charters (Seadragoncharters.com) has added snorkeling and kayaking tours in Howe Sound to their adventure tours. When asked if Jan and her husband Kevin has

had a chance to dive on the new wreck, she replied:

“Of course, we have both been diving on the wreck! I actually cried when the wreck was first being towed from Long Bay to Halkett Bay, because it meant the project that we had been working on for eight years was actually going to happen, and the blood, sweat and tears would all be worth it. I cried again when she actually went down perfectly on sinking day, and I cried one more time in my mask when I was on my first dive right after the sinking. The fact that this artificial reef is shallower than most of the other artificial reefs makes it great for training and beginner divers can also partake because there are plenty of areas shallower than 60ft (18m) that they can explore safely.”

Indeed, the wreck is somewhat shallower than the other retired military ships, making it very accessible year round. According to reports, the bow is to the south at around 105ft (60ft at top) and the stern to the north at 98ft (77ft at top) with plenty of the other sections in 35 to 65ft (10.5-20m) of water. As with the other artificial reefs scuttled by the ARSBC, large holes throughout the vessel make it easy for divers to see inside the wreck and watch how marine critters begin to take hold. Just make sure you are trained for penetration diving if you wish to venture inside.

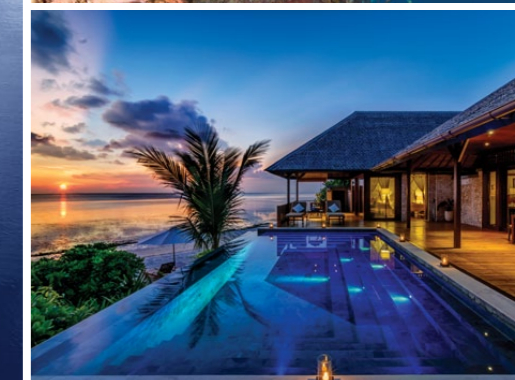
**Marine life**

“The ship already has lots of life,” added Breckman. “The Vancouver Aquarium’s project ABIS has already identified well



According to Jan Breckman, co-owner of Sea Dragon Charters out of Horseshoe Bay, business continues to be strong a year later: “Yes, it looks like another great year is coming up! It takes time for dive stores and trip leaders to organize group charters, so we will continue to have new business for some time. We al-





Howe Sound is full of color and life (above); Volunteers like local divers Wayne and Barb (left) helped clean and prepare *Annapolis* for sinking; Welcome sign painted on inside of *Annapolis* (below)

and BC Parks. Project coordinators Doug Pemberton and Donna Gibbs are asking underwater photographers and videographers to contribute by sharing their experiences, photographs and videos whenever possible.

So far, sightings have included anemones, barnacles, gobies, shiner perch, hydroids, tubeworms and encrusting bryozoans. After a few months, diatoms, new hydroids, spot prawns, coonstripe shrimp, purple and mottled sea stars, rockfish, pollock, greenlings and sculpins were added, followed by red algae, spiral bryozoans, stout shrimp and pygmy rock crabs. For more information on the ABIS project, go to: [www.vancouveraquarium.org/act/research/annapolis](http://www.vancouveraquarium.org/act/research/annapolis).

### Diving

Another dive charter operator, Marc Palay of New World Diving,

Ltd, who also departs from Horse-shoe Bay, said: "We charter to the *Annapolis* three to four times a month with most of the divers being local, but a few groups coming from the US and Alberta. I would say we have 50 percent



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T. Marshall Mans





Jan and Kevin Breckman of Sea Dragon Charters



Dive boat for Sunshine Diving Tours (top right); Dive boat for New World Diving in Howe (right)

technical divers and 50 per cent recreational divers. Wreck diving courses have been very popular. I have also taken out a few handicap divers along the outside of the ship and they love it!"

For those of you who have never been diving in Howe Sound, there are plenty of other excellent dives as explained by Loretta Corbeil, owner of Sunshine Kayaking/ Sunshine Dive Charters (Sunshinekayaking.com): "Howe Sound is unique for diving as it has over 45 dive sites. We started doing dive

charters in Howe Sound after the HMCS *Annapolis* was sunk, then expanded the charters throughout Howe Sound. Our company has been in Gibsons Harbour for 25 years now. Most of the dive sites are only five to 20 minutes away with our charter boat."

Many of the charter operators work with local hotels to offer visiting divers a package deal similar to the one Sunshine Kayaking offers: "We work with Gibsons Garden Hotel, who offer special rates for divers including breakfast and provide a secure

place to wash and store the diving equipment. We also work with Sea Dog Divers Den, the local dive store in Sechelt, for air fills and rentals. Families can come and do a dive and then have a nice holiday here with other things to do like kayaking, fishing and sailing to accommodate the whole family."

A great reference for diving Howe Sound is the book written by Glen Dennison: *The Complete Guide to Diving Howe Sound Reefs and Islands by Boat*. Howe Sound is accessed from Mainland Vancouver, serviced by Vancouver International Airport (YVR). For those traveling to Gibsons from Horseshoe Bay, ferry reservations are recommended during the summer months. Gibsons Harbour is accessed via BC Ferries from Horseshoe Bay to Langdale (BCFerries.com).



### Support and growth

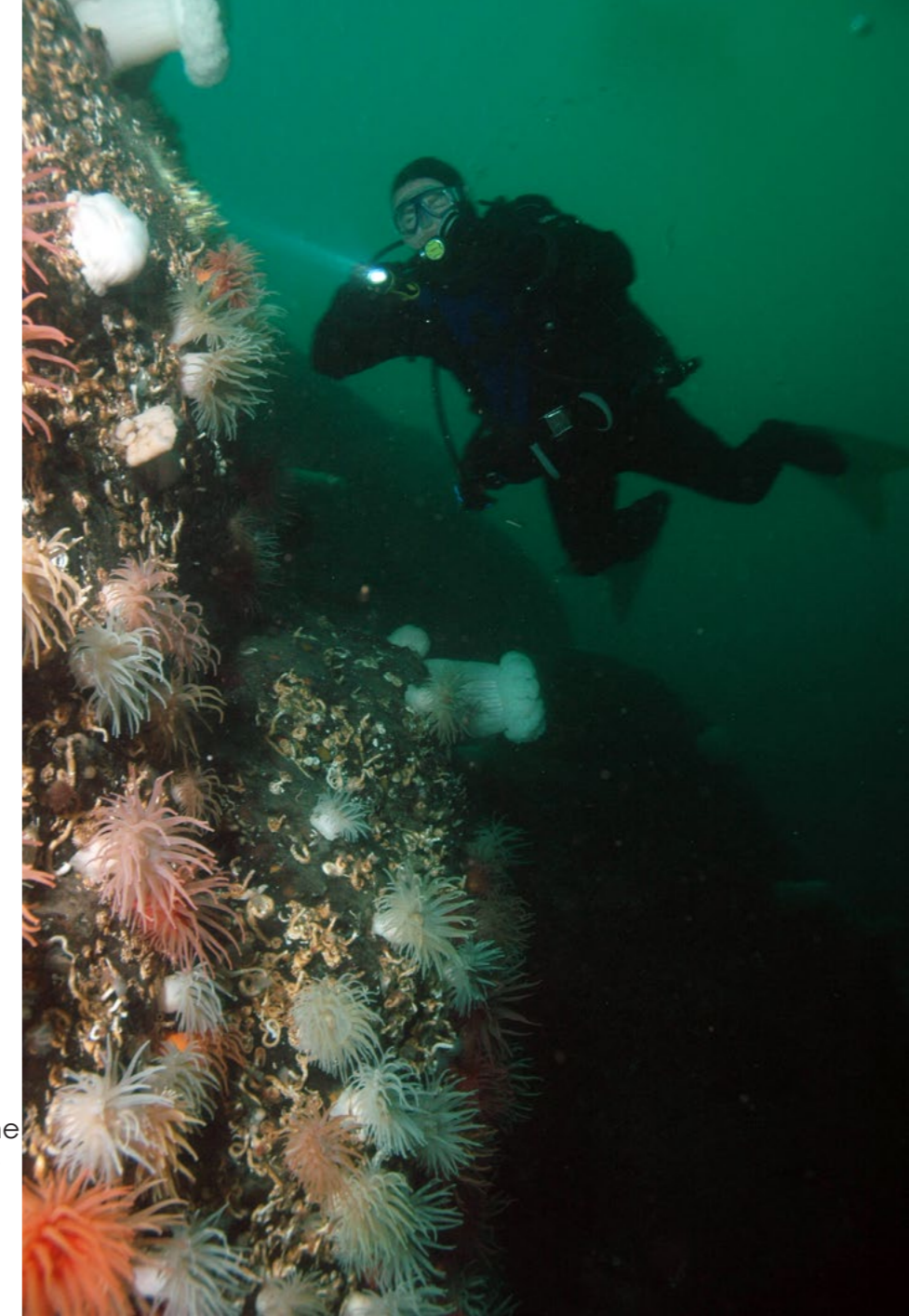
To assist with the upkeep of the artificial reefs around BC, one of the programs the ARSBC has implemented in cooperation with the Dive Industry Association of British Columbia is a voluntary \$20 annual tag fee. Divers receive a colorful, collectible small plastic tag to attach to their buoyancy vest (BCD) to show their support. Money from the program is used for replacing mooring lines, buoys and other needed maintenance on the wrecks. Tags are available from the charter operators.

One thing is for sure that I have heard from many of the charter operators, dive guides and divers who have been on the *Annapolis*, is that it takes

several dives to be able to see the whole ship. Keep in mind, the *Annapolis* is a helicopter-carrying destroyer escort with the hanger still intact. On both sides of the ship are covered walkways, similar to the Cape Breton, currently scuttled in Nanaimo off Snake Island. Perhaps one day the *Annapolis* will also have a thriving population of cloud sponge and feather stars.

For more detailed information and the history of this and other wrecks around British Columbia, go to the ARSBC website (Artificialreef.bc.ca). Have fun! ■

One day the *Annapolis* will resemble surrounding dive sites (upper and lower right)



View of Howe Sound atop the Stawamus Chief hiking trail





JOHN HILL / WIKEMEDIA COMMONS / CC BY-SA 3.0

HM Bark Endeavour replica in Cooktown

## Wreckage of HMS Endeavour located

**Captain James Cook's ship HMS Endeavour, used to explore Australia and last seen during the 1770s, likely discovered off US state of Rhode Island.**

Cook commanded the ship from 1768 to 1771 on his famous voyage mapping the uncharted waters of the south Pacific Ocean. The HMS Endeavour sailed around Cape Horn in Africa, and visited Tahiti, New Zealand and Australia. Cook explored Tonga, Easter Island, Norfolk Island, New Caledonia and Vanuatu on his second voyage. He was killed in 1779 during a trip to the Sandwich Islands, now known as Hawaii.

The Endeavour was sold and used to transport British troops before it met its watery grave—lost for more than two centuries. The ship—then renamed as the Lord Sandwich—was scuttled in Newport Harbor by British forces in the lead up to the 1778 Battle of Rhode Island during the Ameri-

can Revolution.

Now the Rhode Island Marine Archeology Project (RIMP) says it has managed to identify the wreckage of the Lord Sandwich in Newport Harbor, off the state of Rhode Island.

### Sunk in shallow waters

"The American army was assembled on the mainland and the French sent a fleet to help," said Dr Kathy Abbass, the executive director of Rhode Island Marine Archaeology Project. "The British knew they were at great risk so they ordered 13 ships out to be scuttled in a line to blockade the city. They were sunk in fairly shallow waters." According to RIMP, the wreckages are spread across nine different sites, and one group of five ships includes the Lord Sandwich transport, formerly Captain James Cook's Endeavour.

The organisation is now launching a campaign to finance the excavation process. ■

SOURCE: RHODE ISLAND MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

## British WWII sub located in the Med

**A team led by Genoa-based diver wreck-hunter, Massimo Domenico Bordone, found the remains at about 100m deep, about five nautical miles east of the isle of Tavolara, off Sardinia.**

The wreckage is reportedly in quite good condition with only

its prow showing damage from the explosion. In all likelihood, experts say the vessel's inner chamber was not flooded as it sank

The HMS P 311 left Malta on 28 December 1942, on a mission to destroy the Italian battleships Trieste and Gorizia as they lay at anchor in the port of La Maddalena, located on an island of the same name off the northern coast of Sardinia. The

sub vanished without a trace after it was believed to have been hit by a mine in the gulf of Olbia on or around 2 January 1943.

### Positive identification

P 311 was the only boat of her class never to be given a name. She was due to have been named Tutenkhamen but was lost before this was formally done. Paola Pegoraro of the

L'Orso diving club, which provided logistics for Bondone's shipwreck search operation, told The Telegraph that Bondone was able to positively identify the submarine as the P311 by the two Chariot-style "human torpedoes" that are affixed to the outside of the vessel.

A Royal Navy spokesperson said they are examining records to determine whether or not this is indeed the Royal Navy submarine. The Royal Navy said it expects the wreck to be treated with respect while they work to confirm the identity of the submarine. If confirmed the HMS P 311 would almost certainly not be moved from its final resting place, irrespective of whether or not bodies are sealed inside: "Once a military vessel sinks it becomes a war grave and is left where it lies." ■

SOURCE: LA NUOVA SARDEGNA

The sub was believed to have been struck by a mine during its mission.



MASSIMO DOMENICO BORDONE VIA SCUBAPORTAL



HMS P311, sister ship HMS Tantalus



MASSIMO DOMENICO BORDONE VIA SCUBAPORTAL

The wreckage is reportedly in incredibly good condition.



The now decommissioned Royal Australian Navy frigate HMAS Sydney underway in 2013



US NAVY / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / PUBLIC DOMAIN

## Australia to get a new artificial reef... or two

The Australian defence minister announced Ex-HMAS ships *Tobruk* and *Sydney* will be offered to the states and territories in June for the creation of dive wrecks.

HMAS *Tobruk* was retired last year after 35 years of service, including many humanitarian missions. She was launched in 1980. During her 34-year operational history, *Tobruk* sailed over 947,000 nautical miles (1,754,000km or 1,090,000mi), and was deployed on 26 major operations.

Gulf War, the war in Afghanistan, and the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and has completed two round-the-world voyages. She was decommissioned on 7 November 2015.

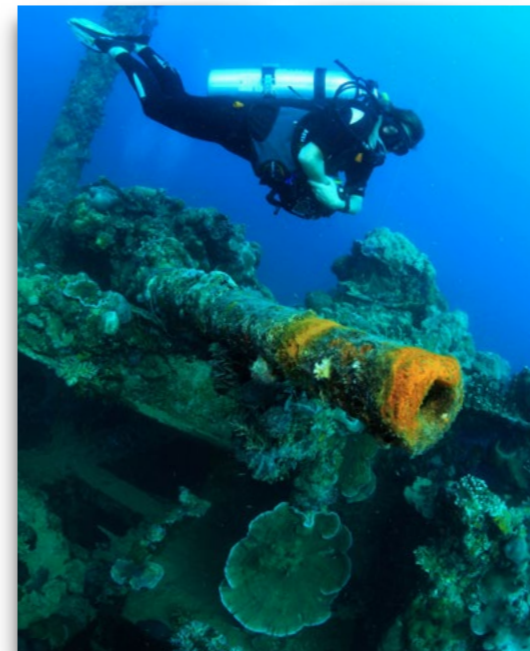
### Lots of interest

Several entities have called for the ships to be scuttled as dive wrecks. Federal Member of Parliament Keith Pitt has spent several years campaigning for the scuttling of a warship in Hervey Bay as a tourist attraction, with *Tobruk* his preferred vessel.

HMAS *Sydney* was laid down and launched in 1980. *Sydney* has been involved in Australian responses to the 1987 Fijian coups d'état and the Bougainville uprising. The frigate was deployed to the Persian Gulf on five occasions in support of United States operations during the

Another proposal has come from the community of St Helens on Tasmania's east coast, which wants the ship to be scuttled at Skeleton Bay. The Whyalla City Council has also expressed interest in using either the HMAS *Sydney* or *Tobruk* as an artificial reef in the Spencer Gulf.

The cost of preparing the ships, which includes the removal of asbestos and other materials, will be roughly AU\$10 million, with government funding required to get the project off the ground. It will likely take up to three years. ■  
SOURCE: DAILY TELEGRAPH



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