

# The Wrecks and Reefs of Porteau Cove Provincial Park

A Summary of Reef Elements, 1971 to 2013

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Porteau Cove has a long history as a site for recreational scuba diving. It dates back to the 1960s when it was a popular weekend destination for Vancouver-area dive clubs. Dungeness crabs and lingcod were favoured catch of early "frogmen."

## **TIRE REEF**

In 1971, divers constructed a primitive artificial reef using tires configured in a large necklace comprising over 700 automobile and truck tires. The tires were assembled on shore by tying them together rim to rim with rope, then the entire necklace was dragged out into 10 to 15 metres of water.

**Status:** The tire reef, the oldest component of the artificial reef complex at Porteau, provides shelter for a large variety of marine creatures. Lingcod, rockfish, gobies, ronquils and perch live on this part of the reef, and several types of seaweeds and marine invertebrates such as anemones live attached to the tires. The interior cavities of the tires provide security for several species of shrimps, including the striped shrimp and juveniles of the commercially important two-spot prawn.

## **"CAPE SPRUCE"**

On February 17, 1980, the 34-metre wooden-hulled **Cape Spruce** was scuttled at Porteau to provide additional interest for divers. The **Cape Spruce** was built in 1942, served as an American naval vessel and ended its days as an ice barge servicing fish boats in the Strait of Georgia. The **Cape Spruce** was scuttled in 10 metres of water, its stern toward shore.

**Status:** The wooden-hulled **Cape Spruce** deteriorated quickly under the attack of boring shipworms and has been reduced to a mere skeleton of metal components, the most interesting of which is the rudder quadrant. The remains are not frequently dived because they are not marked by a buoy.

## **CONCRETE PIPE REEF**

On February 17, 1980, the same day that the **Cape Spruce** was scuttled, Dillingham Construction dumped a large number of concrete pipe sections, some concrete slabs and a couple of massive concrete columns at the inshore end of the tire reef. One of the six-metre-long concrete columns landed on end with a slight tilt and has been dubbed "The Leaning Tower of Porteau." Its peak actually breaks the surface on very low tides.

**Status:** The Concrete Pipe Reef is well colonized by marine life, with many invertebrates and fishes living among the nooks and crannies provided by this material. Schools of striped and pile perch are common on this part of the reef, as well as lingcod. This area has become a significant lingcod spawning area.

## "FORT LANGLEY"

On September 12, 1980, the 16-metre wooden-hulled **Fort Langley** was scuttled north of the **Cape Spruce** in about 15 metres of water. The **Fort Langley** was built in 1913 and served as a passenger ferry on the Fraser River. It was later used as a live-aboard vessel.

**Status:** The wooden-hulled **Fort Langley** was in poor condition when scuttled and did not take long to succumb to the ravages of shipworms. Within a year the hull was nearly gone, leaving only the 10-tonne concrete block, which was used to sink the hull. Now only the rough outline of the hull can be seen on the bottom and little remains of interest. The site is not often dived because it is not marked with a buoy and is difficult to locate.

## CONCRETE BLOCK REEF

On September 12, 1980, the day the **Fort Langley** was scuttled, Dillingham Construction dumped about a dozen massive (10- to 45-tonne) slabs near the offshore end of the tire reef. These large pieces of construction rubble landed in a scattered heap on the bottom in 15 metres of water, creating numerous habitats for marine creatures.

**Status:** This part of the artificial reef supports the most diverse assemblage of marine life at Porteau. In a 1990 biophysical inventory of conspicuous marine life by Subsea Enterprises Inc., 64 species of invertebrates, 18 species of seaweeds and 20 species of fishes were observed. By comparison, non-enhanced areas of "natural" substrate near the artificial reef supported only 11 species of invertebrates, three species of seaweeds and eight species of fishes.

## "NAKAYA"

On August 3, 1985, the 41-metre wooden-hulled **Nakaya** was scuttled near the northern edge of the diving area at Porteau. Commissioned as the minesweeper **Cordova**, the vessel was retired in the 1950s and spent its final years as a floating camp. In August 1989 several modifications were made by Subsea Enterprises to the **Nakaya** in order to increase diver safety. These included installing a diver float over the wreck, cutting an access hole into the accommodation area and rigging a penetration guide line through the inside of the hull.

**Status:** The wooden hull of the **Nakaya** deteriorated significantly over the past decade and is no longer of much interest to divers.

## **H-BEAM REEF (JUNGLE GYM)**

On March 3, 1990, about half a dozen large steel H-beam frames salvaged from the BC Ferries dock demolition at Horseshoe Bay were sunk by Subsea Enterprises near the seaward end of the tire reef, adding a large, three-dimensional element to the artificial reef.

**Status:** The Jungle Gym is gradually becoming encrusted with marine life, including tubeworms, anemones and barnacles. Schools of tube snouts and shiner seaperch also frequent this part of the reef.

## **"CENTENNIAL III"**

On November 28, 1991, the steel dredge tender **Centennial III** was scuttled just south of the seaward end of the H-beam reef in 15 metres of water. The 11-metre, 35-gross-tonne **Centennial III** was donated to BC Parks by Fraser River Pile and Dredge and prepared for reef use by Subsea Enterprises. Three large dredge floats donated by Fraser River Pile and Dredge were also sunk on this date near the inshore end of the tire reef.

**Status:** The **Centennial III** is a popular dive site and has gradually become colonized by marine life, including anemones and lingcod. The hull is marked by a yellow buoy anchored near its bow, so it is readily located by divers.

## **FERROCEMENT HULL (McCALL REEF)**

On November 28, 1991, a 15-metre, 10-tonne ferrocement sailboat hull was scuttled just to the south of the **Centennial III**. The hull was donated to BC Parks by Mr. and Mrs. McCall of West Vancouver. The hull lies on its starboard side in 15 metres of water with its bow facing shoreward.

**Status:** McCall Reef is colonized with marine life such as tunicates and anemones. The port gunnel is entirely overgrown with plumose anemones.

## **"S.S. GRANTHALL"**

On March 11, 1992, the 28-metre, 164-gross-tonne steel tug **Granthall** was scuttled just to the north of the Concrete Block Reef in 10- to 15-metre depths. The hull was donated to BC Parks early in 1992 and prepared for artificial reef use by Subsea Enterprises with the assistance and cooperation of BC Ferries at their Deas Dock facility on the Fraser River.

**Status:** The hull of this tug has become heavily overgrown with marine life, including tunicates, bryozoans, anemones and crinoids. It has become one of the most popular attractions at Porteau since it is shallow and easily explored by novice divers. The **Granthall** is marked by a yellow buoy attached to its bow, so it is easily located by divers.