

## Passion, Partnership, and Exploration: GUE and the Local Community

By Guy Shockey



*The wild west coast, and residents, of BC*

Every GUE class starts with an introduction of students and instructors, and invariably the discussion turns to why people learned to dive. In my experience, the most common answer to this question is the desire to explore the underwater world. This is not surprising considering that seventy percent of our world is covered by water and our natural inclination is to see “what is around the next corner.” This means that to explore the greater part of our world we need to become divers. In fact, when GUE was formed, the founders recognized that maintaining a link between education and the passion for

exploration was one of the most important goals of the nascent organization, and this perspective has been maintained to this day.

Before the advent of GUE, dive training remained segregated from exploration. Today, however, GUE divers can participate in exploration projects around the world to solidify, refine, and augment their dive training. Doing so is fairly easy given the standardization that is a trademark of the organization. As GUE grows and matures, these opportunities will increase, and the concept of a “global” approach to exploration will become more and more common.





*SET members examine the proposed survey site.*

I live and dive regularly on Vancouver Island, which is located off the west coast of British Columbia, Canada. The waters of the Pacific Northwest are exciting to say the least, and our maritime history includes a plethora of shipwrecks and maritime accidents. It has always been a challenging environment for shipping and, as a result, it has yielded extensive exploration opportunities.

In 1975, the Underwater Archeological Society of British Columbia (UASBC) was formed with the intention of surveying and documenting many of the wrecks in the Strait of Georgia, the body of water that separates mainland British Columbia from Vancouver Island. Approximately five years later, the UASBC began a methodical program of surveying regional shipwreck sites. Their purpose was to identify and evaluate historic wrecks in order to document their present condition and monitor them as they aged. The UASBC also hoped to provide information to the Government of British Columbia as to how to best ensure the preservation of these wreck sites.

Historically, the UASBC has been composed primarily of recreational divers, and their surveys were, for the most part, done well within recreational diving limits. However, not all wrecks in the waters around Vancouver Island are found within these limits. Our topography is similar to that of the fjords of Norway, and Vancouver Island is nearly bisected at several points by deep fjords, thus creating considerable shoreline. As a result, the UASBC was unable to dive many of the wrecks for which they had positions.

A few years ago, a snapshot of the current state of underwater archeology in British Columbia would have shown that the UASBC was a group of dedicated explorers with a solid track

record of documenting and surveying wrecks, complete with an infrastructure that included ties to our government. The UASBC also possessed the coordinates of many wrecks that they were not able to dive and survey themselves. At the same time, this snapshot would have revealed a growing community of GUE divers with technical training and the knowledge of how to safely conduct dives to the depths of these wrecks. This second group was also driven by an all-consuming passion to explore; all they needed were the wrecks...

The match seemed made in heaven.

Lucky for all, one of the most active members of the GUE community had also been a UASBC member since his early dive training. He immediately saw the opportunities for an alliance between the two groups and began encouraging other GUE divers to join the UASBC. He also encouraged GUE members to take Nautical Archeology Society (NAS) survey courses through the UASBC.

The relationship continued to develop as more and more GUE members took part in regular UASBC events and began working on some of the deeper surveys. These efforts finally culminated in the search for the *Famous*, documented in *Quest* 12.1. It was clear that GUE training had paid off; we were empowered to safely work on deeper survey projects and contribute meaningfully to the efforts of UASBC.

Today we are an active community, represented by SET (Shipwreck Exploration Team), working hand in hand with the UASBC; we regularly participate in recreational surveys, as well as conduct surveys on some of the deeper wrecks. GUE members



participate in UASBC meetings and have given presentations on global exploration efforts that have taken place in locations such as Truk Lagoon and the Red Sea. One of our GUE members is also an active member of the UASBC Board and has injected new energy into the organization. We have progressed from “trial status” to full-fledged members of the UASBC.

By joining forces with the UASBC, we have been able to keep our passion for underwater exploration alive and at the same time provide a useful service to an existing organization that shares similar goals. I strongly believe that these sorts of opportunities exist around the world and it is simply a case of finding them. Any entrepreneur will tell you that start-up businesses are the hardest of all. Often, if you can identify an existing organization that shares similar goals, it can be easier to combine skill sets and

resources for the benefit of both. In our case, becoming involved with the UASBC has been both exciting and a lot of fun, while at the same time providing ample opportunity to pursue our passion for exploration.

In addition to its involvement with UASBC, SET has also become a GUE affiliate, thereby encouraging participation by GUE members around the world in our active exploration projects. We have also organized and staffed “precision buoyancy” classes designed to make surveys safer and more effective for all involved.

GUE divers with an interest in underwater exploration should explore their local communities to see what resources already exist. For those who live anywhere near water, there are probably existing maritime archeology groups with whom they may be able to combine energies. Also, the Nautical Archeology Society has a plethora of links and information and is a great place to begin research for existing exploration groups. Many universities, particularly those located near the ocean, have active scientific diver programs and most likely also have dive clubs that cross the line between “fun” diver and survey or marine biology diver.

It is unlikely that these organizations will be familiar with GUE, so GUE-trained divers interested in exploration will be faced with establishing their good faith through their actions. In my opinion, it is better to become involved in their work, make an effort, and let actions speak for themselves. This will require time and patience but will pay off in the long run as divers form relationships that foster opportunities. In our case, “technical divers” had approached the UASBC in the past but nothing much had become of it. These divers looked to the UASBC as a ready repository of shipwreck locations and did not choose to become active members of the UASBC by participating in ongoing projects. Our approach was markedly different and now, after establishing our credentials by our work and commitment, SET is an active and vibrant part of UASBC activities. This was demonstrated by the fact that the last NAS course of eight students consisted entirely of GUE divers.

GUE has always been committed to keeping alive the passion that first encouraged us to breathe underwater. Combining community efforts with those of existing exploration groups can be a terrific way to do this. Good luck and happy exploring!



C. Fenton

*A project member prepares a scooter for a dive.*

