

Discover the underwater charms of

Newfoundland



Many millions of years ago, a piece of a land broke away from the ancient continent, Gondwanaland, from the place we now know as Morocco, and traveled a long journey westward until it collided with the North

American continent a bit to the south of Greenland. The first Europeans who visited this new world in 986 A.D. were the Icelandic Vikings under the command

of Thorfinn Karlsefni, but the newcomers did not settle the area for a long time. Five hundred years later, on June, 24, 1497, eighteen British sailors on the crew ship *Matthew* under the command of Genoese Captain Giovanni Caboto (in English, John Cabot) made the long crossing over the Atlantic Ocean in search of a sea route to China, but landed instead on the coast of an unknown island. They raised the Union Jack—the British flag—on this island and named it New Found Land.



Text by Andrey Bizyukin
Photos by Andrey Bizyukin,
Ingo Vollmer, Debbie and Rick Stanley

No, this is not French Polynesia –
Here, one can find many times more fas-
cinating and exciting diving adventures!
--- Andrey Bizyukin

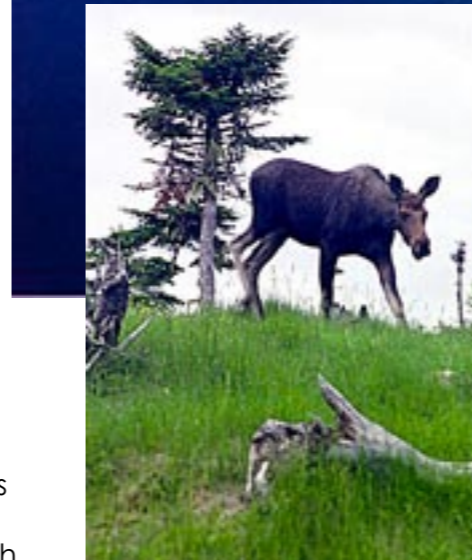


Newfy

LEFT:
Diving with iceberg

TOP RIGHT: Aerial view
of Bell Island and Con-
ception Bay

INSET: Curious New-
foundland moose



After coming back to Bristol, John Cabot informed the authorities that "the lands, which I have found, are not rich with gold, but a lot of fish inhabits the seas along coast." For this discovery, King Henry VII awarded John Cabot the premium prize of ten pounds and an annuity of twenty pounds sterling, which established the British claim to this territory until 1949. Newfoundland remained the first overseas colony of the British Empire. Today, the replica of the *Matthew* sits proudly in Bristol Harbor for all to see.

Newfoundland is the biggest of the Atlantic Canadian provinces, the mother land for hundreds of thousands of caribou, millions of birds, the famous breed of black diving dogs and moose, which can be found walking on motorways. Human population on the island numbers half a million inhabitants (many with Irish origins), ten thousand of whom are divers. Newfoundlanders differentiate themselves from the Canadian nation. "The Irish spirit and

traditions are still strong here," the old residents tell us with pride. Local residents respond with pleasure to the

nickname *Newfy*.

Newfy are benevolent, quiet, socially balanced and relaxed people, speaking one of the oldest English language dialects with the Newfoundland accent.

The capital of the island, St. Johns, is the most eastern port and the oldest city in North America. The city is filled with great history: Water Street – the first and oldest street of North America; the Titanic museum with exhibits of artifacts lifted from the sunken giant; Signal Hill with Marconi's legendary tower—a symbol of the

technological achievements of the last century when in 1901 the first transatlantic radio signals sounded in the heretofore silent ether of the planet; Cape Spear—the most eastern extrem-



Whale's greeting—different forms of life have different ways of saying *hello*

PHOTO BY TINA OLIVERO COURTESY OF OCEAN QUEST CHARTERS



ity of America; and the Bay of St. Johns—the first reliable harbour on the ocean away from Europe.

The weather of the northern Atlantic region does not

indulge in permanency. The thick fog, snow or rain can suddenly be replaced by strong winds or a storm or by sunshine in the blue cloudless sky above the sea where

Newfoundland

icebergs race swiftly past the coast. Here, there are plenty of inns and bars, where it is possible to meet adventurers and seamen from around the world.

Natural treasures

The nature here is familiar to me as it is an exact copy of the central part of Russia—birches, fur-trees, mountain ash, lilac, clover and rose-bay. Only the sea and underwater world are unique.

Where two powerful ocean currents meet—the cold Labrador current and the warm Gulf Stream—a unique underwater biodiversity is created.

Hundreds of species—sea-weed, fish, sponges, anemones, jellyfish and starfish, molluscs, octopus, lobster and crabs, seals, white whales, narwhales, sharks and slopes—live and breed here. Newfoundland's Great Banks, one of the richest places in the world's ocean for fish, provides a habitat for the largest colony of sea birds on Earth as well as a population of over 5000 whales.

At the end of June and July, the sea giants, who have over eaten capelin and cuttlefish, start to play. They wave huge chest fins, clap tails and jump out of the water, attracting a human



LEFT AND RIGHT: Great diving photo luck—an infrequent meeting with a friendly narwhale

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Newfoundland

LEFT: Whale, just before breaching, races upwards towards the surface of the sea



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Amazing and exciting moments for lucky "whale-tail-watchers"



audience of enthusiastic gapers.

Aside from the whales' performances, tourists and divers adore the parade of Greenlandic icebergs. Year round, Labrador's current brings hundreds of the ice monsters that have broken away from a continental glacier. The age of some of these icebergs can reach up to ten thousand years, and they can weigh up to two hundred thousand tons. Nine-tenths of icebergs are under water, therefore one must immerse oneself with an aqualung to catch a glimpse of the blue bulky freakish forms of ice leaving the sea abyss. Nobody is left indifferent after such an experience.

Diving with whales

The North Atlantic is an area of risky diving. Too much depends on quickly changing weather conditions. The diving season in Newfoundland is from May until November. During the rest of

the year, the bays become covered in ice.

Rick and Debbie Stanley, our kind dive masters and engineers of the Sea Quest Company, have constructed a magnificent two-floor hotel for divers with a great view over the sea bay and islands. Strong wind and rain remind us that it is time to go out

and dive. "It is my swimming pool," Rick tells us with pride as he shows us the bay, which is covered with fog. He adores his 18-seat dive boat, and while imitating Schumacher, flies out onto the bay in the huge brightly coloured red inflatable Zodiac with 150-strong Mercury engine, overtaking the wind.



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Rick chases some whales and comes nearer to them—a distance of a few meters. It is possible to observe the behaviour of these sea giants indefinitely—to examine their huge fins, tails and backs and to admire their perfection. With any great divers' luck and a happy coincidence of circumstances, one can also dive together with them.

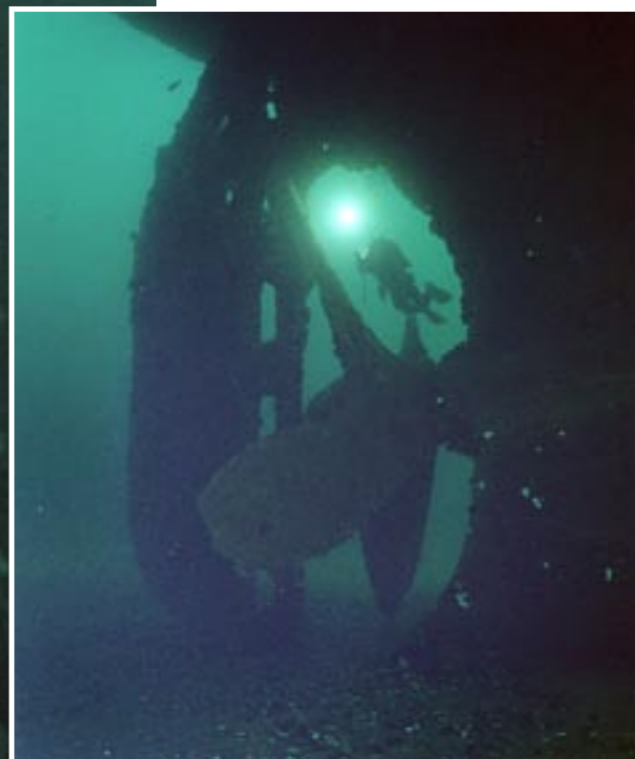
Wrecks

The most popular place for diving is a coastal zone of Bell island, named so because of a rock located near to it that outwardly resembles a bell. Here, at depths of up to 45 meters, four "smart" military transport shipwrecks lie on the sea floor. The history of their occurrence and the events leading up to their sinking are full of drama and military riddles.

During the Second World War, this small island located in Conception Bay, became a strategically important military base. The reason for this was that the largest iron ore mines in North America were located here—huge labyrinths and tunnels located two hundred meters down in the earth were excavated lower than sea level. The mines were a source of ore with an iron content up to 50-60 percent.

Prior to the war, Germany was a major purchaser of this ore. In 1939, Germans imported more than five hundred thousand tons. Clearly, that was a reason for the beginning of military operations. The role and importance of Bell island ore increased over time.

In addition, St. Johns became the gathering place for military transport escorts in the days before transports used the North Atlantic passage to England and Russia. Many Allied ships voyaged between



LEFT AND INSET:
Wrecks of Conception Bay

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comfort
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superior insulation

"I did not get cold during the 14 day expedition diving in water temperatures of down to 2 degrees"

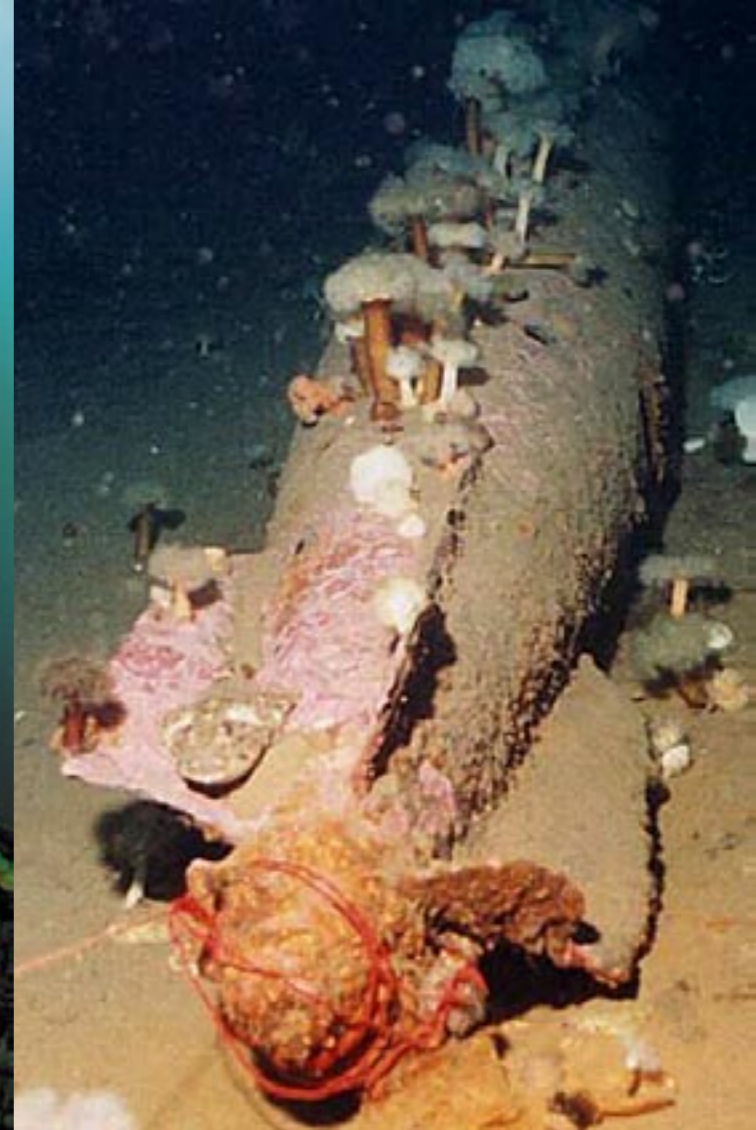
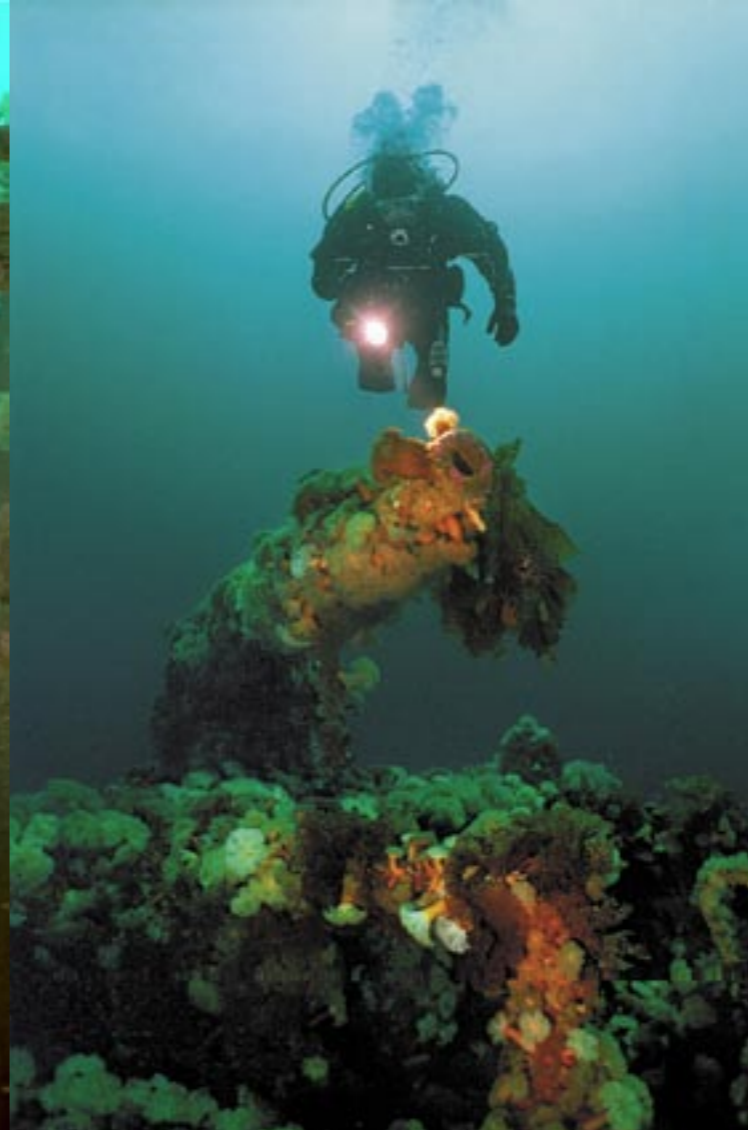
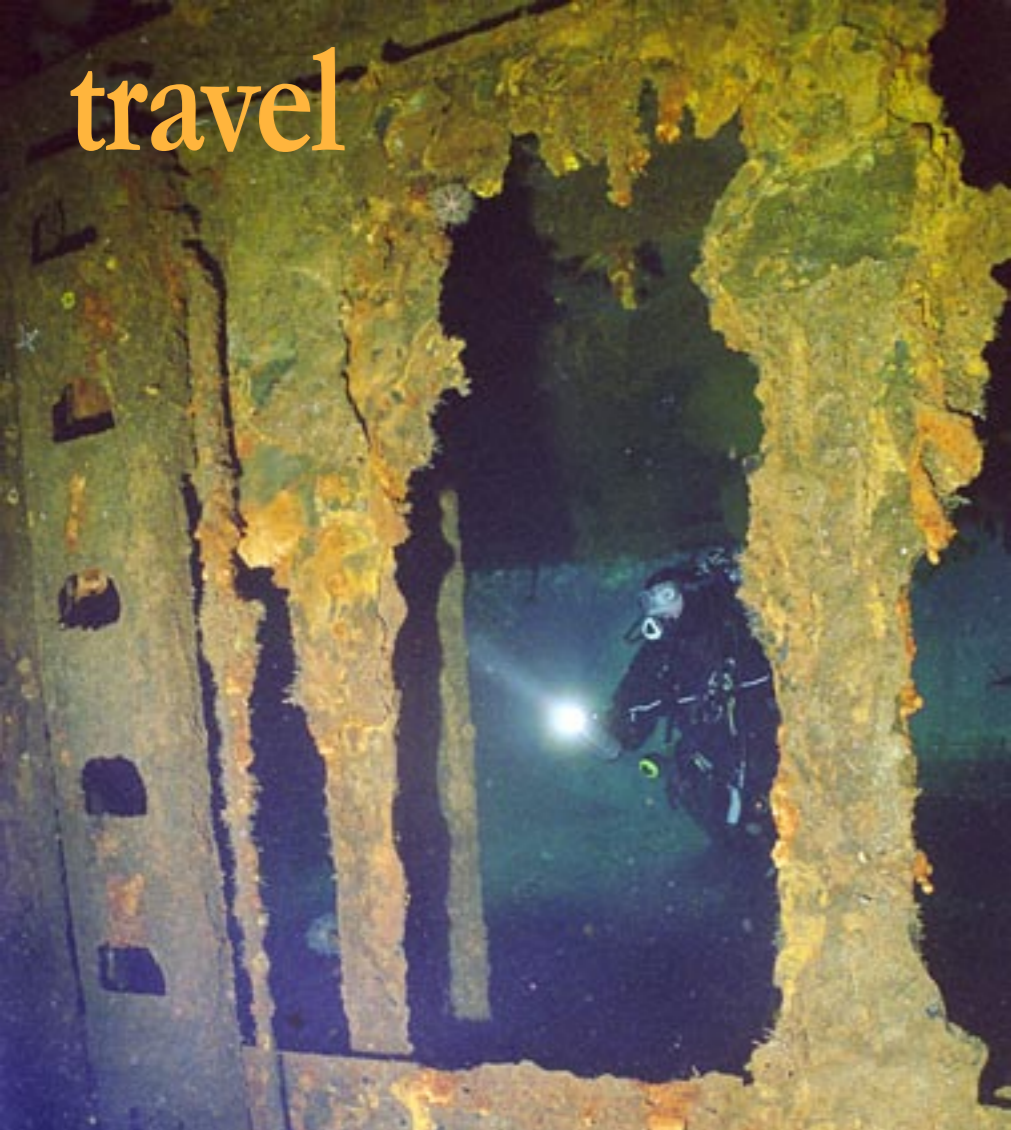
Phill Short, pioneering cave diver after a 14 day exploration of a cave system in Siberia.

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Newfoundland



ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE: Sunk wreck treasure of Bell Island - unexplored holds, cannons, unexploded torpedo and collection anchors

Bell, Newfoundland, and the great ports of the world continuously.

The Second World War began for Newfoundlanders on September 5th, 1942, when the British military transport ships, *Saganaga* and *Lord Strathcona*, which were standing at anchor in Lance Cove, were attacked and sunk by the German submarine *U-Boat 513*, IXC-type, led by Captain Rolf Ruggenberg.

Two months later, while taking advantage of the limited measures taken by British and Canadian Navy on navigational protection of ships, another German submarine *U-Boat 518*, of the same IXC type under the command of Captain Friedrich Wissmann, attacked and sunk the 140-meter British giant, *Rose Castle*, and the small French ship, *PLM 27* (Paris-Lyon-Marseilles), in the same place.

Two successful missions of German submarines left four "brilliant wrecks", according to our hosts, and two unexploded torpedoes, which have sunk in the sea, because their accumulators were faulty. Now, they are a source of inspiration and many an exciting conversation among wreck enthusiasts in the diving community.

"Why do you like to dive these wrecks?" we asked William Flaherty, our encyclopaedic erudite skipper and the local expert on the dive sites of Newfoundland.

"Imagine the bird's flight, when you fly in the sky above a city and examine the people, trees, streets and houses below. Precisely the same sensations I also suffer when I plunge into the depths to see the wreck. It seems to me that I see the wreck like a city—a sunken underwater

city. I am travelling on it and researching it. This is a unique feeling of flight, the freedom of movement in three dimensions, and the pleasure of the discovery, simultaneously. I have made about forty dives just on *Rose Castle* and still have not exhausted my curiosity as a researcher," said Bill.

Diving the wrecks

Having heard plenty of these stories, we decided that it was time to dive the wrecks immediately. Heavy fifteen liter tanks with 25% nitrox, a wide step into the water with a loud "pluh!!!" and a big splash of heavy lead-gray coloured water. The dry suit is excellent gear when it is made to measure. How comfortable it makes you feel in any body of water.

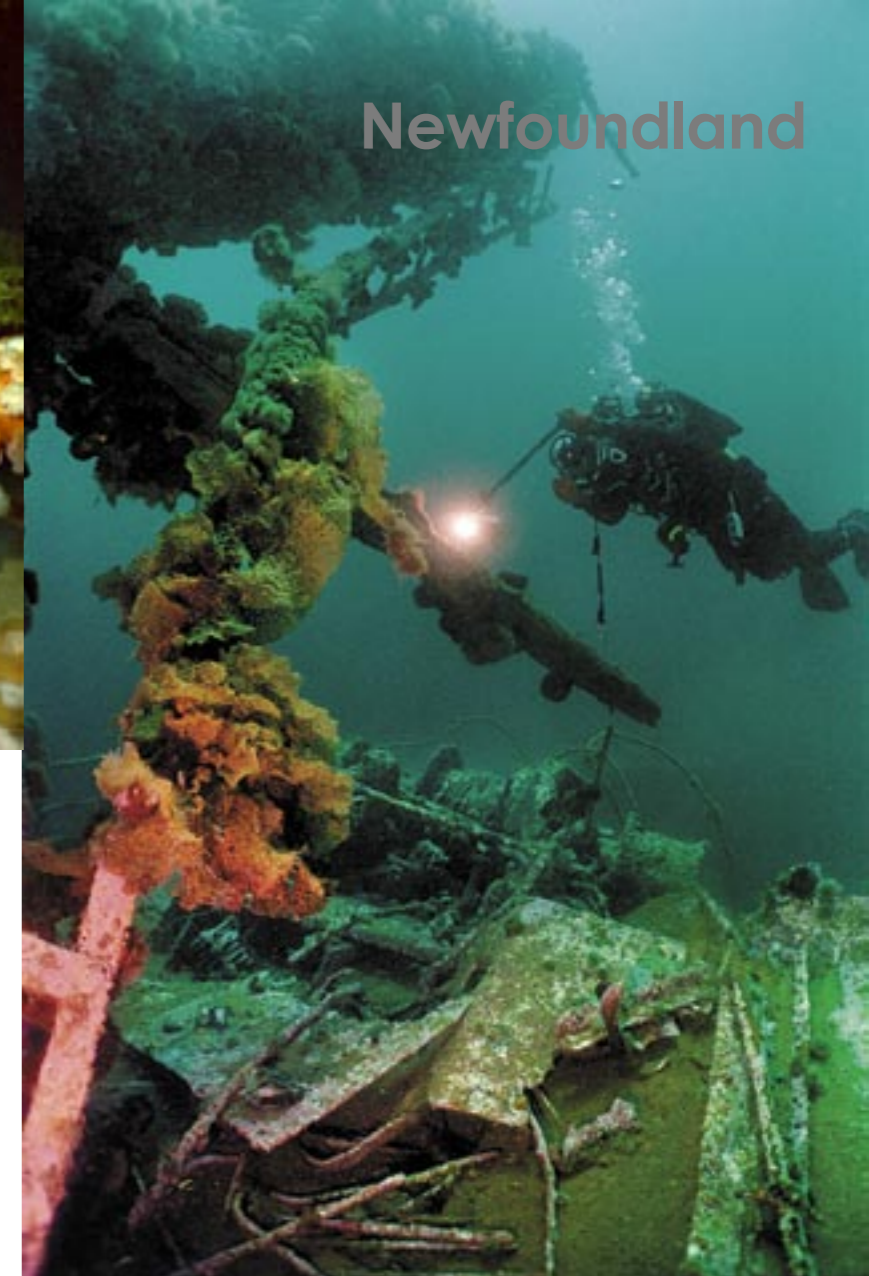
Submersion started along a line tied

to a bright red buoy on the surface. I admired the unusual transparency of the water and the solar beams that played in the depths.

At the depth of 15-20 meters, we could already see the huge sunken ship below. The bow deck of *Rose Castle* was directly under us. Bow reels and bulwark were visible. They had become overgrown with actiniums. The deck house, cabins, cock boat-beams, masts and funnels were all overgrown with anemones, but were still pleasing to the eye. At 35 meters, the water was so clear that the sunlight penetrated the deep very well, and there was no necessity for additional illumination.

My dive buddy today is the self-proclaimed "slowest trimix diver of Newfoundland" and a former US Navy diver.





He does it all very slowly, for ultimate safety, and fixes a decompression cylinder on the wreck deck. Only after that, do we start our underwater journey.

In the beginning, we find the huge aperture of a hold and after turning on our torches, we are immersed in the gloom. Pipes, ladders, cross-beams, heaps of rusty metal and crystal-clear water. We hang with neutral buoyancy in the darkness of the hold. In absolute blackness, we rummage the sides with the light beams of our torches. We try do not to sift up the silt mud or catch our SCUBA hoses on the wreckage.

A light from the opening of a turned-out section of the vessel is piercing the dark ahead of us. This is the place of the torpedo's impact.

We are not sure if the construction of the wreckage is safe enough to pass here, therefore we decide not to return to the surface through the exploded aperture, and instead, swim back the same way we came inside the wreck.

On the main deck, we are met again by sunlight. We mount our tanks above the deck to reduce

the decompression time, check the gas volume and decide to examine one of the top rooms of the vessel.

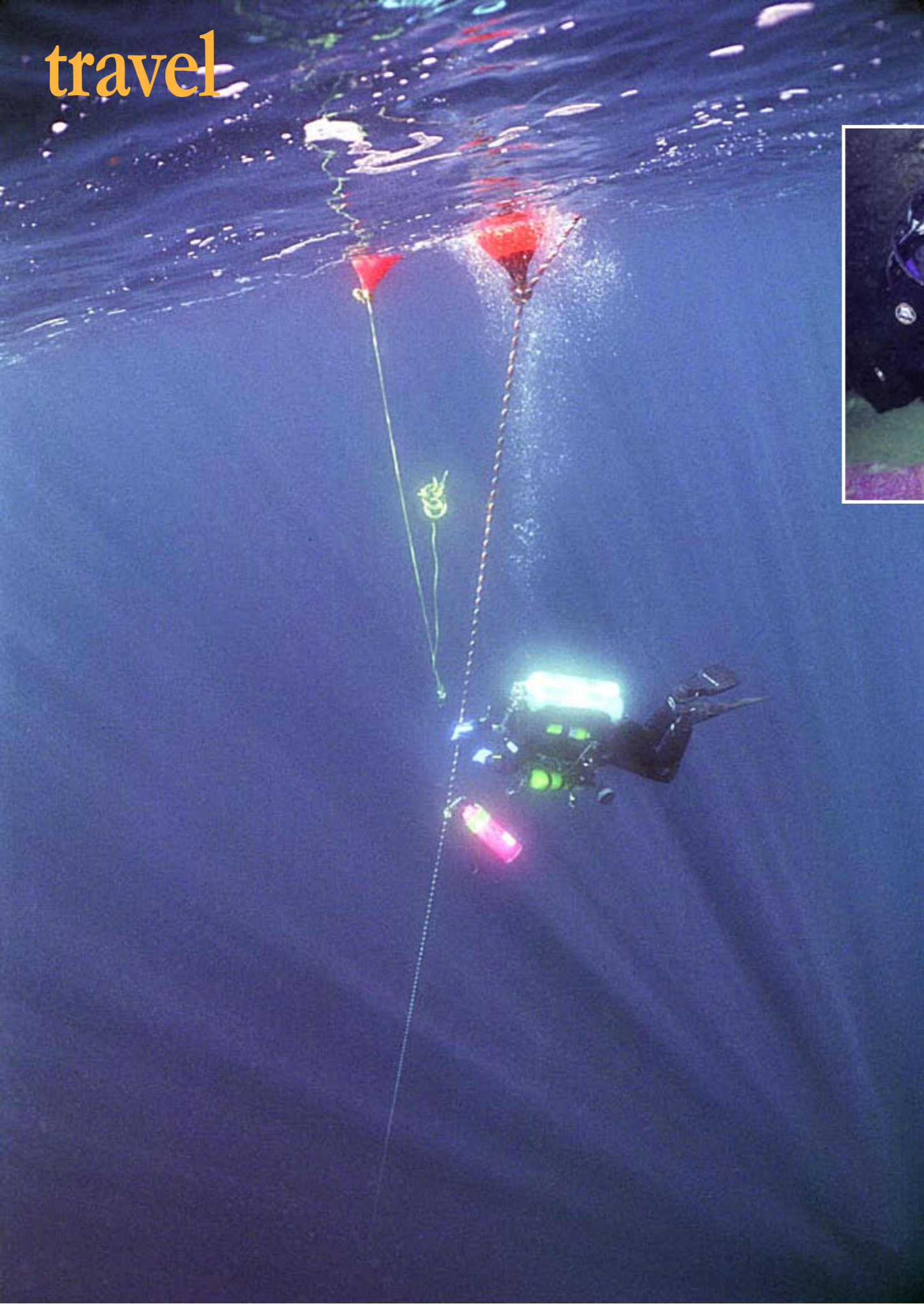
It appeared to be a radio cabin. As in all old ships, the radio cabin, or Marconi's room, was located just above the superstructure of the ship. The door was absent, so we went inside. There were old broken wood boards and a panel with old style arrow galvanometers with scraps of wires hanging on them. Antiquated microphones, or headphones were also visible.

I found out that my dive buddy also happened to be a specialist in wireless radio communications with knowledge accumulated over 23 years of service in the Navy. So, he was ecstatic over this find. His eyes burned with enthusiasm and his happiness about the discovery was boundless. If only he could have touched the history of radio here in this British wreck in the Northern Atlantic, he would have been all the more excited.

Despite language barriers under water, it was simple to understand his exuberance, because I had enough knowledge and appreciation of the topic myself. During that

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE: People, wrecks and fishes, researching each other

Newfoundland



moment however, I was more nervous about the gas pressure in my small cylinder. Decompression time was growing too quickly, so I was the first to give the signal that it was time to go home.

We came up to the sun and warmth very slowly with “deep micro bubble stops”. We each retreated into our own thoughts, recollecting the brightest impressions of the dive. After returning to the surface, both of us were in unanimous agreement with our skipper that the ship was a huge underwater city full of fascinating secrets and exciting discoveries. We were full of desire to dive it again and again knowing that we could never completely explore everything in this sunken city.

Newfy Charm

Newfoundland is home to an underwater world full of life—blue ice blocks and brilliant icebergs, whales breaching, mysterious coastal grottoes (which should be checked for hidden pirate treasure) majestic wrecks and the unique, sun lit and clear waters of the North Atlantic. Peering at this wonderful island far below the wing of the plane on my return flight home,



the uncontrollable desire to come back here again arose—as with any good fairy tale, you want to read it again—to see 5000 whale tails and to experience once more the underwater charm of NEWFY.

PS: The editors of X-RAY MAG would like to express their gratitude to Rick and Debbie Stanley, skipper William Flaherty and Steve Moore, and Ocean Quest Charters for their hospitality and guidance in the experience of Newfoundland.

www.oceanquestcharters.com ■



ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE:
Great marine life, great landscape, great views, great diving and ... great luck!
This is Newfoundland



fact file

Newfoundland, Canada



History Canada is a country of rich natural resources and vast distances. In 1867, Canada became a self-governing territory while retaining its relationship with the British crown. The country has developed economically and technologically in parallel with its southern neighbor along an unfortified border, the United States. After a decade of budget cuts, the country's greatest political issues are improving education and health care services. Recently, the issue of reconciling Quebec's francophone heritage with the rest of the country's population which is anglophone, has receded after a referendum held by the Quebec government failed to pass in 1995. Government: confederation with parliamentary democracy.

Geography Located on the northern half of the North American continent, Canada is bordered by three oceans: the North Atlantic Ocean on the east and the North Pacific Ocean on the west, as well as the Arctic Ocean to the north. After Russia, Canada is the second largest country in the world. It has a strategic position between Russia and the US on the north polar route; about 90% of Canadian are concentrated in the area within 160 km of the border with the US. Terrain: wide plains with mountains in the west and lowlands in the southeast; Natural resources: iron ore, nickel, zinc, copper, gold, lead, molybde-

num, potash, diamonds, silver, fish, timber, wildlife, coal, petroleum, natural gas, hydro-power; Natural hazards: continuous permafrost in north is a serious obstacle to development; as a result of the mixing of air masses from the Arctic, Pacific, and North American interior, cyclonic storms form east of the Rocky Mountains and produce most of the country's rain and snow east of the mountains.

Economy Canada closely resembles the US in its market-oriented economic system, pattern of production, and high living standards. It is an affluent, high-tech industrial society. Agriculture: wheat, barley, oilseed, tobacco, fruits, vegetables; dairy products; forest products; fish; Industries: transportation equipment, chemicals, processed and unprocessed minerals, food products; wood and paper products; fish products, petroleum and natural gas.

Climate varies from temperate in the south to subarctic and arctic in the north

Population 32,507,874
Ethnicity: British Isles origin 28%, French origin 23%, other European



Web sites

Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism www.gov.nf.ca/tourism
Newfoundland&Labrador.com
www.newfoundlandandlabrador.com

Dive Operators

Ocean Quest Charters
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15%, Amerindian 2%, other, mostly Asian, African, Arab 6%, mixed background 26%; Religions: Roman Catholic 46%, Protestant 36%, other religions 18%

Currency Canadian dollar (CAD) Exchange rate: 1 CAD = \$.82 USD / € .63 EURO

Language English 59.3% (official), French 23.2% (official), other languages 17.5%

In this sky,
the fall of darkness
brings the day's
best light.

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