

North America Pacific Northwest

Puget Sound • San Juan Islands • Strait of Juan de Fuca • Vancouver Island • Alaska

The waters of the northern Pacific coast of North America are some of the richest in the world in terms of marine life and natural resources due to a continual influx of nutrients brought by currents that circulate in the region. Divers will find both awe-inspiring and challenging experiences to enjoy here. Wildlife on the large and small scale is abundant top side and below the surface. Great mountains and rivers reach right down to the ocean, so visitors can enjoy

breath-taking scenery and coastal beauty. It is a region that boasts some of the wildest areas of America as well as several of the most cosmopolitan cities on the continent. While the visibility is more fickle and the water is a bit cooler than most tropical divers can appreciate, those that enjoy a bit of adventure, cold water divers and dry suit divers, will find a wealth of underwater treasures to explore in this region for beginners and advanced divers alike.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

- ◀ Dendronofid Nudibranch
- ◀ Giant Pacific Octopus
- ◀ Swimming Anemone
- ◀ Orange Starfish
- ◀ Lemon Nudibranch
- ◀ Pink Anemone
- ◀ Nudibranch eggs

Introduction by Gunild Pak Symes
Photography by Jack Connick, Jon Gross,
and Washington State Tourism
Map courtesy of The Living Earth / Earth Imaging





UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Picking the right dive site at the right time of year and the right time of day with the right dive operator, those of us who are avid underwater photographers can capture some fantastic images on film. The people who live in the Pacific Northwest are friendly and casual, helpful folk.

Neighborhood operators, who know the region like the back of their hands because they dive these sights for personal enjoyment weekly, are very happy to help newcomers enjoy the riches of the underwater realm found practically in their backyards.

The complete scope of diving in the Pacific Northwest cannot be covered in one article alone, however, highlights of both well known dive sites and lesser known sites can be provided here for curious dive travelers who are yearning to explore the Wild West.

We start in the Puget Sound, the sea of emerald islands located in the northwest corner of the state of Washington, where the cities of Seattle and Tacoma border the lower and upper sound. Getting the inside scoop from local dive charter operator, Mike Ferguson of Porthole Dive Charters, readers will learn about the numerous places to dive and observe marine life, such as

Orca whales, close to the cities and out among the gentle islands.

We, then, head north to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, Neah Bay and Cape Flattery at the most western point of the contiguous United States where the Makah Nation, the Native American tribe indigenous to the region, make their home. Local diver and member of Marker Buoy Dive Club, the largest dive club in Seattle, Jack Connick, gives us a bird's eye view of the lesser known dive spots in the area.

Continuing northwards, our correspondent, Jon Collins, explores the amazing diving in and around Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada, a fascinating place with a complex history that blends European, American and native cultures, nestled in a majestic natural setting.

Finally, we head up to Alaska, where correspondent, Barb Roy, shares her dive adventure in Prince William Sound and points along the

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southern Alaskan coast. A land of dramatic extremes, Alaska provides the visitor with a taste of how the planet was in its most pristine state. There, the midnight sun and the Northern Lights are a constant backdrop to the wilderness and remote cities that dot the southern coast of this region, which reaches up into the Arctic circle.

Puget Sound

For folks in Seattle and Tacoma, the Puget Sound is a neighborhood playground for divers, snorkelers, hikers, whale watchers, anglers, kayakers and other outdoor enthusiasts. Because of the nutrient rich currents, the sound is abundant with sea life. Residents in the cities regularly spend time during the work week and weekends enjoying this beautiful area. What follows are a few high points regarding the incredible diving to be found so close to an urban area.



◀ FAR LEFT: Blood Starfish
 ◀ CENTER: Alabaster Nudi-branch and Shrimp
 ▼ BELOW: Rockfish and soft coral

ALL PHOTOS THIS PAGE BY JACK CONNICK



Two great PNW dive resources include these guides by writers who know the area very well: *The Pacific Northwest* by Edward Weber and *Northwest Boat Dives* by Dave Bliss. See www.amazon.com



South Puget Sound



Olympia

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mended approach is to dive the West Wall on the flooding tide and then the North Wall in the ebbing tide. The terrain of this site is uneven and full of life. Giant Pacific Octopus, Mosshead Wabonnets and Grunt Sculpins can be found here. Divers can also find Wolf-eel, Striped Sea Perch, Red Irish Lords, Buffalo Sculpins, Brown Rockfish, Rattfish and Painted Greenlings. Orange Sunflower Stars add brilliant color to the seascape. Point Defiance is a popular fishing spot, so divers should be careful of old fishing sinkers, lures and line lying on the seafloor as well as the boat traffic.

Shore Dives

There are popular shore dives in the southern and central sections of the Puget Sound including Three Tree Point, which holds diverse marine life in a "junk yard" reef and eel grass beds—on rare occasions there may be a six gill shark looming here; Titlow Beach, a good place to check out sea life among pilings; Deadman Wall where you may have a rare encounter with eel-like creatures called Red Brotulas; Seahurst Park, a subtle site that is noted for being a fine place to find various large nudibranchs and sea pens; Les Davis Reef where you can find huge schools of perch; and Sunrise Beach, known for friendly Wolf-eels and large-sized Giant Pacific Octopus.

Edmonds Underwater Park

Edmonds Underwater Park is an

artificial reef developed in the harbor of Edmonds by a few heroic members of the community who took interest in marine conservation and diversity. Edmonds is a quaint little northwestern town of small cafés and boutiques on a gentle slope leaning down to the coast a few miles north of Seattle. It is probably the best-known dive location in the state.

The dive park is located just north of the ferry landing at Edmonds. It offers terrific diving for several reasons. At this site, the depths are shallow and there is an absence of strong currents, the beaches are well kept and scenic, the facilities are very good and include showers, there is easy parking, lots of different places to grab a bite to eat between dives, a well-equipped dive shop nearby called Underwater Sports, and close proximity to Seattle. The marine life here is in unique condition and serves as a testament to how it can bounce back if people give it a chance. The dive park is a favorite for beginning divers as it has a whole lot to see in easy dives. The reef is

Rockfish, Plumose Anemones, Pile Perch, Striped Sea Perch, Shiner Perch, gunnels, Sailfin Sculpines, Rock Soles, some Red Irish Lords, Rattfish, lots of shrimp, crabs and massive Sunflower Stars.

Waterman's Wall

Considered one of the best wall dives in the state, Waterman's wall

is located in the Port Orchard area, just south of Bainbridge Island. The terrain consists of sheer faced walls, long ledges, rock piles and

PHOTO BY JACK CONNICK



SOUTH PUGET SOUND:

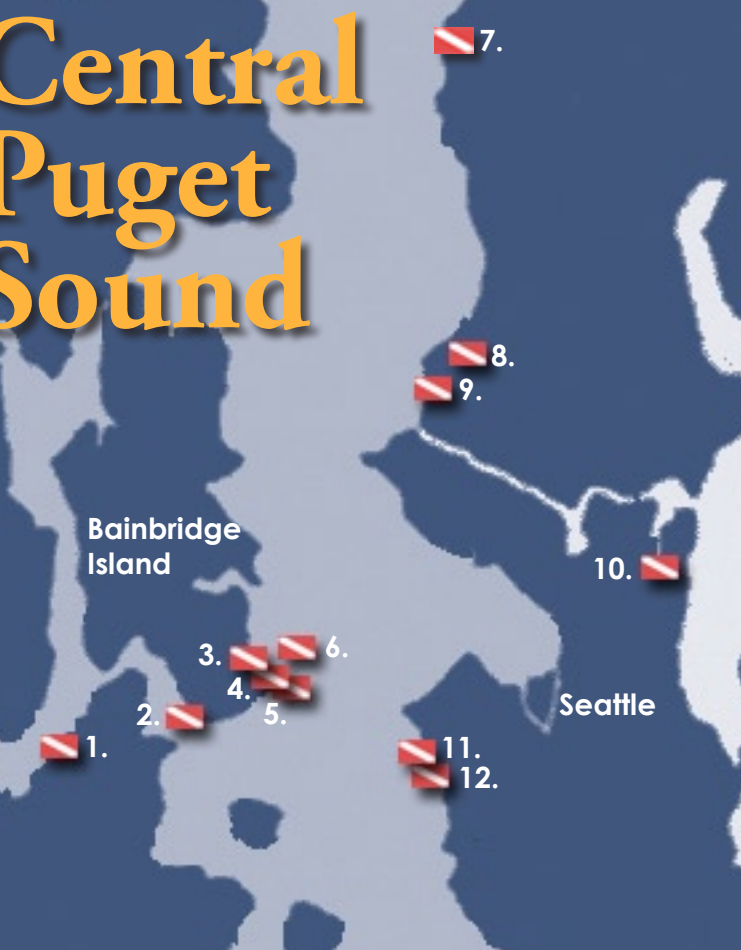
1. Alki Reef
2. Seahurst Park
3. Three Tree Point
4. KVI Tower
5. Maury Island Barges
6. Dalco Wall
7. Sunrise Beach
8. Point Defiance
9. Point Defiance, West Wall
10. Deadman Wall
11. Les Davis Reef
12. Titlow Beach
13. Day Island Wall
14. Z's Reef

Although the northern end of the Puget Sound is known for several outstanding dive sites, south and central Puget Sound also has a good number of interesting sites with diverse and abundant sea life.

Local divers including Jon Gross and Keith Clements, authors of a comprehensive online guide to over 45 sites in the Puget Sound, *The Marine Life Index* at seaotter.com, dive these areas regularly. They point to Point Defiance as one of the favorites. There is a massive shear wall at this site to explore. However, due to depth and currents, it is considered an advanced dive site. The recom-

▶ TOP RIGHT: Crimson Anemone

Central Puget Sound



CENTRAL PUGET SOUND

1. Waterman's Wall
2. Orchard Rocks
3. Blakely Harbor
4. The Boss
5. China Wall
6. Shangri-la
7. Edmonds Underwater Park
8. Golden Gardens
9. Shilshole Breakwater
10. Virginia Mason Hospital (Deco chamber)
11. Alki Reef
12. West Seattle Trench

North Puget Sound



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boulders, large cracks and crevices. Marine life on the wall is abundant and representative of why the Puget Sound is considered by many divers to be a Mecca of marine life. Divers can find Giant Barnacles, scallops, and an assortment of sea stars including Leather Stars, Vermillion Stars, Morning Stars, Sunflower Stars and Pink Short Spined Stars. Brown, Copper and Quillback Rockfish are also present here as well as Lingcod and Buffalo Sculpins. Divers should bring a good light torch to enjoy the color of this site where you will also find orange, purple and yellow sponges and yellow Sea Lemon Nudibranchs.

North Puget Sound

There are several spectacular dive sites in the northern end of the Puget Sound. Keystone is an extremely popular site among local divers who crowd there on the weekends. Octopus can be spotted here. Two hours drive north of Seattle

is an inspiring wall dive at Skyline Marina. Experts say that it is a shore dive that provides plenty of subject matter for macro photography as it has a plentiful and colorful array of invertebrate life including Candy-Striped shrimp, Umbrella crabs, Giant barnacles, Crimson anemones, hard corals and sponges.

Divers who know the region say that one of the best dives in the Puget Sound is located at Possession Point Fingers, which can be reached by boat from



Whidbey Island. Considered an advanced dive due to strong currents, the site sports a unique terrain of sheer vertical walls with countless caves sheltering Lingcod, rockfish, Wolf-eel, rather large Giant Pacific Octopus, and a splendid symphony of colorful nudibranchs including Red Nudibranchs, Orange Spotted Nudibranchs, Sea Lemons, White Lined Dironas, Yellow-Edged Cadlinas and Hudson Dorids.

Wreck Dives

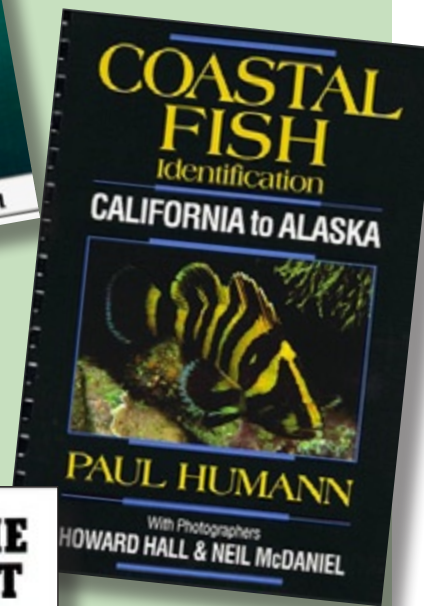
Although not a major attraction of the region, there are several wreck dives in the Puget Sound. Large sunken wooden barges can be explored on the northwest side of Gedney Island, a small island situated between Whidbey Island and the mainland. A 70-foot long wooden boat is wrecked at a site called "The Boss" located in Blakely Harbor. A vertical barge and tugboat can be explored at the Shilshole Bay and West Point area. There are also barge wrecks at Seahurst Park and Maury Island.



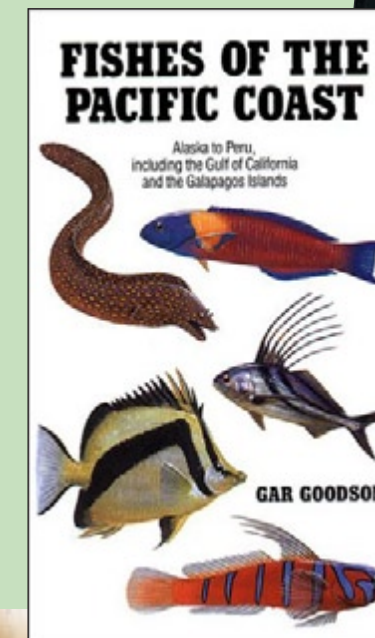
COASTAL FISH IDENTIFICATION
BY H. HALL & N. MCDANIEL
SPIRAL BOUND
PUBLISHER: NEW WORLD PUBLICATIONS
ISBN: 1878348124

FIELD GUIDES

PACIFIC COAST FISHES
BY ESCHMEYER, HERALD & HAMMANN
PAPERBACK: 267 PAGES
PUBLISHER: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
ISBN: 0804713855



FISHES OF THE PACIFIC COAST
BY GAR GOODSON
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ISBN: 0395331889
SEEN AT \$ 4.95 AT AMAZON.COM



- NORTH PUGET SOUND
1. Skyline Marina
 2. Keystone
 3. Gedney Island Barges
 4. Possession Point Fingers

- ▶ TOP CENTER: Lemon Nudibranch on Purple Encrusting Bryozoan
- ▶ BOTTOM CENTER: Mosshead Warbonnet



▲ Various invertebrates, Puget Sound



Sponges, Puget Sound ▶



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San Juan Islands



1. Belle Rocks
2. Long Island
3. Goose Island
4. Eagle Point
5. Pile Point
6. Bellevue Point
7. Skipjack Island
8. Parker Reef
9. Puffin Island

- ▶ Harbour seal, San Juan Islands
- ▶ Breaching killer whale, San Juan Islands

San Juan Islands

Local divers describe diving the San Juan Islands as an exercise in variety. According to Dareld and Janine Clark who wrote the guide, *Diving the San Juans* (Evergreen Pacific Publishing), there are over 60 dive spots in the San Juans, many of the more exciting ones accessible only by boat.

Experts describe the strata, which supports plant and ani-

mal life in this area, as a combination of soft mud and sand as well as rocky formations upon which marine ecosystems have evolved. The area teems with life from some of the largest marine mammals, humpback, minke and orca whales, to loveable harbour seals and sea otters, to the tiniest of sea life still viewable by the naked eye.

Divers will find an abundance of colors and textures among the many species that call the San Juans their home including sponges, barnacles, pectin scallops, tiny orange cup coral named stag-horn bryozoa, pink-tipped, white plumed and orange anemones, tiny ostrich plumed hydroids—a close relative to the jellyfish—hairy sea squirts and giant red sea urchins, rockfish, quillback rockfish and kelp greenlings, warty sponges, purple-hinged rock scallops, haunting protrusions of dead

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man's fingers, banded feather dusters, tiny creeping pedal cucumbers with bright red tentacles, basket stars and tiny black and white brittle stars, brightly colored rose star and vermilion stars, sea cucumbers, red cancer crabs, nudibranchs and a host of other species.

Fish that live in this area include lingcod, cabezon, painted green-

Pacific electric ray, porpoise and octopus. Bull kelp grows quite large here and sea pens loom up from the depths.

Underwater photographers recommend Goose Island and Skipjack Island, which is a private wildlife refuge, since visibility is often very good between 20-45 feet (6-15 m). Killer whales have been spotted at Bellevue Point and Pile Point, which are regular feeding grounds, and Eagle Point where you can also spot eagles soaring overhead. Sucia Island is a marine state park and is very popular



PHOTO BY SUNNY WALTER. WASHINGTON STATE TOURISM



PHOTO BY SUNNY WALTER. WASHINGTON STATE TOURISM

ling, black cod and flounder. You will also find wolf-eels, brilliant blue striped sea perch schooling among cliffs, grunt and sailfin sculpin, spiny dogfish. There are dungeness and red rock crab, Puget Sound king crab, kelp crab and sunflower stars in brilliant shades of pink, orange and purple, red sea gherkins, sea pumpkins, vari-colored worms, reddish gum boot or giant chiton, Mosshead Warbonnet,

1. Mushroom Rock
2. Waadah Island Fingers
3. Tiger Ridge
4. Third Beach Pinnacle
5. Snow Creek Ridge
6. One Mile Beach
7. Sekiu Jetty
8. Wreck of the Diamond Knot
9. Salt Creek State Park (Tongue Point)



PHOTO BY J. POTH. WASHINGTON STATE TOURISM

for its unique beauty. The sheer numbers of fish make Parker Reef an exciting dive site.

There are several protected wilderness areas and bird sanctuaries throughout the San Juan Islands where you can enjoy wildlife topside including Tufted Puffins, Bald Eagles, Pelagic Cormorants, Arctic Loons and Arctic Terns.

Strait of Juan de Fuca

If you ask avid Puget Sound divers, Neah Bay gets the most votes for the best diving in the state. The clarity of water, diversity and abundance of marine life,



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- ▲ TOP: Aerial view, San Juan Islands
- ▲ BOTTOM: People dining outside, Docksider Restaurant, San Juans

Strait of Juan de Fuca

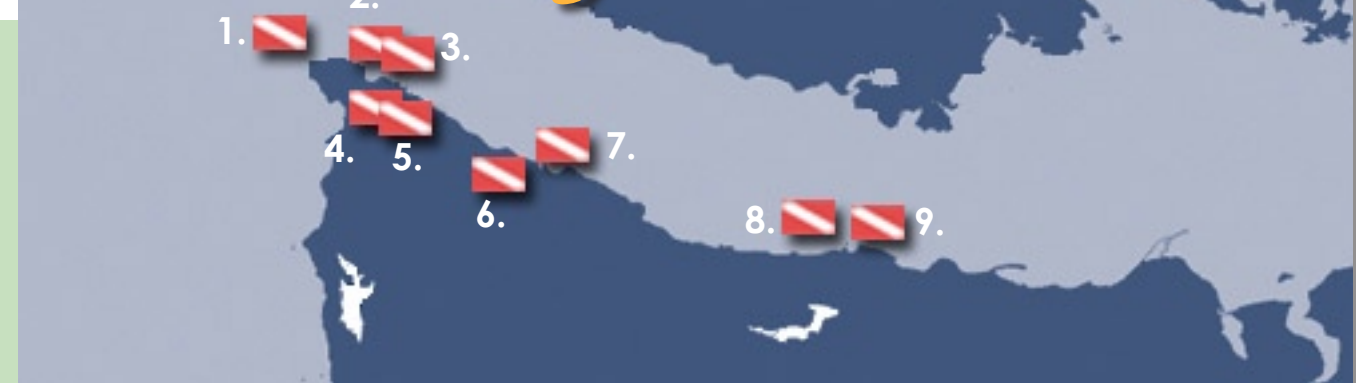




PHOTO BY SUNNY WALTER. WASHINGTON STATE TOURISM

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rents, lots of boat traffic and discarded fishing gear such as stainless downrigger cable and monofilament.

This spectacular terrain supports a wide variety of marine life. The canyon walls, which have small caves, deep ledges, some swim-throughs, lots of holes, crevices and cracks, make good homes for an assortment of marine species including Giant Pacific octopus, Wolf-eels, Vermillion Rockfish, rare Yellow-eye Rockfish, hard and soft corals, nudibranchs and various invertebrates.

Ridge Diving

Several other dive sites in the Strait and around Neah Bay have unusual rock formations and dramatic topography that make for intriguing dive experiences. Snow Creek Ridge has a 20-30 ft high (6-10 m) rock ridge. Its walls are teeming with huge schools of Blue and Black Rockfish as well as Canary, Quillback, Tiger, Yellowtail, Copper and China rockfish. Sponges, hydrocorals, nudibranchs, snails and numerous anemones create a colorful show.

Sekiou Jetty is another site with strange rock pinnacles, ledges, caves, crevices and thick beds of

kelp. Here, divers can discover that it is not always necessary to go deep to find a symphony of color and a great diversity of sea life. The species that populate this area include Kelp Greenlings, Copper, China, and Quillback Rockfish; volleyball-sized Brilliant Red and Purple Sea Urchins; massive and glamorous anemones; as well as hundreds of species of invertebrates that one would

be hardpressed to find in the lower Puget Sound.

Other spectacular "ridge" dives include Tiger Ridge and Third Beach Pinnacle where the awe-inspiring mix of unusual underwater topography and ample marine life make for more examples of the typical Neah Bay diving experience.

There are also several shore dives in the strait including Tongue Point at Salt Creek State Park where you can swim through thick kelp beds and find an explosion of color among Green, Red, and Purple Sea Urchins and large, brightly colored anemones along a rocky bottom; and One Mile Beach, a remote location where there are carpets of purple urchins.

The Diamond Knot

In 1946, the container ship the Diamond Knot, came down from Alaska with a huge load of canned salmon and rammed another boat in the middle of the channel. While it did not sink immediately, it did finally find a resting place on its side at about 130 ft depth (43 m) as it was towed to shore.



PHOTO BY SUNNY WALTER. WASHINGTON STATE TOURISM

The wreck is now completely covered with marine life including giant plume anemones, sponges, corals, and a variety of invertebrate life. Divers can also find decorator crab, Sharpnose crab, Ling Cod and the occasional Red Irish Lord.

In addition, there are schools of Black Rockfish, Quillback and Yellowtail Rockfish making their home at this wreck. ■

SOURCES: *Marine Life Index*, by Keith Clements & Jon Gross; *Diving the San Juans*, by Dareld & Janine Clark; *Mike Ferguson of Porthole Charters*.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

- ◀ Sunrise on the cliffs, Tongue Point, Salt Creek State Park
- ▲ Eye of the Red Irish Lord
- ▲ Seastacks, beach, & tidepools at the Point of Arches on Shi Shi Beach South of Neah Bay
- ◀ Bull Kelp

PHOTO BY JACK CONNICK

topside scenery, challenging currents, thick kelp forests and unique underwater topography add up to an incredible cold water diving experience.

Diving in this area is for experienced advanced divers. This area is exposed to the storms of the Pacific Ocean, which can prevent divers from getting out beyond the Neah Bay breakwater. Locals say the best time to come is summer or early fall when there is more predictable weather. However, it is a good idea to try to avoid the height of the salmon fishing season.

Dive sites in the strait are some of the best kept secrets. Notable sites for their color, diversity of marine life and odd topography due to volcanic formations are Mushroom Rock and Waadah Island Fingers.

At Mushroom Rock, divers spot huge schools of Black Rockfish lounging around in the kelp, large gatherings of krill and shrimp covering the seafloor and plentiful species of seasquirts, nudibranch, and chitons. Giant Pacific Octopuses and Puget Sound King Crab can be spotted here as well as Red-Eyed Jellies, various Rockfish and Painted Greenlings. The area is covered with corals, sponges and large kelp forests.

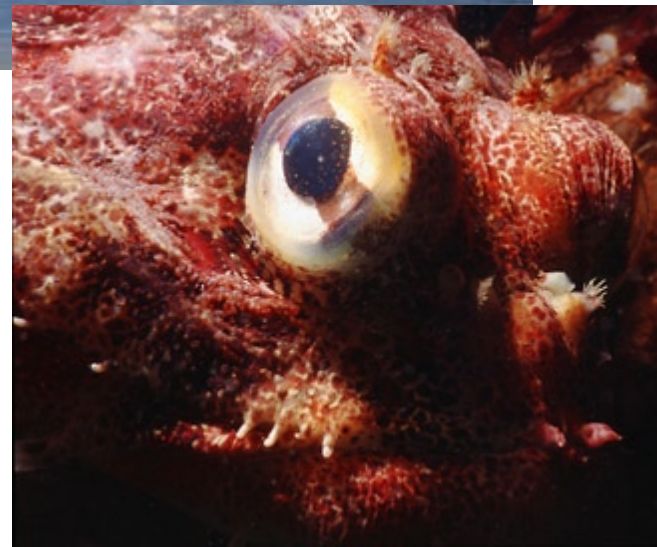


PHOTO BY JACK CONNICK

Waadah Island Fingers

Located just north of Neah Bay, the rugged Northwest topography of Waadah Island Fingers makes it an intriguing site to dive, where it is said one can see more marine species in one place than any other dive site in the Pacific Northwest region. Over millenia of being pounded by strong currents, sheer canyons over 20 ft (6 m) deep and up to 40 ft (13 m) wide in some places have been carved out of the rock. The canyons run parallel to each other and extend far out under the surf.

This site is considered an advanced dive due to strong currents and storms. One must be able to handle over 80 ft (36 m) of free descents, over 50 feet (16 m) of free ascents, surge and strong cur-



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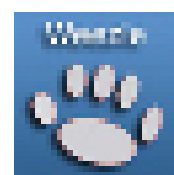
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