



# CHILLS AND THRILLS

A pair of warm-water divers try their luck in British Columbia

**MISSION:** Find a way for two decidedly warm-water divers to explore the fabled underwater wonders of British Columbia.

**PLAN:** Buy drysuits, take the classes and head west. (The plan was nearly aborted when we first fumbled with thick hoods and gloves and then strapped on weight belts that felt more like boat anchors. But we quickly warmed to the dry suit idea.)

**SECRET WEAPON:** The prospect of seeing and photographing critters so different than those you are familiar with that it is like diving again for the first time.

**MISSION TIMING:** Best B.C. diving is during the warmer months from June to August. Think jumping into 48-degree water in the summer is cold? Try it in the winter.

**MISSION LOCATION:** Getting to God's Pocket resort really is half the fun. After flying to Seattle, driving to Vancouver, taking the ferry to Vancouver Island and driving five hours north to Port Hardy, it is still a 12-mile boat ride to the resort on Hurst Island.

**MISSION REQUIREMENTS:** Dry

suit and long wooly underwear.

**FIELD NOTES:** A 40-foot boat transports divers to the area's famous dive sites, including legendary Browning Pass, which is rated as one of the best wall dives in North America. While suiting up, we see an eagle plunge into the water to snag an unwary fish.

The water is cold and visibility ranges from 30-100 feet. Most dives entail drifting along the "walls" or bases of islands that dot waterways leading to the ocean. The currents are swift and can change direction in a matter of minutes, so dives are timed to begin at slack tide. Safety stops are often accomplished holding on to one of the many stalks of bull kelp that anchor themselves to the bottom and rise as high as 40 feet to create a green floating canopy on the surface.

The cold, nutrient-rich waters are so green that the entire area is referred to as the "Emerald Sea." The marine life is immense and prolific – it's almost impossible to find a patch of sea floor not harboring life of some kind.

Life here grows in mounds. Huge anemones, urchins, nudibranchs and an incredible array of starfish are everywhere. Gigantic white plumose and brooding anemones sprout up from the sea floor. Some

walls are so densely covered with soft corals that a dive light transforms them into bright waving blankets of color.

**ADDITIONAL SORTIES:** On the way to Port Hardy, try Campbell River for some excellent diving in Discovery Pass, including the wreck of the HMSC *Columbia*. During the summer there is a chance to glimpse rare six-gill sharks at nearby Hornby Island. You can even spend a night in the small logging town of Woss at a modest but clean motel attached to the Lucky Logger bar, which comes complete with authentic loggers who drink standing up. And don't miss Telegraph Cove for a whale-watching cruise.

**MISSION CENTRAL:** God's Pocket dates back to 1903 and consists of a number of wooden buildings nestled in a protected bay. The resort can house 14 guests in rustic but comfortable rooms, each with a private bath with plenty of hot water.

Call 888-534-8322 or visit [www.godspocket.com](http://www.godspocket.com).

**MISSION ASSESSMENT:** Successful – and extremely economical for U.S. divers, given the current exchange rate.