ALI POSTMA and her husband Joey are working their way around Canada to document the diversity of its diving from coast to coast. She picked out two contrasting locations to give us a flavour...

FROM THE NORTH PACIFIC, to the high Arctic to the North Atlantic, Canada is one of the largest countries in the world. Not only are we big, but at more than 156,000 miles we also have the longest coastline in the world, and more freshwater lakes than any other nation.

Water is everywhere. It’s the babbling river flowing through the prairie, the sea lake high in the mountains, the cold ocean that provides fishermen with lobster. Water connects us.

Joey and I have done countless dives all over the world, and it would only seem logical that as Canadians we would have explored our own backyard. But before last year, I could probably count on one hand the different places we had dived in our home country.

We had barely scratched the surface of scuba-diving in Canada. Our project “Canadian Splash” was born of our desire to connect and encourage other divers to experience this watery world — we’re in the process of diving and photographing every province and territory in Canada to showcase the beauty, wonder and fragility hidden below the waterline.

To provide a flavour for DIVER, we feature a saltwater and a freshwater location in two provinces.

When considering the coldwater diving possibilities of Canada, where do you even begin? In the Great White North, with its vast expanses of uninhabited wilderness and icecaps? Or perhaps the Bay of Fundy, where you can slip beneath the surface to sample diving amid the world’s highest tides?

Come hell or high water, the diving doesn’t stop — at least, not in New Brunswick.

Where most people would dismiss the idea of diving in low visibility, ripping tides and unpredictable currents, Joey and I attempted the eastern province’s Bay of Fundy with open arms.

The bay is a world-renowned tourist destination but also a unique diving location. Not everywhere along its coastline screams scuba-diving, but Deer Island near the US border hosts a phenomenal underwater world, ringed by the confluence of current and seafloor bathymetry that gives rise to the Old Sow, the largest tidal whirlpool in the Western Hemisphere, which spins violently in the Bay of Fundy.

Given the unforgiving nature of a tidal whirlpool, diving there means embracing strong current and also, of course, timing your dive just right for the slack that allows for safe enjoyment of this beautiful place.

A shiver of cold and dark water surrounds me as I inhale and exhale like Darth Vader through my regulator. Even with a drysuit on, diving in the Bay of Fundy can feel mighty chilly at any time of year. I’m not alone as I emerge when the Atlantic Ocean floods my incapone hood.

The sloping seabed gradually turns into a rocky wall jutting out from the floor. Bright pink encrusting algae garnishes every nook, making me feel like Scuba Barbie.

I see marine life everywhere, in reds, pinks, greens, oranges and yellows melding together as on a painter’s palette.

This wall hosts so many macro critters that if you were unwise enough to put down a finger, you would be likely to disturb an anemone or nudibranch. The fauna of this lesser-known Canadian dive paradise are glorious but not surprising. Twice a day, billions of gallons of cold, nutrient-rich north Atlantic waters are flushed in and out of the bay, bringing with them this diversity of life.

The Old Sow’s current gently pushes us along, like a lazy river ride. While drifting we find and photograph marine life with colours and textures that hardly seem to belong in such an extreme environment. Further along the wall, I feel the tide methodically change direction, signaling the midway point of our dive.

We retrace our route, moving up the rock wall to scour a shallower section for macro movement. This is usually the best part of the dive, where we tend to have the most luck finding spiny lumpsuckers — my favourite photographic subjects. I could spend an entire dive focusing on these tiny guys. Joey signals me over, having spotted a pudgy fish anchored by its suction disc on the rock. I’ve seen lumpsuckers on many a dive, but every time I see a new one I squeal into my regulator.

These squishy little fish, sometimes little bigger than a fingernail, have a way of swimming so awkward and adorable that it melts your heart.

We spend more than our share of time playing with the spiny lumpsuckers, and the current starts picking up. The Old Sow whirlpool is starting to go around again, so I enjoy Deer Island’s kaleidoscopic views for a few more minutes before slowly surfacing...
Freshwater sponges, mussels, snails and walleye were among the aquatic wildlife we enjoyed in the open, but more elusive fish such as perch were harder to track down. For another hour and a half we enjoyed watching the life above the waterline just offshore. Would I be able to capture compelling images while battling the flow of the river?

I PEACHED PUSHED off from the shoreline, emptied our BCDs and dropped to the riverbed, where a plaque thoughtfully provides information about the vessel. The further we swam from shore, the more the current picked up.

When the Constance was in our sights we lifted off the bottom, riding the current on the port side. We whisked past the deck planks and the timber structure of the hull along with a fleeting fish or two and, all too fast, reached the stern.

A large group of walleye were hanging out in the sandy shallows, and as I watched them swim against the current, a grumpy-faced pike darted out of nowhere. It lunged in for the kill, the walleye scattering quickly – too quickly. I looked at my buddies and had to snicker into my regulator – better luck finding lunch elsewhere, Mr Pike.

After this Blue Planet sideshow, I returned my attention to the rear of the Constance, where the massive four-bladed propeller was a sight for sore eyes. It was far the most interesting part of the ship, and I indulged in some photo opps while my buddies poured around.

Along the starboard side of the wreck we found a long metal chain placed to help divers pull themselves against the current and explore the boat a second and third time. Head over hand, I turned my mask into the flow and inched my way upstream – a slow, gruelling process.

Back at the bow we went for round two, this time dropping inside the Constance. The inner hull offered protection from the current and made it much easier to photograph and move around. I spotted huge chain-links and a large windlass in the hull but, making my way through the zebra mussel-clogged shallows, I also got to see the massive boilers, winches, engine, deck fittings and other miscellaneous artefacts.

The 1863 VINTAGE Blue Planet was to be the last stop on our Brockville diving adventure. After repeated sinkings and salvages, her final fate came in 1895. We joined a local boat charter this time, because the wreck lies slightly out of reach for shore-divers.

After multiple dives in the area, we had our scuba routine down to a tee, and it didn’t take us long to prep for the dive. We stepped into the water and made sure to grab the anchorline. Down it went, battling strong surface current that lessened at depth. Touching down at 18m, we got our first look at the wooden hulk. Resting on a firm bottom, the wreck was about 35m long and the hull for more intact than the Rothesay’s had been.

We drifted over the deck, and could see the picturesque wooden railing and large timbers making up the framework. I love diving shipwrecks, but the Gaskin was an eerie sight against the ghostly green freshwater backdrop. Towards the stern its condition seemed to deteriorate substantially, and I was surprised how few fish could be seen.

The previous two wrecks had been fish magnets – tails and scales had seemed to flutter everywhere. Back at the bow, by far the most spectacular part of this wreck, we checked out a large hole in the hull and a rusty anchor.

Unlike on the other shallow shipwrecks, our time on the Gaskin had passed far more quickly than we had hoped. Before I knew it, it was time to ascend.