



STORY & PHOTOGRAPHY BY ALISHA POSTMA

BELOW CANADA'S WATERLINE

Lakes, rivers, and oceans are powerful places with ecosystems that are crucial to our very existence.

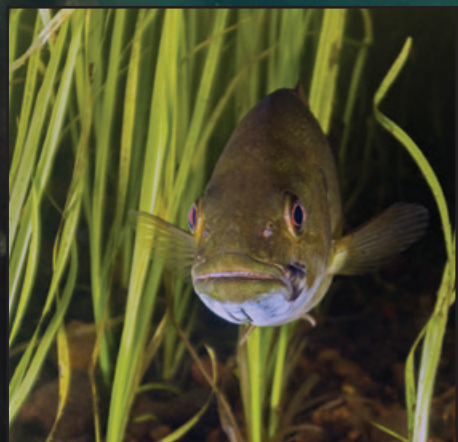
We all have our passions. Some outdoorsy types love backcountry ventures where few have been before, others bag mountain peaks in record time. My mania is scuba diving.

For me, it was love at first splash. I just love to be under the water. Although my home country of Canada might not immediately spring to mind when thinking of exotic dive destinations, the waters surrounding this nation are something special. With a coastline that covers 243,042 km, a huge tidal range deemed the largest on the planet, and 20 percent of the world's freshwater, the underwater realm here is rich with surprises.

THE AUTHOR'S HUSBAND FLOATING AT THE BOW OF THE PLM
SHIPWRECK IN NEWFOUNDLAND.

The Canadian expanse of liquid blue is vast; however, our water systems are delicate and face increasing pressure every day. A warming climate is reshaping communities. Our expansion of urban areas, agriculture, and population mean humans now encroach and pollute aquatic habitats. We may have a rich bounty of water resources but with that comes a responsibility to protect them.

For several years, my husband Joey and I have tossed around the idea of scuba diving across our home nation. From Nunavut's high Arctic to the depths of Ontario's Great Lakes, there is something truly magical about seeing Canada from a different perspective. Canadian Splash is a journey that we began last summer. Our goal: to dive and photograph all 13 of Canada's encompassing provinces and territories showcasing the beauty, wonder, and fragility hidden below the surface.



MAIN: JOEY SCUBA DIVING IN SPRING LAKE, ONTARIO, WITH SOME SUNKEN TIMBER. **LEFT:** A ROCK CRAB HIDING OUT IN THE GREEN PLANT LIFE AT PADDY'S HEAD DIVE SITE IN NOVA SCOTIA. **MIDDLE:** AN ITTY-BITTY MARINE SNAIL FEASTING ON A PIECE OF KELP DIVING ON GRAND MANAN ISLAND, NEW BRUNSWICK. **RIGHT:** A CURIOUS LARGEMOUTH BASS ALONG THE VOYAGEUR ROUTE IN MATTAWA, ONTARIO.

Camera in hand and dive gear strapped to our backs, Joey and I began our adventure in the province of New Brunswick. Located on the famous Bay of Fundy, this maritime province is home to the largest tides in the world. Twice per day these enormously powerful tides roar in and out of Fundy, moving billions of liters of water in and then back out to sea.

Deer Island's Old Sow Whirlpool is a unique and challenging site that offers scuba divers a rich assortment of marine life. The island is situated at the mouth of Passamaquoddy Bay where, thanks to its location, current confluence, and seafloor bathymetry, the second-largest tidal whirlpool in the world exists.

Below the plankton-rich waters of Fundy is an environment teeming with life. Hues of oranges, yellows, reds, and pinks bring warmth to the frigid North Atlantic waters. As the building blocks to many marine communities, rock faces are adorned with sponges, anemones, and coralline algae. Amid this ornate foundation, critters scamper all over the place—my favourites being squishy, gum-ball size lumpsuckers. I could spend hours studying every single macro creature that wanders across my path at this swirling dive site.

After our series of dives in New Brunswick, Joey and I moved east to the neighboring province of Nova Scotia. Some of the province's best shore diving is just 30–45 minutes from Halifax's downtown core.

Paddy's Head and Cranberry Cove are two sites of choice for Joey and I. These diving locations cusp St. Margarets Bay, a mere heart-beat from the famed Peggy's Cove lighthouse. The lush and sheltered nature of the bay offers divers protection in its many coves and natural harbours. St. Margarets' picturesque scenery also makes it a joy to travel to these sites. It has almost become an unsung tradition to visit these sites anytime my husband and I are back in the area.

Along the benthos of Paddy's Head and Cranberry Cove, rock-weed and other vegetation cling to the stony sediment. The bottom is relatively shallow and tapers off gradually into the open part of the bay. Between the sprigs of plant life, networks of urchins, crabs, and other zesty invertebrates stir up trouble. These mischievous little beasts are some of my favourite photography subjects.

In the distance, the silver shimmer of fish scales can be seen flitting about. Pollock, herring, and shad school about the hazy shallows, on the hunt for their next meal. Although they couldn't care less about scuba divers invading their domain, the fish maintain a healthy distance from our cascading trail of scuba bubbles.

Joey and I spent roughly a week in Nova Scotia before moving northward to our third stop on our Canadian Splash journey. Surrounded by the rugged Atlantic Ocean, Newfoundland and Labrador is a wild and isolated landmass. Here, natural elements collide with history boasting azure blue water brimming with vibrant colours and alluring shipwrecks.

During our stay on the island, Conception Bay was where we did the bulk of our scuba diving—the primary draw being the renowned shipwrecks of Bell Island. Twice during the Second World War, German U-boats invaded Conception Bay striking and sinking four vessels supplying the Allied forces with iron ore. The shipwrecks of the PLM, Saganaga, Lord Strathcona, and Rose Castle are now historic and well-preserved diving sites thanks to their surrounding frigid seas.

For wreck lovers, these mammoth-sized shipwrecks offer intrigue woven into the maze of enclosed passages snaking deep into the heart of the craft. For photographers like me, the super clear water coupled with metal frosted in plumose anemones beg for much camera attention. The PLM was the shallowest of the four wrecks, affording us the most bot-

tom time. The Rose Castle was the deepest, with some of this ship's components stretching into technical diving limits, meaning Joey and I could not reach them.

Beyond the wealth of marine life adorning the carriers, each vessel has its distinctive points of interest. The Saganaga has a large anchor mid-ship, which flew up out of the water during its sinking and crashed down on the deck. The PLM has a spectacular stern as well as an intact propeller. The Rose Castle has a sunken torpedo off her bow, lying 50 meters (165 feet) on the seabed, and the Lord Strathcona has a red male lumpfish guarding the base of the anchor line.

Following our incredible series of dives in Newfoundland, Ontario is our most recent dive locale. Ontario has some of the most beautiful expanses of forests and lakes in the country. It is home to four of the five Great Lakes, and thousands more lakes are scattered everywhere in between.

Given the current health concerns, as of the last several months, Joey and I have opted to stay within our home province. We have made it our mission to thoroughly explore Ontario's popular diving spots. Thus far, our dives have brought us to Brockville, Tobermory, Timmins, Sudbury, Sault Saint Marie, and Thunder Bay. All these places have exposed us to new environments, interesting creatures, and unique experiences.

In Brockville and Tobermory, we enjoyed the splendour and glory of Great Lake and St. Lawrence wreck diving. Used for centuries as a primary shipping route, this 3,700-kilometre "marine highway" extends from the Atlantic Ocean as far inland as Lake Superior. As a testament to this region's nautical tribune, age-old ships litter the bottom of these bodies of water. Some of the most notable wrecks we've visited include the Niagara II, the Arabia, the Conestoga, and the Gaskin.

Further north, we had the opportunity to submerge into the buzzing wetlands and

ivers of Ontario Parks. Regulated under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, Ontario Parks is an important entity for outdoor recreation, scientific research, environmental monitoring, and education. These jungle-esque environments provided us with a surprisingly lavish view of Canada's freshwater ecosystems, as well as many of the creatures supporting life within these communities.

While our ambitious Canadian Splash adventure is far from complete, the beauty and fragility witnessed below Canada's waterline has helped me to see my home through new eyes. Lakes, rivers, and oceans are powerful places with ecosystems that are crucial to our very existence. From the jungle wetland to the productive oceans, whether I'm using Canada's waterways for work, recreation, or transportation, the bounty of our watery nation is a force to be treasured, a force to be protected. There truly is no place like it! ♦

A SEMI-TRANSLUCENT NEOTURRIS PILEATA JELLYFISH SPECIES FLOATING IN THE ICY WATERS OF NEWFOUNDLAND.



Protecting them is protecting every single one of us

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