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January 16, 2006

737 Becomes Reef

By Yolanda Brooks
Guest Newswriter

After almost 30 years of flying passengers across North American skies, a Boeing 737 sunk off the coast of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada Saturday, to the cheers of hundreds of onlookers. The retired Air Canada jet became British Columbia's seventh artificial reef and, long after it carried millions of winter-weary Canadian tourists to Florida, it will become a tourist attraction itself. The 100-foot airframe

was winched from a barge and lowered into Stuart Channel, near Chemainus. Within minutes divers reported a level landing on the ocean floor 88.5 feet below and the jet's four-year journey from wreck to reef was complete. The aircraft, built in 1975, was originally acquired by Pacific Western Airlines in 1983. PWA was taken over by Canadian Airlines in the mid-80s before it, too, was taken over by Air Canada in 1999. Air Canada continued to use the plane until 2001 when, with 73,522 hours on it, it was retired. The plane was stripped of all useable parts by Qwest Air Parts, of Memphis, which then donated the shell to the Artificial Reef Society of British Columbia in 2002. As the long search for a suitable reef site began, volunteers from the society stripped the plane back to its shell, scrubbed it clean and cut 10-inch holes in the wings to encourage marine life to start colonization. The jet, now known as Xihuw Reef in honor of the red sea urchin that used to be common in the area, is believed to be the first passenger plane to be sunk for the purpose of creating an artificial reef and it is expected to become a popular attraction for divers.



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