

South of 49° N, but still not in the U.S. of A.!

By Bill Merilees

In *The Dredgings* (Vol. 53, No. 3, 2012) I reported that the shelled opisthobranch, *Retusa obtusa* (Montagu, 1803) had been found just a 'stone's throw' north of the Canadian - United States border at Mud Bay, (49° 05' N) in British Columbia. This tiny (3 mm) species has a broad geographical range that extends from the Mediterranean Sea, into the Arctic, south along the east coast of North America to North Carolina and on our West Coast from Alaska south to at least Mud Bay, B.C. The question was asked "Who will be the first to locate *Retusa obtusa* south of 49° N?" We now have an answer!

While visiting a First Nation's traditional clam garden site at Isabella Point, Fulford Harbour, Saltspring Island, B.C. (Fig.1), one of my scrapings produced a single specimen of *Retusa*

obtusa (Fig.2). Isabella Point is listed as being 48° 44' N. (Gov. of Canada Gazetteer – British Columbia)

At this beach, and nearby Russell Island, First Nation Peoples have created extensive sandy terraces, known as clam gardens, by moving boulders to create a barrier behind which sediments can accumulate. The habitat thus created, where the sample was taken, also appears to receive ground water seepage. Whether reduced salinity is a requirement for the presence of *Retusa* is speculative. However, at Mud Bay both the Serpentine and Nicomekl Rivers bring large volumes of fresh water to the previous collecting site.

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References:

"Gazetteer of Canada, British Columbia, Third Edition". 1985. Energy, Mines and Resources Canada, Ottawa.
Merilees, B. 2012. "I.D. of a Boundary Bay, B.C. Opistobranch". *The Dredgings* Vol. 52 No. 3 p 4.

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Rick Harbo photo



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Clam gardens at Isabella Point, Fulford Harbour, Saltspring Island, B.C.