



## February | Mairi Best, Marine Scientist

### What do you do?

I'm head of science for an ocean observatory called NEPTUNE Canada, which means that I work with the science community to make sure that the observatory allows them to address important ocean questions. I also pursue my own research into what happens to skeletons and shells when the animals die – a kind of CSI for invertebrates.

### Why is it important?

The oceans make up over 70% of our planet's surface, over 90% of the living space, yet we know more about Mars.

Cabled ocean observatories like NEPTUNE Canada extend the internet under the ocean and allow us to “be” there with instruments and robots, and be able to observe and interact on a constant basis with a range of ocean environments from the coast to the deep sea.

We can then learn what is “normal” and have a baseline when things like ocean currents and fish stocks change.

We are also then there when earthquakes and tsunamis happen and we can learn from small ones how to minimize the impact of large ones.

### What does your research involve?

Running an ocean observatory takes a bit of everything: going to sea with a remotely operated vehicle (ROPOS) on a big ship to install and maintain instruments, working with engineers and IT specialists to make sure our observatory is delivering data to our public web environment, working with scientists around the world to help them use

the observatory and add new instruments, and talking to people around the world to tell them about this new way of doing ocean science. I do some of my own experiments on cabled observatories such as NEPTUNE Canada and VENUS, but also I've spent the past 27 years using SCUBA to work on the ocean floor.

### Is there any special equipment involved?

There are thousands of pieces involved in the ocean observatory, including plug in points called nodes and junction boxes, and 40 different kinds of instruments.

### What got you into ocean science?

I was nicknamed Mairi Fish by the time I was four, I took some good advice and found a way to do what I love.

### Did you ever want to be something else?

I worked in theatre through my teenage years. Given the number of presentations I do a year, and my time spent as a university professor, I'm still using those skills.

### What do you like most about your work?

Being at sea – though the past year with 3 months at sea was too much! I also love bringing together people with related interests and helping them build something bigger than the sum of the parts.

### What are three achievements in your life you are proudest of?

My two children.

Successful construction of the world's first regional cabled observatory (NEPTUNE Canada). My PhD dissertation on how the record of past life is preserved in tropical marine environments.

### What was your first summer job?

In a fashion designer's shop, doing sales and needlework. Once at University I did geological mapping of Northern Ontario and paleontological (fossil) collecting on Anticosti Island in the St Lawrence.

### How long did it take to get to the position you are now?

I first went to university in 1982, but I've done a lot of different things along the way, and lived around the world.

### What 5 favourite artists/groups/pieces of music do you listen to on your ipod?

Joni Mitchell, KD Lang, Diana Krall, Bruce Cockburn, Ruben Blades

### What's your favourite colour?

Aquamarine

### How do you get to work every day?

Bus or bicycle. I don't own a car.

### What are your favorite things to do when you aren't working?

Camping and generally being in the outdoors, diving, cooking, reading, spending time with family and friends

### If you could meet one famous person for coffee who would it be?

Rachel Carson

### Why are you here at UVic?

This is the headquarters of NEPTUNE Canada.

### What 5 words would you use to describe yourself?

Inquisitive, tenacious, impatient, generous, open

To learn more about Mairi Best  
visit: <http://seos.uvic.ca/people/mbest.htm>

