



Inuit mentee Alexia Galloway-Alainga discovers, for the first time, what lies beneath the waters of Frobisher Bay.



All photos: Sedna's sea women - Amanda Cotton



Sedna's underwater photographer Jo-Ann Wilkins at work in the emerald green waters of Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island, Nunavut.



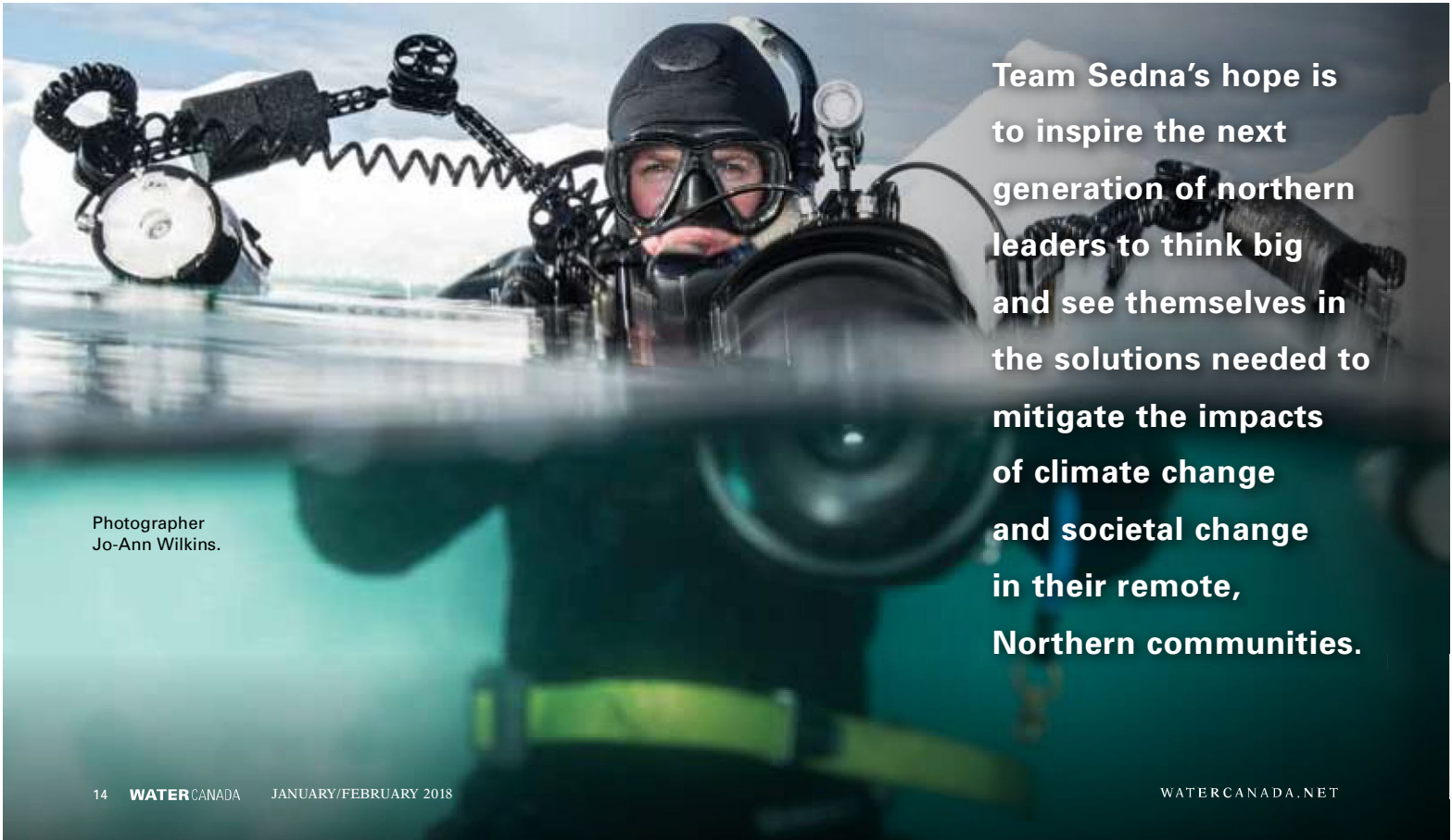
(L-R): Sedna's Veronica Ryl, Inuit mentee Alexia Galloway-Alainga, and Jo-Ann Wilkins deploy a newly-assembled underwater robot.



Pack ice in Frobisher Bay, Nunavut.



Sedna's sea women and their Inuit advisors pose after a day of snorkelling and scuba diving in and around pack ice in Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island, Nunavut. Front Row L-R): Veronica Ryl, Renata Rojas, Becky Kagan Schott, Aaju Peter, Susan R. Eaton. Johnny Issaluk, Mary Ellen Gucciardi, Kitrina Godding, Urszula Tokarska. Back Row (L-R): Stephanie Gandulla, Joanna Lentini, Amanda Cotton, Kristin Gates, Jo-Ann Wilkins.



Photographer Jo-Ann Wilkins.

**Team Sedna's hope is to inspire the next generation of northern leaders to think big and see themselves in the solutions needed to mitigate the impacts of climate change and societal change in their remote, Northern communities.**



# Katujjiqatigit | Working Together

The all-female Sedna Epic Expedition brings a changing ocean to eye level for coastal Inuit communities. BY SUSAN R. EATON

**BANK TO THE LEFT**, bank to the right. Tethered to diver propulsion vehicles, the women flew through emerald-green arctic waters at six kilometres per hour, dodging sculpted ice formations off the northern coast of Labrador. They soon discovered that snorkelling in pack ice is a contact sport. After several star-inducing head bumps, the team's dive physician determined that helmets would be standard gear for future expeditions. When wardens at nearby Torngat Mountains National Park advised that they spotted a few polar bears heading towards the divers, wildlife spotters on the mother ship and dive zodiacs doubled their vigilance.

This was to be the first of two all-female, proof-of-concept snorkelling and scuba diving trials completed in preparation for the Sedna Epic Expedition's snorkel relay of the Northwest Passage. During the trials, Team Sedna conducted snorkel relays, collected scientific data, and gained invaluable experience in this harsh and unforgiving environment.

The expeditions took place in the icy waters of northern Labrador, Nunavut, the Davis Strait, western Greenland, and Iceland and involved 40 participants: ocean explorers, scientists, artists, journalists, educators, students, and medical and scuba diving professionals, ages 16 to 58. These women hailed from Canada, the United States, Mexico, and New Zealand.

In the summers of 2019 and 2020, the Sedna Epic Expedition will mount

a 3,000-kilometre snorkel relay of the Northwest Passage—a world-first—to bring global attention to the impacts of climate change on sea ice in the Arctic. Preparation for this monumental undertaking has involved several years of logistics and team-building exercises, with the support of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society, Arctic outfitters, scuba equipment manufacturers, scientific organizations, and Inuit leaders.

## Engaging local communities

In July and August 2016, Team Sedna collaborated with Inuit advisors and community leaders to deliver a hands-on ocean outreach program for Inuit youth, girls, and Elders of Iqaluit (most of whom were non-swimmers). Bringing the ocean to eye level, the outreach involved showcasing invertebrates and small fishes housed temporarily in aquariums, running workshops to build and fly underwater robots equipped with video cameras, and leading snorkel safaris to explore what lies beneath the waves of Frobisher Bay.

"The Sedna Epic Expedition is an exciting vision," said Graham Dickson, the owner of Arctic Kingdom, an expedition partner and dive outfitter with offices in Toronto and Iqaluit. "Sailing through the Northwest Passage is a challenge, much less swimming through it," said Dickson, also a Fellow of the RCGS and master dive instructor

with 20 years' experience leading excursions in the Arctic.

## The Sedna Epic

According to Inuit legend, Sedna is the Inuit goddess of the sea, and she's the mother of all marine mammals. She will be with the snorkellers as they record the impacts of climate change in the Arctic. Assisted by diver propulsion vehicles (also known as scooters), the women will undertake a 100-day snorkel relay, travelling from Pond Inlet, Nunavut, to Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. En route, they'll conduct oceanographic research and deliver their innovative ocean outreach program to Inuit and Inuvialuit communities situated along the Northwest Passage, with a focus on empowering girls and young women in ocean careers.

Inuit and Inuvialuit societies are matrilineal in structure, with a long tradition of female community leaders. Team Sedna's hope is to inspire the next generation of northern leaders to think big and see themselves in the solutions needed to mitigate the impacts of climate change and societal change in their remote, Northern communities.

## Working together

Johnny Issaluk, a community leader and skilled hunter from Iqaluit, is one of Sedna's esteemed Inuit advisors. A recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012 for his contributions to



Sedna's Dive Safety Officer Jeffrey Gallant and Inuit Advisor Aaju Peter are triumphant after her first snorkel excursion ever, in Frobisher Bay.



Inuit mentee Alexia Alainga-Galloway displays her newly-assembled underwater robot in Iqaluit, Nunavut.



Sedna's maritime archaeologist Stephanie Gandulla and teammate wear helmets to navigate pack ice in Frobisher Bay.

All Photos: watercanada.com - Armand Colton

improving Inuit health and community well-being, Issaluk has won numerous medals in traditional Inuit games. Issaluk named the Sedna Epic's 2016 expedition *Katujjiqatigit*, an Inuktitut word that means fighting together or working together.

"Sedna was involved in teaching self-worth and self-healing within the community," he said. "We need role models to come into the communities. Sedna made a difference to a lot of kids. Anything that helps Inuit get tools under their belt is a form of reconciliation."

A tropical scuba diver before joining the team, he described the Sedna Epic as an eye opener.

"I learned a lot about diving in cold water and team work," said Issaluk. "It was very interesting to dive at home, and to encounter marine life I'd never seen before."

"From the very beginning, the Inuit were explorers," he said. In the winter, the Inuit crossed the frozen ocean via dog sled, and in the summer, they explored the Arctic via kayak.

Selected as a Canada 150 Ambassador by the Government of Canada, Issaluk proudly wears the logo, which celebrates 150 years of confederation in Canada. While describing himself as pro-Canadian, he nonetheless acknowledges how colonialization adversely impacted many generations of Inuit, including his

parents and siblings. "For me, Canada 150 is more about the next 150 years," he said, citing the educational and athletic opportunities that he's had.

Mary Ellen Gucciardi, an educator from Toronto, is also one of Sedna's advisors. A consultant in alternative education and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies, Gucciardi has led several educational exchanges to Nunavut, developing community partnerships and immersing teachers and students alike in environmental stewardship and Inuit culture in the Arctic.

"One of the imperatives for educators is to create culturally responsive curriculum for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit," said Gucciardi. "Sedna engaged in community, with community. We mentored Inuit girls and young women and they became part of Team Sedna."

Pointing to Sedna's multiplier effect, she said, "Sedna's sea women returned home with a new understanding and perspective of the Arctic and of the Inuit. Every woman on the team left Nunavut changed—that's what relationship does. None of this can take place with emails." She added, "These relationships are still being fostered today."

Iqaluit-based Alexia Galloway-Alainga, 20, is one of ten young northern women who Team Sedna mentored in the summer of 2016. An accomplished Inuit throat singer, Galloway-Alainga is

enrolled in her third year of social work studies at Carleton University in Ottawa.

Galloway-Alainga grew up boating and hunting on the water and snowmobiling on sea ice in the winter. She has lost more than one close family member to drowning, so the prospect of leaping off a fishing boat into Frobisher Bay was emotionally challenging.

"Snorkelling was a big step for me, but I was surrounded by amazing women, role models who I look up to," she said. "I had a leak in my dry suit the first time I snorkeled, but continued anyways!"

Galloway-Alainga also assisted with delivering Sedna's underwater robot and touch aquarium outreach program to youth in Iqaluit. "I eat seal; I eat fish," she said. "Inuit youth now understand how small sea critters are essential to the Inuit way of life and the marine food chain."

The Sedna Epic is currently scouring the world for an expedition vessel suitable to transit the Northwest Passage during the summers of 2019 and 2020. Sedna's sea women will reunite in August 2018 to continue building relationships with Inuit communities and to gain more cold-water immersion training in Nunavut and western Greenland. **wc**

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Susan R. Eaton is the founder and leader of the Sedna Epic Expedition. She is a Calgary-based geoscientist, journalist, and conservationist.