The Scuba Sports Club of Westchester, New York

Our 44th year serving the local and northeast dive community !

The Scuba Sport Club's October 2019 Newsletter

Gary Lehman, Newsletter Editor

Welcome to the October 2019 issue of The Scuba Sports Club Sea Swells! We invite all members of the diving community to contribute; please contact Gary at gary.a.lehman@gmail.com with your articles and photos! Our Club Newsletter includes features about our Club's diving and social calendar; our diving adventures, social/educational events, occasional equipment and health issue discussions, and profiles on some of the more colorful and intrepid characters in our local diving community (of which there are many!), and other features of interest.

The word of the day here at The Scuba Sports Club is *peripatetic*! Indeed, the sun never sets on the TSSC empire; see articles about our Club members' travels to Egypt, the South Pacific and Australia! And back to Florida (Key West) and...even a beach clean-up in Valhalla (right down the road). Nick talks safety and his newest *Blackbeard* adventure! In this issue we also reflect on the importance of safety preparation and dive safety procedures; we are saddened and shocked by the tragedy of the liveaboard *Conception* calamity and the destruction in the Bahamas from Hurricane Dorian… Our Featured Creature columnist Rick has spun his magic again, and Steve R. offers his "My Turn" about the Purple Heart medal for our Armed Services. ...Thank you Steve — and all veterans now and always — for your service!

So find the articles of interest to you, then relax and enjoy — and make your plans, envision your dive adventures, and all your dreams come true — with… ***The Scuba Sports Club !***

Gary
Sea Swells Newsletter Editor

The Anchor Line

Denise Blais, President

Hello Everyone,

Fall of 2019 is upon us! What a productive year it has been so far! We have traveled to Playa del Carmen, journeyed to Egypt, and scaled the wrecks of the Florida Keys. Some of our members are gearing up for a short jaunt down to North Carolina and the final trip of the year will be in lovely Little Cayman.

We switched things up this year by moving our yearly BBQ from May to August and held it at Dennis's community beach area, where we all had a great time! We still have the photo contest to put together and 2020 Elections to complete.

We are looking forward to hosting our last few speakers and close out the year with a fabulous party! The planning of our Holiday Party is well underway and we are very excited for you to see the great location and great prizes we have in store. So reserve your spot today!

On behalf of the Board, and myself we are really looking forward to seeing everyone to end the year celebrating together!

Denise
Madame President

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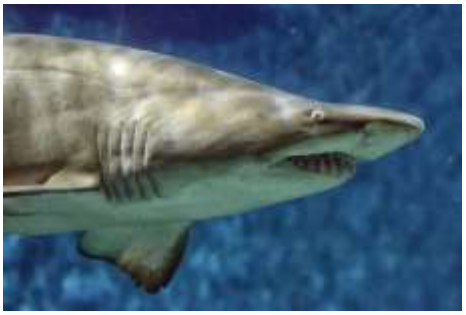

TSSC CLUB OFFICERS and DIRECTORS 2019

(...We always welcome our Club membership to join our leadership team !!!)

President	Denise Blais
Vice President	Ed Van Dolsen
Secretary	Michelle Memoli
Membership	Al Miller
Dive Planning	Jack Ricotta
Treasurer	Sheri Buchman
Program Director	Amanda Slattery
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Executive Director	Kenneth Salstrom
Past President	Denise Blais
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Safety and Education	Nick Lappano
Social Director	In search of...
Webmaster	Denise Blais
Legal Advisor	Robert Schrager
Founder	Zig Zigahn
Co-Founder	Soliman Shenouda

Denise

Ed

Sheri

Michelle

Amanda

Gene

Al

Jack

Kenny

Gary

J_u_d_y

Club Dive Trips, Deco Stops — Event Planning Calendar for 2019

What's on the radar, More to come!

(We love to hear new ideas!)

Event	Club Contact	Date
Egypt Club Trip	Jack Ricotta	June 15-30
Florida Keys Wreck Trek	Al Miller	August 2-9
North Carolina Wrecks	Jack Ricotta	September 19-23
Little Cayman Club Trip	Jack Ricottta	October 6-13
Explorers Club Sea Stories	Gary Lehman	November 9
Holiday Party	Denise Blais	December 14
NYC Christmas Tree / Lights / Store Fronts and Dinner !	Denise Blais	December TBD

TSSC's Egypt Adventure, June 2019

James Kafka

To anyone fascinated by ancient cultures, Egypt is near the top of the list. Often considered a treasure trove of preserved artifacts, art and architecture, thousands of years old, with engineering achievements unrivaled in civilizations of its time. Mystical pyramids, vast deserts and a civilization that has thrived and endured through many, many challenges over the ages. For SCUBA divers, there is the additional appeal of exploring the unique aquatic beauty below the surface of the Red Sea. "The Red Sea's underwater eco-system is home to over 300 species of coral and 1,200 species of fish, 10% of which are found nowhere else in the world." (1)

On June 15, carry-on bags stuffed with every item required for an 11-hour flight, The Scuba Sports Club departed New York JFK for Cairo, Egypt.

The group was received at Cairo International Airport by Hossam of South Sinai Travel; escorted through baggage claim and onto our bus for transportation to the Le Meridien Pyramids hotel. Onboard the bus, we met our tour guide for the week, Egyptologist Fouad Salah Berto, who was the same outstanding tour guide that lead the previous TSSC trip to Egypt. Over the next week Fouad would become an indispensable member of our tour group, advising us on everything Egyptian, past or present, and helping us navigate every aspect of our journey. Especially dispensing tips or "*baksheesh*" (2) as is customary to maintain positive relationships and smooth passage wherever we went. One must remember though, it can be a thin line between tips, bribes or corruption, and you soon find out that the demand for baksheesh smothers Egyptian society like a burka.

First order of business, Fouad promptly introduced our onboard security detail, comprised of two *well-armed* police officers, courtesy of the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism. To step back a moment -- the events

(1) Marine Life – Red Sea Diving Safari. https://www.redsea-divingsafari.com/eco-efforts/marine-life

(2) Baksheesh -- https://www.ytravelblog.com/how-to-become-a-master-of-baksheesh-in-egypt-tip-or-bribe/

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James Kafka

of the "Arab Spring" in 2011 had a distinctly chilling effect on Egyptian tourism. In the years since, it has been a slow process to recover tourist confidence. Effective or not, there is a very visible military and police presence throughout the country; especially along frequent tourist routes. In addition, at various times during our land travels the bus was escorted by 1 to 2 police cars. Sometimes assisting the bus to enter busy traffic, but mostly, I believe, they were just maintaining that visible presence. In the end, our journey through Egypt was as trouble-free as anyone could have hoped. But at the same time, we received ample benefits from the tour bus, tourist hotels, a tour guide, mostly tourist destinations and the presence of our escorts.

Cairo

It is truly a luxury traveling through Egypt by air-conditioned bus. Apart from sheltering you from the near 100°F humid climate, the bus is a fortress amid a flowing sea of cars, small trucks, vans, motorcycles, "motorcycle carts" and carts pulled by donkey. Somehow all magically maneuvering their way with next-to-no guidelines on the pavement and conspicuously absent signage. Then you notice that the shoulders of the road, on the sides and in the middle, are being used by small vehicles and carts, usually going AGAINST the traffic on each side of the highway! Pedestrians cross wherever they find a break, since there are NO CROSSWALKS anywhere! A shockingly risky real-life game of Frogger! Although the government has "introduced" a few traffic signals around the city, the Egyptian public has not completely accepted them. Stopping can be optional! (Of course, to be completely fair, I distinctly remember a taxi ride in Boston that operated that way also.) Although accidents do happen, and sadly we were witness to one, the existing "ordered-chaos" continues to get everyone where they want to go -- regardless of risk to life and limb. Did I happen to mention how wonderful air-conditioned buses are?

Back at the hotel, after our first day of touring, most of us were counting on a cool dip in the pool to wash away the day's dusty trek. To our surprise and puzzlement, we found out that the pool closed at 6:00pm! Supposedly for "chemical treatment". Eventually, we would find this "curious custom" of chemically treating the pools at 6:00pm would follow us to every hotel in Egypt! None-the-less, the showers in our rooms were refreshing and the dinner buffets and beverages relaxed our spirits. The evening temperatures and light breezes were heavenly.

After dinner the first night, our tour guide, Fouad, offered to lead us "around the neighborhood" on a short walk. Here was our first

TSSC's Egypt Adventure, June 2019

James Kafka

opportunity to experience Cairo without any filter or tourist-spin. Our walk took us out along the busy road that our hotel was on, past a couple of restaurants, locked businesses and crumbling residential buildings. We soon turned along a walled section of property where stray cats sat and walked along the top -- observing us pass. Only the lights from the businesses and an occasional car lit our way. The ground was rough and uneven, with scattered trash and debris. You had to watch your step. A young Egyptian man walking ahead of us stopped, reached down into a large ceramic jar, that appeared no different than the debris along the side of the road, and produced a cup from which he proceeded to drink. What the hell? I later found out that "water standpipes" have been provided by the government as an alternate source of public drinking water. I could see no visible sign identifying this standpipe or declaring its water safe to drink. The communal "public cup", that the young man returned to the ceramic jar, was definitely high-risk, if not certifiably dangerous.

Turning again, this time down a sparsely lit residential street. Occasionally passing children playing in groups. Many under-nourished stray dogs and cats darted among the bushes. Every pile of trash we passed was a congregation point for the stray animals, digging for any scrap of food they could find. Children laughing and playing behind us; you couldn't find the slightest hint of contentment in the faces of the frail stray animals.

We would soon learn from Fouad, that trash collection continues to be a major issue in Egypt, especially Cairo. Significant efforts have been undertaken in the past, sometimes in partnership with other countries, but for numerous reasons each effort eventually fell apart. The overwhelming presence of trash on the streets, sometimes in open piles, was a constant problem everywhere we went

TSSC's Egypt Adventure, June 2019

James Kafka

Over the four days in Cairo, our group toured many of the major archeological sites, including a walk past the beautiful, intricate wood and ivory walls of the Hanging Church (est. completion in 692), whose name is derived from "hanging" decorations on the towers, not the morbid image that one might assume. The "Holy Family Crypt" in Saint Sergio's Church, where it is believed that Mary, Joseph and Jesus where hidden from the Romans during their journey through Cairo 2,000 years ago. The spacious and towering Mosque of Sultan Hassan, completed in 1356, continues to be one of the largest Mosques in the world. Next door, the ornate Al-Rifa'i Mosque, completed in 1912, contained the crypts of the Royal Family of Muhammad Ali Pasha who is considered the founder of modern Egypt. The intricately adorned Mosque of Muhammad Ali, a.k.a. the Alabaster Mosque, completed in 1848, is an architectural marvel constructed of brilliant white alabaster. (Sunglasses required to walk the interior courtyard in the daylight!) The Saladin Citadel, a.k.a. the Mohammad Ali Citadel, was a fortress used and reused by many rulers as far back as 1176 and was the infamous location of the "Massacre at the Citadel" in 1811 – an event that was instrumental in bringing an end to Mamluk (3), or "slave warrior", rule over Egypt .

(3) Mamluk history and Egypt -- https://www.historytoday.com/miscellanies/who-were-mamluks

TSSC's Egypt Adventure, June 2019

James Kafka

Especially notable was the Egyptian museum, containing an abundance of statues and artifacts, including mummies on display and the incredible, solid gold "death mask" discovered in King Tutankhamen's sarcophagus. I personally consider this to be one of the most beautiful and aesthetically pleasing artifacts I have ever seen.

A walk through the Khan el-Khalili bazaar was a rich experience and provided some of us with many shopping opportunities. Rugs, chests inlaid with mother-of-pearl, brassware, clothes, jewelry -- everything you could think of was sprawled on tables or hanging from the walls. Merchants were relentlessly beckoning you into their stores. You could not show the slightest interest in anything without a merchant descending on you, merchandise in hand, claiming to have the lowest prices and the highest quality goods. "Come in, come in, please this way!" Some members of our group took it in-stride, others (including myself) had difficulty with the bazaars.

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James Kafka

You were just not given a moment to browse (or breathe). Still, just walking the merchandise lined alleyways and sitting in an open-air café, sipping Egyptian coffee, was an unforgettable experience.

Lunches consisted of a bountiful array of grilled kebab with other meats, stewed vegetables and delicious, usually fresh-baked Egyptian bread, accompanied with hummus, tahini, olives and other condiments. The Citadel Restaurant presented a variety of smoking, sizzling kebab and sausages on a fiery grill in the middle of the table. Abou Tarek Restaurant, near Tahrir Square, introduced us to

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"Koshary", an incredibly popular dish in Egypt. Purportedly the "national dish", Koshary is a mixture of rice, lentils, chickpeas, pasta, tomato sauce and spices. I found it absolutely delicious. (Kevin and Liza were so impressed, they recreated it when they got back home! I see a Koshary deco stop coming! I'll bring the Stella!) One evening, Fouad took us to a street-side falafel restaurant. The falafel sandwiches were sooo good! In case you were wondering, alcoholic beverages were not available with our meals outside the hotels, but our hotels offered a full bar and any choice of beverage with our meals. On most days, we never retired without a "deco stop" somewhere in the hotel.

Near the end of our second day, Fouad helped us locate a "beer & wine shop" on our way back to the hotel. Being on the far side of the street, our onboard policemen stepped out and proceeded to STOP TRAFFIC for us to dash across to "Drinkies". Yes, there are beer & wine stores in Cairo! Paper bag in hand, I will never, ever forget that hilarious experience! We also gained a whole new appreciation for our security detail. They garnered immediate respect from the drivers, as the flow of traffic abruptly paused. It was so smooth; Moses would be been impressed!

Back on the highway, it was a daily experience to pass through canyons of severely damaged residential buildings, classified as "illegal" by the government. Instead of demolishing the building, the government "cripples" the building by knocking out walls and floors, mostly on the upper sections. Although this gives the building an overall "post-war" appearance, people desperate for housing still inhabit the undamaged floors and even invest their own labor and materials to complete the units they occupy. Sometimes "completing" involves just a sheet of cloth over a hole in the wall, instead of a glass window. One wonders how someone without sealed windows would ever survive the seasonal sand storms that choke the city from time to time. Building, after building, after building. Connected by dirt streets. Not one structure looked finished or functional by our own standards. It was a somber scene.

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James Kafka

On our last day in Cairo, we visited the Pyramids of Giza and the Sphinx, as well as archeological sites at Memphis and Saqqara. Although partially visible from our hotel, standing at the base of the Great Pyramids was truly a soulful experience. The largest pyramid, also known as the Pyramid of Cheops, is the oldest of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Finished in the year 2560 BC, at a height of 455 feet, it "was the tallest man-made structure in the world for more than 3,800 years".(4) You cannot help

looking up in awe and wonder at the engineering and manpower required to accomplish this feat. Inspiration that I hope comes to my aid the next time I struggle with a sandcastle on the beach!
fter a short bus ride -- over many speed-bumps -- along a canal supporting lush farmlands, we enjoyed another delicious lunch in an open-air restaurant, before touring the museum at Memphis and the Pyramid of Djoser at Saqqara. Unfortunately, the Pyramid of Djoser, a.k.a. the Step Pyramid due to its staircase design, was under renovation and off-limits during our visit, however, it was still impressive from a distance. Built in the 27th century B.C., it is considered to be a prime example of "the earliest large-scale cut stone construction" (5).

During our stay in Cairo, some members of our party started feeling the curse of "Pharaoh's Revenge". Although not debilitating, it did cause some to skip a few meals. Eventually, over the two weeks, I believe all of us did have some reaction to the local bacteria. Even though

4.Great Pyramid of Giza – Wikipedia.com 5.Pyramid of Djoser – Wikipedia.com

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I personally followed the tour guide's advice and was as careful as possible, by the end of the trip I did have to reach for those little white pills to clear my body of some unwanted guests. I never experienced any digestive discomfort, loss of energy or a loss of appetite, but I was incredibly thankful for the readily available "facilities" onboard the bus and boat.

Luxor

On June 22, after a short 7:30am EgyptAir flight from Cairo International to Luxor, we were back on the road to visit the temples at Karnak and Luxor along the Nile. All of our luggage stowed below the bus, we arrived at the Karnak Temple, whose name is derived from the Arabic word "Khurnak", meaning "fortified village" (6). Partially restored, the complex of halls and buildings were truly impressive. Each stone column was intricately decorated with carved hieroglyphics. The large slabs of stone connecting the columns have been estimated to exceed 70 tons. In its day, resplendent in painted hieroglyphics and smooth towering stone columns, the temple must have been absolutely breathtaking.

After a pleasant stop for lunch at El Hussein Restaurant, it was time to check-in to the Sonesta St. George Hotel in Luxor. Accommodations were excellent and a step-up in old-world ambiance.

(6) Karnak – Wikipedia.com

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Settled-in and rested, at dusk we were transported to the Luxor Temple on the Nile. The air had cooled down from its peak of 112°F, and the combination of the setting sun and the evening lights made the temple a sight to behold. Services were in progress at the mosque integrated with the temple complex.

The chanting of the Imam added to the experience walking the grounds and observing the ancient site. Construction of the temple began in 1390 B.C. by Amenhotep III and was completed over the next 177 years by a succession of Pharaohs, including Tutankhamun. Its main entrance was originally flanked by two huge obelisks, of which one remains in place today and the other resides at the Place de la Concorde in Paris, France. Many times, I've seen that obelisk while viewing coverage of the Tour de France, and now I stood at the site of its original home. Someday I'll stand at its base in the Place de la Concorde, fully appreciating its connection with the Luxor Temple on the Nile, the many hands that sculpted it and our TSSC adventure in 2019.

On our final day in Luxor the forecast was 115°F, sunny and not a drop of precipitation in sight. Drier than Cairo, but still not Arizona. We headed out early to our first stop: The Valley of the Kings. For "nearly 500 years from the 16th to 11th century BC, rock cut tombs were excavated for the pharaohs and powerful nobles". (7) Over time the pyramids proved to be too obvious a marker for treasure thieves. By the 16th century BC the Egyptians were more discreet in their choice of burial grounds. This barren nondescript valley contains 63 known tombs, including that of Tutankhamun, with some discoveries as

(7) Valley of the Kings – Wikipedia.com

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recent as 2008. Here were some of the best-preserved tombs on our trip. Vivid, rich carvings on the tunnels and rooms, many still displaying the original paint applied thousands of years ago.

One room of special interest was partially unfinished and thoroughly illustrated the process of how the hieroglyphics were drawn, carved, smoothed and painted. Such a treasure to have survived the ages and the tumultuous history of Egypt.

After another delicious outdoor lunch (Do you get the impression I liked the food?) at a nearby restaurant we pulled into our final archeological stop: The Mortuary Temple of Queen Hatshepsut, a.k.a. Djeser-Djeseru, built during the 18th Dynasty of Egypt 1549-1292 BC. The lateral, square column structure of the temple marked a turning point in Egyptian architecture, away from large imposing stone structures, to temples that could be occupied and used for active worship or ceremonies. Many thanks to "the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, who were responsible for the study and restoration of the three levels of the temple". (8) Their work still continues today. Without their dedication to this project, this site would have been scattered rubble on a barren hillside.

On our last night in Luxor, Fouad offered to guide us on a horse drawn carriage ride through the streets and into the market district. To some a carriage ride may seem too much of a tourist amusement, but its access to the back-streets of the market district was priceless. Eventually, we got out and continued on foot through the bazaar. Although similar to the Khan el-Khalili bazaar, the pressure to buy was toned down and most of us did get an item or two to take home. Fouad recommended an Italian restaurant on the way back to the hotel and it did not disappoint. What a tranquil way to spend the last night in Luxor.

(8) Mortuary Temple of Hatshepsut – Wikipedia.com

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Next day, we checked out of the Sonesta St. George early. A 4-hour bus ride would take us East across the desert to the coastal town of Quseer, and then South along the shoreline of the Red Sea to Port Ghalib, where we would board our dive boat, the Heaven Saphir. Since the boat was on a strict schedule with the Egyptian Coast Guard to leave port by 4:00pm, we only had brief stops for fluids, restroom and an occasional security checkpoint, before reaching the boat in early afternoon. It was such a welcome sight to finally see the turquoise and cobalt blue waters of the Red Sea ahead of us. I can confidently say that ALL of us were ready to jump in – IMMEDIATELY!

Diving Aboard the Heaven Saphir

Gear stowed in our cabins. The 118-foot Heaven Saphir departed Port Ghalib on schedule. Underway, in moderately choppy seas, everyone unavoidably staggered into the main galley for an introduction to the crew and a briefing on the boat operations. Our dive masters Tarek and Karim, gave us the usual run-down on what to expect over the course of the week, including standard dive schedule, Nitrox, water entry/exit procedures and where to find the beverages: beer, wine, soda and water. Dinner was served and we were off on our rocking and rolling first night!

The boat continued its unsteady trudge across the waves for most of the night. At one point both sets of closet doors flew open, spilling half our gear to the floor. Startled awake, I worked my way out of bed like I was exiting the water in rough seas, clinging to every hand-hold I could find. Deborah quickly secured our valuables, with an armlock on the bottle of Cognac! Fortunately, it didn't take too long to rearrange our gear and laugh ourselves back to sleep.

Over the 7 nights and 5 full days of diving, there would be the opportunity to enjoy 3 dives/day, plus a night dive when available. It was reported that Al didn't miss a single dive! Most of us took advantage of the optional Nitrox 32 air mix; with some of us opting for 100 cu-ft tanks. The crew and our 18 member TSSC group filled the boat to capacity. The spacious upper deck had plenty of padded lounge area, with several bean-bags to mold your own custom seat as Dennis did quite often. The overhead canopy was a blessing during our sun-drenched days at sea.

The boat captain charted a southern route, well past Marsa Alam, below the Ras Banas peninsula. At one point my cell phone read "Welcome to Saudi Arabia" -- whoa! Over the course of the voyage we would visit some 14 dive sites in all, including wall diving at Elphinstone, Gota Soraya and Habili Ali, exploring the wreck of the Heaven One at Abu Dabab, swimming the passthroughs at St. John's Caves

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and gliding through the coral canyons at Claudia. Although entry for most sites was an easy stride off the back of the boat, a couple of sites required a zodiac entry and one, Elphinstone, required a zodiac exit was well.

Just like our land excursion, rain was never on the radar as far as our phone apps could forecast. Every day was a glorious sun-fest, which kept you in the shade (or the water) during the day, but made the evenings pleasant after sunset. The trade winds from the North were constant and so reliable that the crew would always tie-off the boat along the Southern shoreline of each reef. The coral heads themselves were barely visible above the surface of the water. Only a few breaking waves indicated their presence.
The water was an amazing 85 degrees – keeping my 3-mil wetsuit onboard, flapping in the breeze for the entire trip. I didn't see any obvious coral damage from the warm waters, but I also didn't feel the visual exhilaration that I've felt in the past diving a truly pristine and densely populated underwater habitat. The large and medium marine life was sparse. Perhaps the warm waters WERE taking a toll. Perhaps it was something else. It's been 30-years since my wife and I have undertaken an exotic trip like this. We eventually did encounter some large marine life and schools of fish, but not in the numbers we remember. It is unfair though, to expect a rich and diverse ecosystem on every trip. Discussing our observation with others on deck produced a variety of responses. From, "this is some of the best diving I've done", to "I know what you mean, the oceans are declining".

The temperature may also have been a contributing factor that kept the sharks out of our reach. There were only a couple members that caught a glimpse of any sharks, always a distance below us.

On each dive, there were abundant small, colorful reef fish. Frequent anemones with plump brightly colored clownfish dancing playfully among the anemone's tentacles. Several varieties of lionfish were common, slightly larger that I've seen in the Caribbean. Some with an array of delicate white fins, and

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some with darker, more robust physiques. All sizes of tridacna clams, some with striking iridescent blue markings. Some deeply imbedded in the reef. I couldn't help wondering, do they tailor their growth to match the enclosure of the reef around them? It seemed they were hopelessly confined to a tiny one-shell condo, with no options for expansion.

A full-grown sea turtle suddenly appeared out of the darkness on our first night dive, nearly colliding with Kevin. It instantly captured everyone's attention as it turned and gracefully came to rest on the sandy bottom below us. In the halo of our dive lights a large black moray eel glided out of the reef and swam slowly away, seemingly unconcerned with our presence. Leaving the turtle to continue its journey, we soon spotted an octopus searching the reef for something to eat. We paused and it paused, showing off its ability to change color and patterns at will. We hovered there for a few minutes, taking in the show, then turned to retrace our path along the reef.

If you like coral tunnels, St. John's Caves offered many passages that twisted and turned between the outer reef and inner lagoon. It was a pleasant tour until the dive party from a neighboring boat entered the caves going in the opposite direction. Oh well, I'm sure they were thinking the same thing.

A subsequent dive at Claudia reef took us through beautiful sweeping canyons of coral that were spectacularly lit by the sunlight streaming down through the water. This was my personal favorite. Along the way we encountered several schools of fish that gracefully shifted in unison as we passed through. I couldn't help pausing to drift with them, while their eyes swiveled in their sockets checking me out. 800 PSI, time to move on.

Back on deck, as soon as you exited the water, the crew would always greet us with cups of freshly prepared fruit juice or hot cocoa. What a refreshing way to soothe your dry throat from diving for the last hour. Out of your gear and rinsed off, it was time for dive logs and chatting about the highlights of the dive, lounging on deck or enjoying the next meal. It was a schedule that fit hand in glove. Lying back, watching the sea birds glide and hover in the wind, soon turned into snooze time. It wasn't long before the bell rang and everyone started gathering for the next dive briefing.

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James Kafka

Although I am a bit of a biased reporter, when it comes to the cuisine on this trip, there appeared to be something for everyone's taste at every meal. Meat dishes were always balanced with vegetable and grain platters, along with dairy and fresh fruit. Mango and guava juices were a daily treat. Bottled water, soda, beer and wine were in ample supply. Seemed like "Heaven" aboard the Saphir to me! I found the cooking superb, with plenty of fresh vegetables. Although it's impossible to satisfy everyone, most were ready to dig-in when mealtime came around.

On June 25, before dinner the dining hall was decorated with balloons and streamers for Bob Cofer's birthday. The marker board was turned into a giant birthday card for Bob, which we all signed. The chef baked a cake and we all had a grand time helping Bob to celebrate the occasion. Once again, another reason to break-out the Rhum! I don't remember who started it, but someone began batting one of the balloons around and it just kept going, and going. Many, many laughs and a good time!

During our return trip up the coast, north towards Port Ghalib, we encountered an Egyptian Coast Guard vessel, heading south on routine patrol. It was sleek and appeared well armored, with these big boxes on deck, which I suppose could have been anything from advanced radar to sophisticated missile systems. It was a serious looking boat. Then the ship turned, and Tarek advised us that they wanted to board the Heaven Saphir, and by the way, make sure that no one takes pictures. The Heaven Saphir stopped and the Coast Guard vessel slowly circled around us ... once ... twice. It's amazing how quickly your mood can change, 30-minutes ago I was lounging on the deck, sipping a beer, humming Hakuna Matata. Radio conversation continued. Within the hour we heard the boat engines start again and the Coast Guard vessel moved away, continuing southward.

Next day after we docked in Port Ghalib, the chef and galley crew went all-out for our last dinner which included a whole roast turkey cooked to perfection, intricately carved melon, soup, vegetables and dessert. What a feast to top-off the week of diving!

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James Kafka

Return Home
Next morning, our bus transportation arrived at 3:00am. Bags packed and final farewells to the crew complete, our gear was stowed on the bus in time for a 4:00am departure from Port Ghalib. With a glorious sunrise lighting up the mountains over the Egyptian desert, let me immortalize this experience and take one last panorama from the boat deck. Ahh, but what's that … Kevin and Liza photo-bombing my panorama! Gotcha!

Three hours later we arrived at Hurghada International Airport for a short return-flight to Cairo. What indicated our arrival you ask? With two fists in the air, the bus driver started yelling: "I love Ah-meh-ri-ka! I love Ah-meh-ri-ka!". Translation: "I love baksheesh!" and give me ALL you can spare!

The flight to Cairo behind us, we were soon checked into the Le Meridien Airport hotel. Arriving midday, some members of the group were eager to take advantage of the swimming pool. It was too good an opportunity to pass up – a full 6-hours before the dreaded "chemical treatment" that would close down one of the most desired features of the hotel – the cool, refreshing pool! What could possibly go wrong? It only took a food & beverage order to find out. As Denise relayed to me afterwards; the waiter just could not keep the order straight, he kept coming back and back and back to confirm the order. Time went by, … where's the drinks? When they finally arrived, some had to be returned, because they didn't even remotely resemble what was ordered. The food finally arrived, drinks somewhat resolved and most momentary frustrations dissipated. But wait, when the bill arrived, the math didn't add up! Aaaaahhhhh!

Fortunately, the dinner buffet was a whole different experience and hit all the right notes. Fouad, who was our tour guide during the land excursion, and whom my wife now refers to as "a living Egyptian God", reappeared and sat down with us during the meal. Everyone was surprised and overjoyed to see him again. It was the perfect closure that set everyone up for a good night of rest.

I can honestly say this trip had a near perfect balance of land and sea experiences and it was no accident. Many thanks to Judy and Jack for all your hard work coordinating this trip. It was sincerely appreciated.

Where No-one Has Dived Before!

Amanda Slattery

The attraction of the three-week itinerary from Santiago, Chile to Papeete, Tahiti in March/April 2019 was the opportunity to explore seldom-visited sites across the South Pacific. Following a day to discover the Chilean capital, we spent two days learning the mysteries of Easter Island before boarding the National Geographic's good ship *Orion*, an expedition ship class. This 100-passenger ship is equipped for sixteen scuba divers.

Racing ahead of the storm which almost prevented our boarding, and after two days at sea, we arrived at uninhabited Ducie Atoll a tiny bird-filled paradise which we explored on foot. The next day saw us at Henderson Island, another desolate spot in the middle of the South Pacific where we completed the required checkout dive in waters scouted for their suitability. There are no known dive sites here. The coral walls delighted us with their soft pastel colors. Two days later found us at the Acteon Islands in the company of French Polynesian divemasters who had never dived among these islands before. Next stop was Pitcairn Island where we saw the graves of some of the mutineers from *HMS Bounty* and their descendants. I particularly enjoy the mix of diving and encounters with different cultures on these National Geographic trips.

Arceye Hawkfish off Tahanea

Emperor Angelfish off Tahanea

Where No-one Has Dived Before!

Amanda Slattery

(Flags of Rapa Nui, Tahiti and Tuamotu, Clockwise)

The next few days saw us discovering the delights of islands in the Tuamotu Archipelago teeming with whitetip, silvertip and blacktip reef sharks, all signs of a very healthy ocean. We were excited to submit all photos of sharks to contribute to the National Geographic shark count. There was a plethora of interesting ocean life: eagle rays, saddleback and pennant butterflyfish, triggerfish, schooling unicornfish and a manta ray with a 12' wingspan. One of the highlights was a drift dive through the North Passage and into the lagoon at Fakarava with the current taking us soaring over the reef.

Our final dive was cancelled – a great disappointment – since, after we had investigated the island of Makatea, a pod of sperm whales presented themselves around the ship. In an effort to get as many people as possible onto the water among the whales, diving was cancelled. We boarded the zodiaks with snorkel gear and after a couple of attempts to quietly enter the water without splashing, we swam close enough to watch a whale dive in front of our eyes. It was a pretty spectacular finale to the trip.

Impressions of Easter Island

Amanda Slattery

Easter Island had long been on my bucket list, so this was one reason for jumping at this opportunity. The existence of the moai has challenged scholars - who now understand why they were created, but not how they were transported from the quarry to the platforms, or why or how the custom was so suddenly terminated.

Bishoff/Getty

It was interesting to learn that ours is not the only civilization which has ruined an environment.

Destruction of a physical environment is not a recent or isolated phenomenon. The Polynesians who populated the island planted eucalyptus trees which are poisonous to livestock. There are no wild or domesticated animals grazing the land. In former times there were many seabirds, the annual arrival of the manutara (a type of tern) was responsible for the creation of the Birdman Cult, in which honor was given to the first man to bring an intact egg back from an offshore island. However, the eggs and flesh of the birds were eaten, and now there are very few still inhabiting the islands.

Manutara bird of Easter Island

Despite the fascinating mystery of the moai, it was disappointing to discover that the island is essentially dead. there are no indigenous birds or animals left. No wild or domestic animal graze the land as poisonous eucalyptus trees, introduced by Polynesian settlers, dot the landscape.

The moai statues are intriguing. Much care has been taken to restore platforms destroyed by weather and hostile invaders, but mysteries of their creation and transportation remain

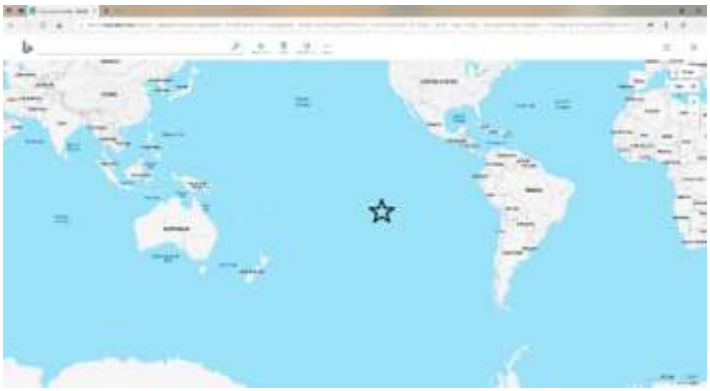
Mysteries of Easter Island !

Gary Lehman

Many of us over the years have marveled at the stellae of Easter Island. How and why did these monoliths appear on remote Easter Island? Who built them and when? What were they all about? Were they deposited on the island by aliens in antiquity shrouded in mystery? Where is Easter Island anyhow?? And above all, WHY? Our Club's intrepid Amanda has had the phenomenal experience of touring Easter Island and witnessing these as part of her South Pacific odyssey. Amanda has contributed to the following report, so come along and join us, exploring these mysteries!!

The fact is that humans like to build, for lots of reasons – religious, political, military, pride and ostentation, personal celebration, love and other reasons. Some structures are so massive that they are even visible from space, for example the Great Wall of China (note that various older sections were built 3,000 years ago). Some famous structures and buildings which come to mind are (as of of us have recently witnessed) the pyramids of Giza near Cairo (variously built 4,500 years ago), Stonehenge, the standing stones of Stenness (built 5,000 years ago), the Eiffel Tower, the World Trade Center Towers, Burj Al Arab hotel in Dubai, the Coliseum in Rome, the Taj Mahal in Agra India.. and on and on, across the full reach and range of human existence, time and space. ***And… the nearly 1,000 Moai statues of Easter Island !***

Where is Easter Island? Who built the monoliths, and why? So what are these monoliths?



As you can see, Easter Island is PRETTY REMOTE. It is 2,200 miles west of Chile. Evidence suggests that this volcanic is land was first inhabited around 800 years ago by seafaring Polynesians. Evi dently, they were very successful at what they were doing because they had the re sources and time to build these statues (for whatever reason…).

Mysteries of Easter Island !

Gary Lehman

It is suspected that a combination of over-farming, rat infestation, diseases contracted from mainlanders, and marauders in the slave trade arriving from South America in the 19th century wiped out the Easter Island culture and civilization.

These statues are carved out of volcanic tufa; Easter Island is volcanic in origin (similar to the Hawaiian Islands). Radiocarbon dating places the origins of the statues between 1100 to 1700AD. They range up to 13' in height and some weigh 14 tons. This was a monumental effort to extract these blocks from the local extinct volcano lava field. Ethnographers suspect they were constructed to honor deceased chiefs and leaders. There does not appear to be any astronomical significance such as the case with Stonehenge (5,000 years old) or the Pueblo structures in Chaco Canyon in New Mexico (which intriguingly, are dated similarly to the Moai statues of Easter Island).

Fascinating work is being done by inter-disciplinary teams examining soil yield, human nutritional needs, human waste, trash, estimated historical rainfall, and temperature to try to figure out what happened to Easter Island civilization with more certainty. Perhaps by the next time a member of our Club returns to Easter Island, more will be known and the Sea Swells editor will be sure to report on all new developments as they surface !

Odyssey Across the South Pacific Continues … Pitcairn Island !

Gary Lehman

Who remembers the classic 1962 film *Mutiny on the Bounty* starring Marlon Brando, Trevor Howard and Richard Harris? Those who do remember the film might also recall — it was based on an actual event! And our own intrepid Amanda on her South Pacific odyssey was there on the scene -- and touched the place where history happened !

So First: Where is Pitcairn Island? This speck of land (2 miles by 1 mile) is inhabited by around 50 people is A VERY , very far way away! The volcanic Pitcairn Islands are a British Overseas Territory which include the islands of Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno. These islands are in the middle of the vast South Pacific… 1350 miles east south-east of Tahiti and over 4100 miles from Panama. The Islands' administrative headquarters are in Auckland New Zealand, 3300 miles away.

The story around *HMS Bounty* and Pitcairn Island has captivated the public's imagination in many books and several films. *HMS Bounty's* mission in 1787 was to bring breadfruit from Tahiti to the West Indies. In a nutshell, Lieutenant Fletcher Christian lead a mutiny against an apparently brutal Captain Bligh aboard *HMS Bounty* on April 28, 1789. Bligh and 18 sailors loyal to him were set adrift in a lifeboat. The mutineers sailed first to Tahiti where some mutineers stayed, with the rest settling on Pitcairn Island. The Pitcairn group included Fletcher Christian and the *Bounty* was burned and sunk to avoid detection by the Royal Navy Admiralty. Incredibly, Captain Bligh and his loyal crew survived their 4,000-mile journey to the Dutch East Indies.

Odyssey Across the South Pacific Continues … Pitcairn Island !

Gary Lehman

Upon returning to England in 1790, Bligh resolved to bring the mutineers to justice. *HMS Pandora* was dispatched with Bligh aboard, and several mutineers were apprehended on Tahiti. Upon return to England, *HMS Pandora* ran aground on the Great Barrier Reef, killing several of the mutineers. Surviving mutineers were court martialed: some acquitted, some pardoned, some hanged. While Pitcairn is almost uninhabited at this time, some descendants of Fletcher Christian and the mutineers remain on the island.

The burned wreck of *HMS Bounty* is on the bottom in shallow waters, and visible in the pristine waters of Pitcairn Island; artifacts have been recovered and are in museums in various Pacific locations. And here is one of *HMS Bounty's* cannon, as photographed and reported on by Amanda!

Ps… for more reading on this subject, consult

https://archive.archaeology.org/9905/etc/bounty.html

Adventure to Australia's Great Barrier Reef

Michael Ferrari and *The Spirit of Freedom* Website

June 3-10, 2019 saw me on a bucket list dive vacation to Australia's Great Barrier Reef!

I chose this trip after watching the Blue Planet II documentary narrated by David Attenborough. In the documentary he explained the effects of climate change on the GBR and how much of the reef is being threatened by the rising water temperature. A trip to the GBR has always been on my bucket list, and I finally decided not to wait any longer and wished to see the reef before any further damage is incurred. I booked the trip through Caradonna Dive agency.

The boat I was assigned to is the liveaboard *The Spirit of Freedom* offering world-class, liveaboard dive cruises to Australia's Great Barrier Reef and Coral Sea reefs. Departing from Cairns in Northern Australia, the *Spirit of Freedom* ventures far beyond the reach of day-trip vessels to explore the seldom-visited dive sites of the northern Great Barrier Reef and remote Coral Sea reefs. Shark dives, potato cod feeding, sheer walls laced with massive soft corals, manta-rays, minke whale encounters and abundant, healthy tropical reefs, rich with marine biodiversity, are just some of the highlights you'll experience when you dive the *Spirit of Freedom*.

Spirit of Freedom is regarded as one of Australia's most comfortable and well appointed liveaboard dive vessels. With three decks of living space, generous cabins with private bathrooms, this 37-meter (125 ft) vessel offers all the amenities of a hotel, complimented by first class meals and personalized professional service from the crew of 10.

Spirit of Freedom is owned and operated by Cairns' locals, Chris Eade and Phillip Hobbs. With more than 30 years of experience in dive tourism, they have earned a reputation for quality dive tours with the highest safety standards.

As a guest on *Spirit of Freedom* my expectations were exceeded with stunning dive locations, amazing marine encounters, comfortable accommodations and great Australian service. I also had an opportunity for an encounter with a minke whale during this trip, which was an experience of a life-time!

Adventure to Australia's Great Barrier Reef

Michael Ferrari and *The Spirit of Freedom* Website

Cairns is a vibrant, bustling cosmopolitan city located in the heart of Australia's tropics. A vast range of accommodations are available from budget through to luxury spa style lodgings. The city boasts a great choice of restaurants and casual eateries along with an array of shopping options. Known as the 'Gateway to the Great Barrier Reef' Cairns is also in close proximity to ancient World Heritage Rainforests, lush hinterland teeming with waterfalls, The Outback and Cape York Peninsula. Tranquil, white sandy beaches including Palm Cove and Port Douglas lay within easy reach to the north of the city.

In addition to the Great Barrier Reef and Coral Sea, Cairns offers many wonderful nature-based and cultural experiences including White Water Rafting, Hot Air Ballooning, Skyrail Rainforest Cableway, Kuranda Scenic Rail, Tjapukai Aboriginal Park, Lava Tubes at Undara National Park, Crocodile spotting on the Daintree River and Cape Tribulation, to name just a few.

The Great Barrier Reef and neighboring Coral Sea are known to have the greatest collection of coral reefs on earth, and visitors come from all parts of the world to experience the wonder of its waters, islands, corals, fish, bird life and iconic species. Spirit of Freedom and Tusa Dive Tours are experts in the region as the Great Barrier Reef is their home, their 'neighborhood' and place of work and recreation. TUSA Dive and Spirit of Freedom are proud to be accredited as an Advanced Ecotourism Operator – the highest eco certification attainable in Australia, and are committed to providing a service that reflects their responsibility to contribute to the conservation of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, passing on this rich heritage to future generations.

The company's actions to reduce carbon emission have been recognized through the Climate Action Certification Program, with TUSA Dive and Spirit of Freedom awarded Certification as Climate Action Business. This accreditation recognizes that company's commitment to tackle Climate Change through implementing a range of emission reduction measures and by evaluating and measuring the business carbon footprint.

(All photos from the liveaboard courtesy photographers Lorenzo and Kaku)

Spirit of Freedom DiveTrip Report

Michael Ferrari

Spirit of Freedom and their passengers waved goodbye to sunny Cairns for a few days and departed Trinity Wharf on Monday. Our Ribbon Reef adventure https://www.spiritoffreedom.com.au/diving/ribbon-reefs started at Troppos, Norman Reef with a couple of check-out dives; the divers onboard were excited to jump in for the first dive of the trip and refresh their dive skills. The second dive of our trip was a magical twilight dive, with the sun slowly sinking towards the horizon the divers' torches highlighted the Giant Trevally and Grey Reef Sharks, just a few meters away from the boat!

Tuesday started with a visit to one and only Steve's Bommie (one of the best dive sites in the Great Barrier Reef), boasting 30-meter visibility and a very mild current and attracting large schools of pelagic fish; it doesn't get any better than this! We explored the pinnacle and found lots of cool critters, colorful nudibranchs, mantis shrimp, pipefish and the very elusive Leafy Scorpionfish. Many large stonefish were spotted in the shallows and we even got the chance to say hi to Nemo!

After a short steam north we arrived to Ribbon Reef #5 to dive the always-beautiful Clam Gardens, the sun shining in the sky and a short break in the wind gave our divers perfect conditions and everyone enjoyed a relaxing dive. We then had a fantastic meal prepared by our onboard magician Scotty while making our way up north in the Ribbons, arriving to another spectacular site, Google Gardens, where we encountered several Cuttlefish and turtles.

Our last couple of dives on Tuesday took place at Challenger Bay, in the afternoon a large and friendly Great Barracuda greeted us just under the boat, but the highlight was the sighting of one of the biggest turtles we've ever seen, a huge male loggerhead! The night dive at Challenger Bay featured red bass, giant trevally and sharks hunting in the darkness, using the help of our dive torches.

The final day of the trip started at Pixie Pinnacle, where colorful soft corals and sea fans were everyone's favorite, we then proceeded our trip towards Lizard Island and stopped at the world- famous Cod Hole. As soon as the divers jumped in the water here, were greeted by two large potato cods, who put on a big show for us during the cod feeding! After the feed some lucky divers were able to spot some of the tiniest creatures in the ocean: two white Coleman's pigmy seahorses! After lunch we further explored Cod Hole doing the first drift dive of the trip, after a quick trip in the tender everyone loved an effortless one-way dive drifting back to the boat. A big incoming tide gave us very clear waters.

Drift diving was so great we decided to move to Dynamite Passage for another one! This time some of us saw a friendly pod of Spinner Dolphins just after their back-roll entry. A school of 30 bumphead parrotfish was hanging out not far from our boat and it was a great encounter, just before coming back to the *Spirit of Freedom* one last time!

On Thursday morning everyone hopped in the tenders across to Watsons Bay on Lizard Island for a short walk to the top of Chinaman's Ridge for some scenic views of the bay before those leaving us for Cairns had to board their charter plane for the short scenic flight back to Cairns along the coast.

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues!

Gene Miceli

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues!
By Gene Miceli

TSSC has visited the Florida Keys several times over the last few years and typically these trips have focused on the upper keys – Key Largo in particular. Not too surprising as this area is an easy flight into Fort Lauderdale or Miami and a quick hop out to Key Largo. The wrecks in the upper keys will keep divers coming back for more. And so TSSC has complied, returning to dive the *USS Spiegel Grove* and the *USCGC Duane* on multiple occasions.

Over the last year there has been a growing interest by a few in the club to return to the keys to dive more of the notable wrecks we miss when staying in the upper keys. During BTS several of the TSSC volunteers started to build the momentum to make a Key West trip happen in 2019. Given the full calendar of TSSC trips already on the schedule, it was determined that this trip would be a non-TSSC event and would therefore be the responsibility of each member to organize airfare and group-up for lodging arrangements.

Al Miller kicked the trip into gear and started planning out August dates, a condo and the dive operators that could accommodate the wrecks we had on our radar. As the group started to build through announcements made at member meetings additional folks expressed interest in joining. Jack Ricotta and Michelle Memoli stepped in to organize a second residence to accommodate the growing interest.

As August approached the plans of the **"Key West Wreck Trek"** were being finalized. A major shout out to Al Miller for his detailed communications and willingness to go above and beyond for all on the trip. Al was taking nitrox, rental gear and tank size preferences from all and communicating with the dive operators. A total and complete "PINTA" – thanks Al!

As Friday August 2nd approached members from the NY metro area were descending on Florida. Members from Florida were organizing drives out to the keys and planning supermarket stops to stock the kitchens. Everybody seemed to have their own travel itinerary, but between rental cars and members coming off the mainland, we all made it to Key West.

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues!

Gene Miceli

The lodging arrangements were unlike most if not all TSSC trips. Typically, the process is link-up with a roommate you want to share a room with. Whether that is a hotel room or a state-room on a liveaboard. This trip was a bit more like a cable tv reality show where various personalities share a home. In the Miller residence, I stayed along with Katelynn, Melissa and Nick. Sleeping arrangements were a bit unorthodox by my travel standards. Nick claimed the pull-out sofa, Melissa and Katelynn shared a queen size bed, while Al and myself shared the king. As much as Al is regarded as a big teddy bear, his cuddling skills need some work. However, he does make nice evening wind down conversation rehashing the daily events. Let's move on from here – what happens in KW stays in KW. The Ricotta residence was quite sweet (and a bit more upscale). The multi-level rental home was a walking distance from Duval Street and only required bed sharing amongst those who do it regularly. Jack, Stephanie, Craig, Sandra, Michelle, Mikhayl, Ali, Steve, Ed and Sheri all shared this home. Although the private swimming pool and hot tub would be considered the highlight, I felt the covered patio was the place to be. A nice common area to hang out and chat with fellow divers.

Saturday arrived and we made our way to Lost Reef Adventures. We were scheduled to dive the *USNS Vandenberg* with this outfit – a double dip. The weather seemed perfect. The sun was shining, not a cloud in sight and it was getting quite hot and muggy. After the typical paperwork check-ins and our tanks were analyzed we were on our way to the dive site. Approximately 5 minutes out of harbor the swells were beginning to build. The bow riders were soon to get doused with sea spray prompting the captain to reassess conditions, abort the trip and head back to port. Clearly, we were not thrilled with losing our first day, but the captain made the call. Back at the docks we broke down gear and headed out for plan B on our Saturday. Most headed home for showers and a change of clothes and did some wandering and shopping along Duvall St and the seaport. The late afternoon kicked off the KW welcome reception. A big thank you to Michelle who made it her mission to ensure we had dinners that brought together both houses. The welcome reception dinner was held at the Ricotta palace and included catered BBQ – so much food and quite delicious. Fun was had by all.

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues!

Gene Miceli

By Sunday morning I feel we were getting used to our new housemates and arrangements. We learned who tends to get to bed early and who are on the early side to wake. You get familiar with who is up for early coffee and breakfast too. But bringing together people of the opposite gender who are not accustomed to sharing their homes with others brought out the best in the Miller residence. At least twice Melissa woke for a 3am bathroom call for the house to hear her taking a shower. Five people and two full bathrooms – clearly this wasn't necessary. I learned over breakfast Nick was still working on his "putting the toilet seat down" skills. Melissa took a swim in the bowl! It only got better as this happened to her twice!

After Melissa went toilet diving it was time to load the car and get back to the docks to give real diving another try. Today was a different dive plan. We were scheduled to dive the Cayman Salvager and Joe's Tug. Two wrecks on the trek that most had not done before. These dives were a bit shallower than the planned *Vandenberg* and not a bad way to get the wreck juices flowing. The weather was ideal, and the seas were calm – we would be diving today. The *Cayman Salvager* was utilized as a cable layer to haul freight and even played a role with carrying Cuban refugees in 1979. It sank unexpectedly at the docks in 1985. After being raised and refloated it sank again in 92 feet of water. Nick was my dive buddy and I think most on the trip paired up with another diver who had similar preferences and air usage and remained a team for the week. Steve was a solo diver on this trip. Only the marine life would be able to match his bottom times. Since he was using his rebreather, his dives typically lasted as long as our first dive and our surface interval combined. The second dive of the morning was on *Joe's Tug*. The wreck was a 75' steel hulled shrimp boat that was intended to be sunk as an artificial reef, but local legend has it that a group of pirates stole the boat in KW harbor and it sank during their getaway. I don't really know myself about all that, but it was a demolished wreck. The bow is still intact, but the stern to midship is a litter of debris on the ocean floor making for some cool hiding places for the marine life. These dives checked two boxes on the wreck trek and set the stage for a group of anxious divers to get on the *Vandenberg*. We were told that since both the *Cayman Salvager* and *Joe's Tug* are not the draw to bring divers into Key West that they are rarely visited by the dive operations. The growth on the mooring lines clearly indicate this is the case.

The post dive yard sale of drying gear took over the Miller balcony. The table became a landing zone for all misc. items while the chairs and railings carried five diver's worth of wetsuits, bcd's and regulators. The scene down the road at Jack's was a bit more interesting. That crew elected to drop their gear in the swimming pool for a daily soaking. The periodic swimmer was merely a bobbing head amongst floating gear.

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues!

Gene Miceli

During our afternoon break on Sunday, Ed rallied a small militia to head back over to the dive shop. The purpose of the visit was twofold – we would like to schedule make-up dives for the lost trip and moving forward, please don't allow mildly rough seas to call our trip. The dive shop received the message and was interested in picking up the lost business. Ed's role now transitioned from labor union rep into a commissioned recruiter. The boat wouldn't leave the dock without a minimum of 5 divers. With varying flight departure times on Friday, this was going to include only a few available divers. It was interesting that we didn't have the same captain for the remainder of our dives.

Monday arrived much like the others. Fantastic weather and sea conditions to match. The ride out to the Vandenberg was smooth and I don't think there was even the slightest pitch or roll once the crew hooked us up to the mooring line. The dive briefing covered the layout of the ship, the location of the multiple ball lines and the rules of engagement on the dives we were preparing for. Pool was now open and buddy teams began to splash. Nick and I worked our way down the line following the path of exhaled bubbles before us. Arriving on the wreck midship allowed buddy teams to see much of the wreck's superstructure. As we all quickly learned, the current was strong! Using the superstructure for shelter from the current and the usage of the currents for our swims was going to be well worth the planning. Most were diving 30% enriched air on these dives allowing us to a bit more time to explore the vast wreck. Most did a general scout of the wreck, checking out passages and easy swim throughs. Barracudas, reef sharks and large schools of jacks let us know how healthy the artificial reef is doing. Keeping an eye on computers and gauges was key to enjoying these dives as no deco times and air supply were dropping much quicker at the 100+ foot depths. The ride back into port was filled with many sharing their excitement and opinions of the wreck. The highlight dives of the trip did not disappoint.

Monday night was an interesting evening. The group linked-up for a dinner on the docks by the KW seaport. A few beers and grouper sandwiches (well that was what I enjoyed) were on the mark. The afterparty had been discussed even before we left NY…there was to be a drag queen show on this trip. Unfortunately, the Miller residence was exhausted from the diving and the heat and chose to be party poopers. Shh, don't tell anyone we just wanted to get home to watch wheel of fortune and tuck in to bed. I was told a select group made it to the show. I can't speak firsthand, but pictures have made the rounds. Clearly the young bloods in the group were living it up. The general account was that the show was hysterical and made for a fun evening. It's what makes Key West so interesting.

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues!

Gene Miceli

Tuesday was the first of two days we would travel up north to continue our diving. Today we would be traveling to Marathon to dive the Thunderbolt and follow it with a shallow reef dive. The *Thunderbolt* was scuttled in 1986 and had served as a cable-laying ship in WWII. The wreck was one of the smaller wrecks we were on this week, but it was a cool ship to explore. The winch wheel on the bow was rather interesting. It is also worth mentioning that the waters had a significant increase in boating traffic today as the Florida lobster season opened and seemingly every reef included dive flags. Our second reef dive allowed us to participate in the fun. Since the boat had a commercial license, we were able to scour the reef and bag some lobsters. I must admit, I was horrible and looked foolish. Clearly my technique of cornering and netting a lobster was inadequate. Others had more success than I did – I believe a total of three lobsters were brought up on the boat. It's a good thing we're not making a living on this.

Following our afternoon dives we headed out to a local restaurant in Marathon for a group dinner. The restaurant cooked up the lobster tails and all got a taste of the Florida bug. The drive back down US1 to Key West capped off a great day with views of the old Flagler railroad.

Wednesday brought us back up north to Big Pine Key. The *Adolphus Busch* was the dive destination for our first dive followed by another shallow reef. The *A Busch* was a former cargo freighter which was intentionally sunk in 1988. The wreck was interesting and allowed us to check another box in the process. Heading back into Key West the group stopped at a local place to enjoy another group dinner.

The dives in Marathon and Big Pine were organized through Captain Hook's which we understand is going through a few dive shop acquisitions in the keys. The growth and changes underway with their operation likely played a role in the service we experienced. Overall, the service was acceptable as there are so many people we interact with, but by comparison to Lost Reef in KW, it was subpar. The nitrox fills in Marathon was an interesting experience – we played a greater role in the analysis, labeling and documenting than should have been the case. In Big Pine we were welcomed by friendly staff at the counter, however, told that Al's detailed nitrox order was never received at their location. We would be diving air. Certainly, these were issues worth expressing to leadership and memory banking for future visits.

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues!

Gene Miceli

Thursday brought a mixed bag of activities for the group. It was originally not a scheduled day for diving so many were hanging out at the houses, doing some shopping and making use of the swimming pools. A small group including myself, Ed, Steve, Craig, Nick, Kaitlynn and Sheri headed back out with Lost Reef Adventures for another double dip on the Vandenberg. With a smaller group we attempted to link-up our buddy teams together. The dives earlier in the week provided a good basis for us to formulate dive plans for the day. The dive boat hooked us up on the stern of the wreck which required us to head to midship. We jumped into a few wide passages where entry and exits were clearly visible and then worked our way back down-current to the stern for our ascent. On the dive boat we discussed we had one last dive on this great wreck before the trip was a wrap. We agreed we would splash on dive two and high tail it up towards the bow on the starboard side of the ship. Expecting we would not be able to make it to the bow, we would be thrilled to spend time on the bridge. The plan was for anyone who found the current too much work to make it, stay on the starboard side and explore or start to head back to the stern. Alternative plans were not needed as the full group made it to the bridge and we got a great view of the US flag hanging from a superstructure near the bow. Gas supply was dipping to the point where the group needed to get started towards the stern. Heading off the bridge we were greeted by a sizable reef shark moving into our path. What a great view of an awesome looking shark, but we just didn't have the time to hang out with him. It was time to move. Working our way back towards the stern we had decisions to manage. Our no deco times were dropping along with our air and typically that would be an easy solve by ascending off the deck of the wreck. However, the current was strong and swimming above the wreck out of any protection the ship can offer would make the swim to the stern line much more difficult as the current had shifted during the dive. It was no longer running bow to stern, it was going port to starboard. Managing the current was key as missing the last mooring line at the stern meant a free ascent and surface swim into Cuba. We elected to stay low. After completing a lengthier ascent, we had a great time discussing the dive, the bridge and that awesome reef shark. Time to head in and get our gear rinsed, dried and packed for our travels home.

Thursday night brought us all together one last time for a lobster dinner. Big thank you to Melissa for taking the initiative and finding this event. We enjoyed a dinner together and had a cake to celebrate Mikhal's birthday. Following a few drinks and more socializing, we headed to houses to pack gear/luggage and make our return flights home on Friday.

The trip was really a great time. When it started with a conversation amongst a few we had no idea it would morph into the trip it became. Excellent diving, meals and entertainment made for a great week. But sadly it was time for us to go home and for Al to explain to Sandy (wife) that she still is the one he chooses to share a comforter with. Did I mention there is still the *Eagle* in Islamorada that remains unchecked on our wreck trek? Is anyone interested in joining us back in the keys – 2020 perhaps?

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues

Photo Postcard !

The Florida Wreck Trek… Continues

Photo Postcard !

Blackbeard Cruise 2019!

Nick Lappano

Thanks to winning a raffle at the LIDA Film Festival in January I once again had the pleasure of going on a week-long cruise with Blackbeard Cruises in the Bahamas. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Denise B. for her assistance to this end.

Since the raffle prize provided was a complimentary ticket I could not book until 20 days before the ship set sale. That being said, I was anxiously monitoring the number open berths to determine what week would be feasible. It looked liked the week of September 14 thru 20 would have the greatest possibility of having an available spot so I set my sights on that week.

My luck held out and on August 26th I called and booked my spot, paying the port taxes and gratuities which were not included with the winning ticket. I then booked a non-stop flight out of Newark on United Airlines. To avoid the hassle of rushing to be on the boat by noon on Saturday the 14th, I arranged to stay overnigt at the Nassau Harbor Club. The room was basic , but it would serve my needs for an overnight spot to “crash”.

So I flew into Nassau on Friday the 13th on a flight which was less than half full, hopped on the transfer to the Nassau Harbor Club and was checked in by 3 PM.

Awakening on the 14th I had breakfast at Starbucks across the street from the Harbor Club, checked out of the hotel and casually made my way to the boat, the Sea Explorer. I had included most of my information in my online trip application, so check-in was quick and easy. My assigned bunk was #4 lower which was on the starboard side of the boat, near the bow.

Blackbeard Cruise 2019!

Nick Lappano

We emptied our bags into our bunks, set up our BCDs and regs on the tanks on the dive deck and stowed the rest of our dive gear in the storage compartments under the seats. For those traveling with hard sided bags their bags were stored ashore. I was using a duffle which I was able to store in my bunk with the small supply of clothes and other essentials which had brought with me. Space is extremely limited so for most of us our stuff took up 1/3 to ½ of our bunk. Single bunks like mine are about 3 feet wide so it was quite the cozy fit.

Since all of the passengers had arrived well before the scheduled 3PM departure time we left the dock at 2PM. This was fortunate since due to weather conditions, our Captain, Iain, had decided to go further south than usual to start our adventure, instead of a four-hour crossing, it would take us about eight hours to reach our mooring site for the evening. It was bit of a bouncy ride, but we handled it well. I think one of the passengers may have suffered from a mild bout of seasickness but that was it.

Although the site was somewhat protected, we were still rocking quite a bit at mooring. The Blackbeard boats are a little smaller than most liveaboards at 65-feet long with a 19-foot beam, so one feels the rough seas a bit more than on a larger vessel, but it was okay, and I slept relatively well.

Regarding the crew, they were all great. As usual on a liveaboard, all of them were multi-tasking, but their primary roles were Iain- Captain; Justin- First Mate; Alayna- Dive Instructor; Brian- Dive Instructor; Chris- Engineer; and most importantly Gladys- our chef. The meals were all tasty and well-prepared, and there was plenty of food for all.

Blackbeard Cruise 2019!

Nick Lappano

If you are looking to maximize you dive time, liveaboard diving is, in my opinion your best choice. Basically, the plan is *Eat, Sleep and Dive* (not necessarily in that order). We would get up around sunrise and after breakfast make our first dive of the day. Then our tanks would be re-filled and after an approximately 90-minute surface interval we would make our second dive. Toward mid-afternoon we would make our third dive; and the night dive would be after dinner. On a liveaboard you only assemble your gear once. From that point on your tank (with your kit is attached) is filled using a whip. We would take our first stages off the tank to indicate the need for a fill, and after filling it the crew would put the dust cap on the tank valve indicating that it was ready to go.

We also used DAN Diver I.D. system boards to keep track of our presence ON board or OFF the boat. Before jumping in the water, we would move our name tag to “OFF” and return it to the “ON” board as soon as we returned to the boat. So, it was important to remember three things: remove your first stage, bungee your tank, and move your name back to the “ON” board before doing anything else.

Needless to say, I made every dive. I was lucky to pair up with two experienced divers, Max, a dive instructor from Key West and Perry (who was logging his 18th trip on Blackbeard’s) a divemaster from Canada. Max usually took the lead, and he got us back to the boat every time. Perry, after 18 trips, knew the sites about as well as the crew.

Blackbeard Cruise 2019!

Nick Lappano

We saw sharks on almost every dive with the highlight being a shark dive on the wreck of the Austin Smith where we swam down to the deck at about 50 feet and held on to the rails while the sharks and groupers annihilated a frozen bait ball while was mounted over the deck about fifteen feet above us. I could not even begin to count the number of sharks, large groupers and other fish which pummeled the bait ball into oblivion. The feed lasted about 15 minutes, and we spent the remainder of the dive cruising the wreck and mingling with the remaining sharks, all of which were Caribbean reef sharks. They were calm and posed no threat whatsoever.

Another outstanding dive site was Dog Rocks. This site had innumerable swim throughs of various lengths and widths and it quite exciting to cruise through them.

For Sunday Monday, Tuesday and early Wednesday we enjoyed spectacular visibility, ranging from 70 to 80 feet. The water temperature never got below 82 degrees.
...Wikipedia

Unfortunately, on Wednesday afternoon the conditions changed. The winds shifted and conditions went downhill on our last two dives. Viz dropped to about 15 or 20 feet and the seas got pretty choppy. Due to the conditions (which would have included quite the bouncy ladder) we only made 16 dives instead of the hoped for 19. Captain Iain put safety first, and for that I applaud him. Thanks to Iain's knowledge and seamanship we maximized our opportunities given what Mother Nature had tossed our way. We saw sharks on almost every dive usually seeing five or six per dive. We also saw rays, moray eels (mostly spotted) and a few turtles.

Blackbeard Cruise 2019!

Nick Lappano

There were sixteen divers on the Sea Explorer from many different states as well as Canada, Germany New Zealand, South Africa and England. As the accommodations on Blackbeard's boats are confined you meet everyone readily and we all got along "swimmingly".

While the limited accommodations on Blackbeard's might not be everyone's cup of tea, for those with an adventurous spirit who are willing to put up with roughing it a little and sleeping in tight quarters it provides an economical opportunity for divers to maximize their diving dollar while having a fun time!

… Nick

(For more information on Blackbeard liveaboards, see https://allstarliveaboards.com/blackbeards-liveaboard-diving/)

NICK LAPPANO's Safety Stop

Knowing How To Use An Important Tool,

Your Dive Computer !!

Over the last few months I have continued to speak about the proper use of your dive computer, provided that you use one.

Almost all divers have crossed over to the use of dive computers for the additional information which they provide. They provide much more info than the old depth gauge and underwater timing system and extend your available dive time exponentially especially on multi-level dives.

That said, many divers do not take the time to get to know their dive computer. The prevents them from either maximizing its efficiency, or more important using it safely.

Know your computer

As I have said many times, learn how your computer works! In the past, most companies provided a paper owner's manual. If you get one these, read it completely to understand ALL of the functions of your dive computer. If you didn't receive a paper manual (which is happening more and more frequently) download the manual from the manufacturer's website. Don't rely solely on the little laminated card which you may have received.

I have noted the following when observing divers and the way in which they use their computers.

Knowing How To Use An Important Tool,

Your Dive Computer !!

-Know how to set the various functions on your computer. How do you switch to Nitrox? How do you switch modes? If you set your computer to the wrong mode, such as “Free” or “Gauge” instead of “Dive” (aka Normal) and dive with it your computer is not being used as intended which will increase your risk of injury or worse.

If you notice such an error after commencing a dive and you do not have a properly functioning back up dive computer which you have been using for your previous dives, you should abort the dive immediately to avoid such risks.

In addition, it may take 24 hours for you to reset your computer to the needed mode.

-Practice changing settings at home before your trip. If using Nitrox, make sure your computer is set to the proper O2 percentage before EVERY dive.

- Know how to read the information which your computer provides to you. When diving scroll through the various screens. If you don’t understand something refer to the manual.

- USE YOUR COMPUTER SAFELY. Unless you are a trained technical diver, following a predetermined dive plan which includes decompression stops and the training and equipment required for such diving you should NOT be making dives which require a Deco stop. Monitor your NDL (No Decompression Limit) time as well as your remaining air when diving. Especially on deeper dives, the time remaining before you need to make a required Deco stop can fly by really fast. DO NOT PUSH THE LIMITS. Plan you dive with your buddy to be on the ascent line with a sufficient amount of NDL time remaining so that you will not be required to make a Deco stop. Maybe you will plan to be back to the line and on your way back to the surface) when you are down to 10 minutes, maybe 5 minutes. Do not “ride” your computer down to a minute or two. Be conservative and plan for contingencies when deciding this.

- What happens if you “blow it” and have to make a DECO stop?
I know that we should not intentionally be making dives requiring DECO stops but I have observed several divers being forced to make unplanned DECO stops. I cannot emphasize enough: “DO NOT MAKE DECO DIVES!!” Just in case this happens, which you should take all steps to avoid, it is very important that you know <u>at least</u> two things.

1.) How does your computer tell you that you have to make a DECO stop? I have seen confused divers who do not know whether they are required to make a DECO stop or not.

Knowing How To Use An Important Tool,

Your Dive Computer !!

2.) How does the computer display the depth and time for the required DECO stop? In most cases this will differ from the usual 15 to 20 depth for a safety stop. Unless you stop at the required depth and for the required time, your computer may not recognize the safety stop and clear you for future diving. More importantly you increase your risk of DCS. Not all computers display this information the same way. Make sure you know how your computer tells you what you need to know.

Both of the above are in the operator's manual.

To summarize, dive computers are a fantastic tool when used safely and properly. But like any tool they can be dangerous if not used correctly. Also remember that pushing the limits of your computer is not a safe practice. All computer logarithms are based on theoretical calculations. If your computer provides different levels (conservative vs. liberal) of settings, consider going with the more conservative option.

Divers have suffered incidents even when their computer says they did everything right. The more conservatively you dive regarding those limits the better.

Note: The author is not a dive professional, and this article is not meant to serve as a form of training. All such training should be conducted under the guidance of a Dive Professional (instructor). These insights are provided from the author's observations as a recreational diver

...Nick

Where to get those manuals ! Some representative dive computer websites…

https://www.oceanicworldwide.com/us/

https://www.shearwater.com/

https://www.scubapro.com/

https://www.cressi.com/

https://atomicaquatics.com/computer.html

My Turn: The Purple Heart Medal—
History and Awareness

Steve Reichenbach

I suppose some of you might be wondering why I have submitted an article on the Purple Heart Medal to a SCUBA newsletter. The reason is that after the Club's holiday party I realized that a lot of people did not know what the Purple Heart Metal represents, or the history of the medal — so I thought I would write this short piece on the medal.

The Purple Heart traces its lineage back to George Washington who wanted to recognize and improve the morale of his troops during the Revolutionary War. George came up with the idea for a medal that he called the "Badge of Military Merit" in the shape of a Purple Heart.

On August 7, 1782, in Newburgh NY, this became the first award to be issued to the fledgling American army. After the war and with the disbandment of the army the medal faded away, and there were no federal awards until the Civil War.

On October 10, 1927, the Army Chief Of Staff asked Congress to revive the "Badge of Military Merit", but nothing happened until January 7, 1931 when General Douglas Mac Arthur reopened work on a new design of the medal. By Executive Order of the President of the United States, the Purple Heart was revived on the 200th Anniversary of George Washington's birth, out of respect to his memory and military achievements by War Department General Order No. 3, dated February 22, 1932.

During WWII over 1,500,000 medals were manufactured, many in anticipation of the casualties expected to be suffered by US armed forces during the invasion of the Japanese home islands; the US took 26,000 casualties during the capture of Iwo Jima, and suffered 50,000 taking Okinawa. By the end of the WWII 500,000 medals remained; and after the Korean conflict and Vietnam there were still 120,000 medals on hand.

Criteria

The Purple Heart is awarded in the name of the President of the United States to any member of the Armed Forces of the United States who, while serving under competent authority in any capacity with one of the U.S. Armed Services after April 5, 1917, has been wounded or killed.

George Washington's Badge of Military Merit

A Dive Club is a Community - As the Ocean is Open

Judy K.

A Dive Club is more than just people who enjoy diving and enjoy having fun together. We rely on each other underwater and above water. We count on each other to be environmentally aware and project activism in order to protect our oceans as best we can; we have not only read about - but have also personally witnessed- the plight of the Earth's oceans. Divers are people you've likely shared a vacation with or learned new things about the aquatic environment from, or have become a better diver and buddy because they were with you. But as divers we have concerns about equipment failures, procedural errors, lapses in judgement; and about hurricanes damaging and destroying some of the places we love; and dive boats going missing or bursting into flames -- and divers just not returning to the surface. These tragedies happen.

Being in a dive club means being connected to all divers, not just the divers in our own club. I see all the clubs with fellow divers as groups of people who I do not see that often -- or as people with my shared passion whom I have yet to meet. It's all about protecting ourselves; remember you need to rescue yourself first; but also watch out for our buddies and helping them out whenever we possibly can. During times of disasters, it's a great reminder that each of us in scuba clubs really care for each other, and for the sport and the health of our environment.

So much can be said about the recent tragic events: a boat fire killing so many divers in CA, and Hurricane Dorian's devastation on both on land and sea. As divers, we are all feeling the loss of each and every death of any diver . My takeaway is we often take for granted how lucky we are to be able to scuba dive, and that we on occasion might in our excitement forgo safety procedures. For example: I was once on a trip with a group of people who really wanted to get out of port asap, so the boat crew rushed -- and the entire safety briefing was overlooked, and was never done on the liveaboard. We were very lucky. Nothing bad happened. Imagine however that if this boat experienced a medical emergency, or the boat caught fire? No one except the crew would have known if the boat had O2 or fire extinguishers, or where they were located. No one would have known the basics. Most people just don't consider negative circumstances until it is too close – and frequently too late. Consider those who live in areas subject to severe weather events -- they should have an evacuation plan in place for themselves and their pets. Even those of us in the Northeast should have the basics on hand and ready for any event. Heck…winter is coming up, and once I was without power for 3 weeks during winter. That was excessive; but I was able to have all that I needed - ready to grab and go -- for myself and pets (water, food, medications, pet carrier/food, important papers and electronics). After each event, I keep adding more items to my list. It is so important to comprehensively consider what items are critical, and to have them in your 'emergency go bag'.

A Dive Club is a Community - As the Ocean is Open

Judy K.

In that way we provide maximal protection for ourselves, our families and our cherished friends.

We constantly think of the damage humans inflict on our oceans; yet we often overlook that Mother Nature herself does a lot of damage as well. The coral reefs which have been broken during this and previous hurricanes and typhoon seasons have never been (to my knowledge) calculated -- but we know it happens. Luckily, some groups like the Coral Restoration Foundation and others work to repair this damage. We also know that much of the natural barriers degrade over time, and it's helpful to place artificial reefs in certain areas. Long Island Divers Association (LIDA) has been working on getting several artificial reefs placed -- and succeeding! Kudos to them, because their efforts will help protect not only the land, but also the subsurface ecosystem. LIDA has done so much for the benefits of the Northeast diver (and sun lovers too!) that I'd do no justice attempting to explain it all. I can report that LIDA's website states that "An additional artificial reefs have been deployed on the Matinecock Reef. A 46-ft steel barge and two paired steel pontoons for a total of 3 patch reefs." LIDA helps the dive community, and does so with open arms to welcome divers to new dive sites.

We cannot individually save ourselves from everything, but as divers we must try to be as prepared as we can. Together divers all over the world are seeking to be a good buddy to the Earth and to other divers - and to those who might need our help in locations we love to travel and dive in. What we take for granted is currently gravely threatened in the Bahamas – such as getting clean drinking water or finding a place to sleep. So be thankful and continue to support the efforts to rebuild and help those divers who have lost so much. As a club we are friends; but also, a world-wide community. So, if you are a diver, be part of a dive club and try to get more involved; as we all need more who care for the community of diving.

Our Hearts Go Out to Families and Friends in California and The Bahamas

Gary Lehman

As we go to press, our community recently faced two terrible events – the deaths aboard liveaboard *Conception*, and the human and physical devastation in the Bahamas from Hurricane Dorian. Just last year I was diving in the Bahamas; the Bahamians are such engaging and fun-loving people. With sadness we must consider the scope of the recovery and restoration efforts for the islands, and the human suffering going on there now, with loss of life and property. There are many ways for us to assist financially in these efforts and make things hopefully just a little easier for our Bahamian friends. We have - and we will again - enjoy the Bahamas. But right now, they need a hand. Please throw them a line, and help our friends in the Bahamas get back up again — and pray that again soon they will all be dancing Junkanoo!

As divers, we all know the risks of diving. We train and practice our safety procedures and precautions. We take our refresher courses. We practice self-rescue and buddy diving. This is all good and necessary. But there are other risks to our sport, some unrelated specifically to actual scuba diving. We rely on our gear, the staff at our dive shops and on our liveaboards, on procedures, we rely on each other, and on Providence. This understanding was tragically brought home to us all on the liveaboard *Conception*. A lot of people are working hard on the post incident review to determine root cause(s) and contributing factors. The airline industry pioneered this methodology. For this tragedy many agencies are collaborating, with NTSB as the lead agency coordinating the investigative and forensic work of the Coast Guard, the local authorities have jurisdiction (Sheriff and Fire departments), ATF and FBI. Diver Alert Network is assisting where possible. As are the surviving crew members with their testimony. The forensics will probably get to the bottom of it, but it will be a long time for the tragedy to be fully worked out. The diving world has changed forever with this tragedy.

But for now, the families, friends and communities of the victims have suffered a shattering loss. May they all somehow find peace. We can help them via Divers Alert Network. Click this link below and with your participation, you are offering emotional support to those divers' families who are now suffering the worst in the aftermath.

https://www.diversalertnetwork.org/theconception/?fbclid=IwAR2psNACCO5zWoU547lHi407NTjS5G6TmMpWZKxVHANPdtpB96TYN26l_LA

Kensico Reservoir Cleanup

Al Miller

The annual NYC Reservoir Cleanup was held on Sunday, September 15, 2019. Members of The Scuba Sports Club included: Denise Blais, Sheri Buchman, Al Miller, Gene Miceli, Melissa Miceli and son Chris were on hand to remove trash from the Kensico Reservoir in Westchester County NY.

As usual, it gave us a great feeling of accomplishment to improve the environment while enjoying the company of fellow members.

…Editor's Note

The Kensico Reservoir is in Armonk near where our Club meets each month. With the growing population of Westchester County resulting from the ascendancy of New York City after the Civil War, a radically expanded water supply was needed. Fresh water supplies were captured from the Bronx River (among others). But this was not enough, and the Kensico Dam was built during WW1, bringing in and storing water from the Catskill Mountains upstate. Kensico Reservoir is an important source of water for the greater NYC area, and is a strategic resource for the entire community. Hey --The Scuba Sports Club is not just about diving; we are part of our community too --and Fun Diving Is Just The Beginning! Hats off to The Scuba Sports Club for participating in the effort to keep Westchester's water supply and this important recreational area top shelf!

Featured Creatures
by Rick D'Amico

The Black Sea Bass

Centropristis striata

Cousin of the grouper, the black sea bass is a member of the family Serranidae. However, unlike the tropical grouper, it is found in temperate waters along the East Coast of the United States from Maine to northern Florida. Despite its common name, it isn't related to the Chilean sea bass (Patagonian toothfish, *Dissostichus eleginoides*).

IDENTIFICATION

There are several fish in the area that could possibly be confused with the black sea bass, but it does have some distinguishing traits. The black sea bass has a relatively stout body. The soft and spiny portions of the sea bass' dorsal fin are connected, so there is really one long fin, but it is notched, giving the appearance of two dorsal fins. This makes it different from the scup (porgy), striped bass, which also inhabit our region. The mouth and pectoral fins are considerably larger than those of a tautog (blackfish) or cunner (bergall). The caudal (tail) fin and the pectoral fins are rounded, and mature sea bass will have an elongated upper ray on its tail (see photo to right).

Like many fish that live in rocky bottom habitats, black sea bass can vary considerably in color. Older black sea bass tend to be dark grey or black in color, while younger fish are generally dusky brown. The underside is generally paler than the sides.

Below are fish that could possibly be confused with the black sea bass:

Featured Creatures The Black Sea Bass

by Rick D'Amico

HABITAT

Black sea bass are frequently found in shallow waters around rock jetties, rocky bottoms, piers and pilings, where they feed on the abundance of marine life that inhabit these areas. They're generally found near the bottom, where they will frequently be found in congregations. They are bottom feeders and tend to gather around areas with structure, be it natural structures such as rocks or man-made structures such as docks/ pilings or breakwaters, artificial reefs, or jetties. As bottom waters become cooler during the Au-tumn months, the migrate in a southerly and offshore direction. They overwinter in warmer, deeper waters of the offshore continental shelf and have been reported in water depths of over 400 feet. During the Spring they return to the northerly inner continental shelf waters, where they spawn.

SPAWNING AND GROWTH

They are sequential protogynous hermaphrodites. That is, they begin their lives as one sex and turn into another. In the case of black sea bass, they start life as females and later turn into
males. This often occurs when there is a shortage of males and a female will switch sexes. It's common in their family, Serranidae. Dominant males will grow to a larger size and will acquire a blue hump on its head during spawning season. (See photo to right.)

Typically, the black sea bass spawns in our vicinity along coastal areas of the East Coast between May and July. During their spawning season, females can produce between 30,000 and 500,000 eggs, de-pending on their size. They produce buoyant, pelagic eggs
along the continental shelf. After the eggs hatch, the larvae re-
main pelagic (as ichthoplankton, or fish plankton) until the reach approximately ½ inch in length, when they then move inshore and towards bottom waters. A black sea bass larva is shown to the right.

Older juveniles and adults tend to move offshore to deeper, saltier waters. They grow relatively slowly and reach sexual maturity in 1 to 3 years. They reach sexual maturity at roughly 7.5 inches. The maximum weight is approximately 8 lbs. Black sea bass grow to a maximum length of 26 inches, although generally they reach peak length at approximately 12 inches. Females can live for up to 8 years, while males can live for up to 12 years.

Featured Creatures The Black Sea Bass

by Rick D'Amico

FEEDING

Black sea bass consume a wide variety of organisms. They're opportunistic feeders and will usually eat whatever prey is available. Fishes, such as anchovies and herring become an important component of their diet when they reach a length of approximately 8 inches. They also eat mollusks, crustaceans and worms. They generally feed by day, as they can see their prey better in the lit waters. By contrast, black sea bass are prey for larger fish, such as little skate, spiny dogfish, monkfish (goosefish), spotted hake, and summer flounder (fluke). They've been known to be cannibalistic, as larger black sea bass will feed upon smaller individuals (see photo to right).

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SPECIES

In terms of population levels, according to NOAA Fisheries 2017 stock assessment, the black sea bass population in the mid-Atlantic region is above target levels and is considered not subject to overfishing. In the south-Atlantic region, the stock of black sea bass is below target levels but is not considered subject to overfishing. Overall, the population is stable and sustainable. The species is managed cooperatively by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (under the Summer Flounder, Scup, and Black Sea Bass Fishery Management Plan).

In New York and Connecticut, there are regulations for non-commercial harvest of black sea bass. In New York, the size limit for black sea bass is 15 inches. Between June 23rd and August 31st, the daily catch limit is 3 fish/person. Between September 1st and December 31st the limit is 7 fish. In Connecticut, the minimum size limit for black sea bass is 15 inches and the catch limit is 5 fish. The season for taking black sea bass runs from May 1st to December 31st.

FOOD FISH

There are several reasons why black sea bass is highly valued as a food fish. In terms of flavor, black sea bass has a light, flaky flesh that is firm and lean. With its mild and delicate flavor, it has become widely-liked by seafood aficionados. Black sea bass is popular amongst Asian chefs. A low-fat source of protein and magnesium, it can be a very nutritious meal. Its flesh has low to medium concentrations of mercury, making consumption of black sea bass a minimal health risk.

This fish lends itself to several varieties of preparation. It can be fried, broiled, grilled, baked, steamed, sautéed, and a few other methods. It has a very simple bone structure, so it's easily filleted. However, it can also be prepared whole (gutted and scaled, of course), since its bones are relatively easy to separate from the flesh. It also freezes well, if you've got more uncooked bass than you need for one sitting. Because its fishery status is stable, you can enjoy it without concern for endangering the species.

Featured Creatures The Black Sea Bass

by Rick D'Amico

SEVERAL WAYS TO PREPARE BLACK SEA BASS

Pan-Seared, Filleted

Steamed, Filleted

Roasted**, Filleted**

Baked, Whole

In a Salad

Grilled, Whole

Grilled, Filleted

Our National Parks Online Map Repository

Hello fellow sojourners. Hey, we love scuba diving. But, we also love other outdoor adventures too. Many of us enjoy hiking, trekking and other aquatics — and in fact all manner of exploration! That much should be pretty clear to everyone based on the adventures undertaken by our intrepid members as showcased in this issue of *Sea Swells!*

We all know that planning is the key to success *in extremis.* Whenever we are in new and challenging situations, we rely on our previsualization and our preparation to guide us to success.

Often this involves something as simple as a MAP! Unfolding a map before the adventure and studying it can be critical to understand on an at least simplistic level the situation on the ground which will face us. After all, before we dive a site, the dive boat operator or divemaster usually gives us a rough schematic of the dive site. That helps us figure out where we are going to go —- and how to get back to the boat or assemble back at the rally point!

Point of all this is that we have a terrific tool at our disposal for our terrestrial adventures which we would like to alert you to... We are very fortunate here in the USA to have a substantial network of fantastic national parks. Bryce, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, Yellowstone, Big Bend, and on and on. We have John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt primarily to thank for our breathtaking national parks. It is a fascinating story, well beyond the range of this scuba diving newsletter article. But of course, I invite you to explore this story if this is of interest to you !

So before your next visit to one of our National Parks, navigate over to the below-referenced Smithsonian website and plug in your destination National Park — and start checking out the map for Park features and locations. I can report that the Yellowstone Park is a stunning, visual kaleidoscope and diverse collection of geologic, geographic, landscape and wildlife treasures. Having a map to plan your visit to this (or to any of our Parks) will be invaluable. So, charge up your camera batteries, grab your SD cards for photos—and your map — and have a terrific adventure !

Browse over here… http://npmaps.com/

https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/want-browse-some-national-park-maps-theres-site-180959021/

And Around The Dive Shop…..

LOCAL DIVE SHOPS…….AT YOUR SERVICE!

Looking for dive-related gifts? Need to upgrade your gear?

Here is a list of shops that may just have the right one for your best dive buddy or for yourself!

www.divenewsnetwork.com or www.scubah2omag.com