



Sea Swells

Our 48th year serving the local and northeast dive community!



Winter Solstice 2023 President's Anchor Line

This particular issue of Seaswells is especially near and dear to my heart as it is the last one I'm writing as TSSC president! These last three years have been both challenging and rewarding. I humbly thank the TSSC board for all their assistance and input during this time; without them, this club would not run as smoothly as it does. I'd also like to thank my fellow members for being there to support me and the club as well. Many members have spent countless hours volunteering to help our club be adequately represented at various events and in a variety of ways. While looking back on how far we've come as a club, I believe we're progressing with the times and adding more and more to our repertoire of what the club has to offer, and it is just the beginning! Take a look at some of the upcoming trips and events we have happening soon. With all the things we have planned, I know there will be something for everyone to enjoy!

As we transition to our new 2024 board, I will continue helping the board and club as past president in any way I can. It is my pleasure to welcome Gene Miceli as our new club president and Kevin Cushing as VP! With their experience and drive, the new leadership will be top-notch, and I leave you all in great hands! Most of the 2023 board will keep their positions in the new year, and some will stay on, but with the added challenge of trying out a new position! To note some changes, Michelle Memoli will now be the director at large, Nick Lapano will be stepping in for Kenny Salstrom as executive director, Katelyn Krack will be returning as secretary, and Niels Ebbesen will be joining the board for the first time as our new program director! It's always great to have new people on the board who bring fresh ideas!

As always, thank you all for being the best part of TSSC. Without each and every one of you, we would not be the great club we are today!

Very Truly Yours,

Melissa Lonquich
President, TSSC



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Winter Solstice Research



Winter Solstice—Thursday, Dec 21, 2023, 10:27 PM - 9 hours and 32 minutes of sunlight.

Now that we are all on the same page in relation to the Winter Solstice (Pun intended), let’s dive into (Whoops) some interesting tales of the Solstice that our ancestors would tell each other before there was radio.

In ancient times, tribes of people in the northern hemisphere knew that winter meant dying crops, freezing temperatures and short days. However, without the necessary scientific knowledge, they weren’t able to figure what was causing the sun to appear less. As such, they created their own tales and myths around it. The sun was always seen as a feminine figure. The pre-Islamic southern Arabians called her **Atthar**. In Mesopotamia, she was **Arinna**, the Queen of Heaven.

To the Vikings, she was **Sol**, to the Inuit the sun was **Sun Sister** — and the list is legion. Some Nordic communities believed that the Winter Solstice was when their goddesses would give birth, bringing more light into our darkened world. They called it “**mothers’ night**”. The belief was prevalent in other ancient societies, as well. According to

myths, the Egyptian goddess **Isis’s** son **Horus** and the Greek goddess **Leto’s** son **Apollo** were both born on the Winter Solstice. In Finnish mythology, the tale tells that **Louhi**, the hag witch queen of the North, kidnapped the sun and moon, and held them captive inside a mountain in her homeland Pohjola. Thus causing the dark days of winter.

In the Highlands of Scotland, they called the Winter Solstice “**Grian-stad Geamhraidh**”, meaning “sun-stop winter”. They believed that the winter was brought on by a hag-goddess named **Cailleach**. She was described as a scary woman with long, white hair who was so much bigger than humans that the waters of the Sound of Mull would come up to only her knees. Sometimes known as the Veiled One or the Queen of Winter, the Cailleach determined the winter’s length and harshness. To get rid of her and the cold weather she brought, Scots would carve her likeness into a wooden log and burn it, hoping it would banish her and lead to brighter times ahead. Celtic priests would cut the mistletoe that grew on the oak tree and give it as a blessing. Oaks were seen as sacred and the winter fruit of the mistletoe was a symbol of life in the dark winter months

According to the Greeks, the hairy, gnome-like creatures called **Kallikantzaros**, who live underground, love the winter and don’t want it to come to an end. These beings can’t be exposed to sunlight as it kills them. Therefore, for most of the year, they are busy sawing the trunk of the world tree underground, hoping to collapse it with our planet. But during winter, for a few days, it is dark enough for them to come out and cause mischief, making them forget all about their evil plan to end life as we know it. The myth says they wreak havoc until Epiphany in early January, when the sun starts moving again and they must go back into hiding. Then they come to the realization that the world tree has healed itself during their absence, so they start their sawing all over again until the same cycle occurs next winter.

Given how vital the sun was to the survival of communities, the Winter Solstice became one of the most important days in the ancient calendar. To make sure the sun would come back again with its warmth and glory, they created elaborate rituals and festivals around the Winter Solstice, the long and dark night that was the turning point of



Horus



Corryvreckan Whirlpool

Washtub of Cailleach



Cailleach



A Greek Kallikantzaros



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the sun's journey back to us. Different communities and cultures came up with different ways to entice and celebrate the day, most of which are observed by us today in one way or another.

The ancient Romans also held a solstice festival at this time, called Saturnalia, to celebrate the rebirth of the year. This was a time when the ordinary rules were turned upside down. Grudges and quarrels were forgotten while businesses, courts and schools were closed. Wars were interrupted or postponed and slaves were served by their masters.

Here are some other interesting ones:

European Neolithic ancestors valued the Winter Solstice so much that they built carefully aligned monuments for it, including Stonehenge in England and Newgrange in Ireland. While Newgrange points to the Winter Solstice sunrise, Stonehenge marks the winter solstice sunset.

People from Scandinavian and Germanic communities started the celebration of a winter holiday called Yule that, some say, was held as a sun festival on the Winter Solstice. Some scholars believe that the celebration was a mid-winter one instead. And, as we know, it was eventually moved to be aligned with the Christian celebration, [Christmas](#).

To this day, some Iranian, Iraqi, and other Middle Eastern communities still celebrate Winter Solstice as "Yalda Night". It involves families coming together, usually at the house of the eldest, to eat, recite poetry and serve foods that symbolise abundance, such as pomegranates.

As a contrast, the Talmud ascribes the origins of this festival to Adam, who saw that the days were getting shorter and thought it was punishment for his sin. He was afraid that the world was returning to the chaos and emptiness that existed before creation, so he fasted. Once he saw that the days were getting longer again he realised that this was the natural cycle of the world, so celebrated.

This divergent article was designed to stimulate our appreciation of the various cultures we pass through during our SCUBA sojourns.

*Whatever and however you choose to celebrate the Solstice season.....
Enjoy your days of darkness celebrating the coming light with all who hold dear.*





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2023 Officers' and Directors' Ordered MugShots



Melissa L*

♦ **President**

Gene M*

♦ **Vice President**

Liza H*

♦ **Social Director**

Michelle M*

♦ **Secretary**



Amanda S*

♦ **Membership Director**

Gary L *

♦ **Newsletter Publisher**

Jack R *

♦ **Dive Planning**

Sheri B*

♦ **Treasurer**



Helen C *

♦ **Program Director**

Judy D *

♦ **Environment & Legislative**

Joe R*

♦ **Safety & Education**



Kevin C*

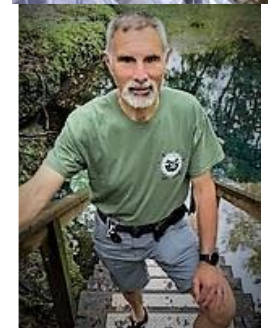
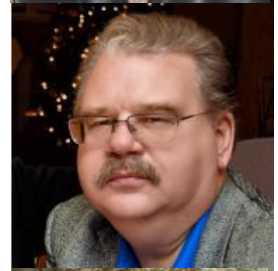
♦ **Director at Large**

Kenny S*

♦ **Executive Director**

Ken A*

♦ **Newsletter Editor**



We encourage Club members to join the Leadership



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7SSC visits Capt. Don's Habitat in Bonaire

By Nick Lappano



On Saturday, September 30th 11 intrepid Club members visited Captain Don's Habitat in the diver's paradise. Bonaire. Those participating in this adventure included Amanda Slattery, Charlie Adams, Niels Ebbesen, Katelynn Krack, Amy Ferguson, Steve Medwid, Mike Wessinger, Denise Blais, Ken Andreu, my roommate Al Miller, and myself.

Jack Ricotta, the Club's trip planner, got us a great deal from Caradonna Adventures. Jack was unfortunately unable to make the trip and Amanda Slattery stepped up to the plate to assume the duties of trip leader, so thanks are due to both of them.

We arrived on several flights with some of us flying out of JFK, LaGuardia and Newark in the New York area. In addition, Amy flew down from South Carolina and Mike flew in from Tulsa.

By about 6 PM everyone had arrived in Bonaire and we had a nice group dinner at the resort restaurant, excitedly discussing our plans for the week. As most of us were suffering from sleep deprivation, as a result of having little or no sleep since Friday morning, we all turned in early and had no problem falling asleep.

The next morning, after a buffet breakfast, we assembled on the deck near the dive shop for the mandatory Bonaire orientation meeting before proceeding to our required "check out" dive. This self-monitored dive is required to check out your weighting and gear before going out to dive on the reefs. From then on, we were free to dive wherever and whenever we wished. Captain Don's Habitat, founded by Bonaire's dive pioneer, Captain Don Stewart, promotes itself as the home of "dive freedom".



Some went out on the first available boat at 11 AM while the rest stretched the checkout dive to a full dive of 45 minutes or more and delayed our first boat dive until 2 PM. After that, almost all of us went on the two morning boat dives on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday with a few other sporadically spaced afternoon boat dives. On Friday morning some of us went on the morning boat dive while others finished up the week with a few shore dives.



Included in our package were 10 boat dives. These were made to various reefs as well as Bonaire's signature wreck, the Hilma Hooker. For these dives we had the same crew throughout, Sherman and Alex, who alternated leading us on the dives. Most of the dives lasted about an hour with benign conditions. There was minimal current and most of the time we had clear skies although we did experience a few mild, brief rain showers. Visibility was 80 plus feet on most dives and water temp was usually between 85 and 86 degrees with a few thermoclines where the temp "dropped" to 82 degrees, hardly significant for northeast divers. We



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Bonaire By Nick Lappano saw seahorses, some turtles (including a huge green sea turtle, spotted by Denise, which appeared to be about four feet long) various shrimp species and the usual variety of tropical fish. Some expressed the sentiment that the underwater life was not as abundant as expected, but we still saw a lot more than we would see in local conditions up here where we only have a few feet of visibility at best. Plus, the tropical fish were a lot more colorful than their northern cousins.

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was minimal current and most of the time we had clear skies although we did experience a few mild rain showers. Visibility was 80 plus feet on most dives and water temp was usually 85 degrees with a few thermoclines where the temp "dropped" to 82 degrees, hardly significant for northeast divers. It was funny that we could see the boundaries of said thermoclines as a ripple effect in the water despite the relative insignificance of the temperature change. We saw seahorses, some turtles (including a huge loggerhead spotted by Denise) various shrimp species and the usual variety of tropical fish. Some expressed the sentiment that the underwater life was not as abundant as expected, but we still saw a lot more than we see in local northeast dive condi-

tions where it is dark with only a few feet of visibility.

We were concerned to see how much of the coral was stained blue. This was evidence of how far stony coral tissue loss disease (SCTLD) has spread. This had been going on for almost 10 years, but this is the first time I have seen such widespread evidence of it. Steps are being taken to limit the spread of the disease, but currently the effectiveness of these measures is unknown.

When boat diving, the boats left the dock at 8:30AM, 11:00AM and 2:00PM. All the trips were one tank excursions. This afforded us an opportunity between dives to take care of various tasks on shore. The guides seemed to know the underwater terrain well and found several seahorses and other creatures in the locations which they expected them to be at. The conditions were quite good with excellent visibility and nice water temps as previously mentioned. The lack of current precluded the need for a drift line most of the time, so we came up right off the stern of the boat, taking care to be sure the ladder was clear of divers climbing onto the boat before approaching it.

Throughout the week divers were continually roaming around to take advantage of the unlimited shore diving, either going by truck (Three had been rented, one each by Ken, Amy and Mike.) to some of the many sites on the island marked by the





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Bonaire by Nick Lappano iconic yellow stones or just jumping in on the resort's home reef which had access to a small wreck, the La Machaca, as well as a sandy area and a reef with a significant amount of sea life. Right in front of the resort there were sightings of various eels, all sorts of fish, a squadron of squid, the occasional turtle and many tarpon. One of the other guests saw a frogfish on the reef at 75 feet while diving late Wednesday afternoon and many of us made quite a few dives looking for it, without success.

Several night dives were also made on the house reef. Anyone making the night dives was accompanied throughout by the ever-present, prehistoric-looking tarpon. These fish look like they are plated with stainless steel scales and usually grow up to five feet in length, although some rare specimens can reach up to eight feet! The tarpon seemed to be using the illumination from our dive lights to hunt for fish.

As the full moon had been the Friday before our arrival, there was also the expectation of seeing the courtship display of ostracods. These are tiny crustaceans, sometimes referred to as seed shrimp, which are known to emit light to attract a mate. The best time to see these displays is during the five nights following the full moon. We had limited success in this endeavor with some seeing significant displays, while others were frustrated in the attempt, a reminder of the unpredictability of nature.



Most of us were diving Nitrox, which was supposedly banked at 32%. We only had an opportunity to analyze our gas on the first boat dive. Inexplicably, the crew did not provide an analyzer for the remainder of the dives. I think they only had one to share between the boats. In my opinion, this was a serious breach of protocol, but we were at their mercy. I kept my computers set at 32% for the week, but who knows if we were at 30, 31, 32, 33 or 34%. (On the day when we were provided with an analyzer our mixes ranged from 30% to 33%.) In addition, the analyzers at several of the tank pick up points on shore were a little "sketchy" with inconsistent readings and difficulty in calibrating (perhaps due to the humidity). Since I was not sure of my exact gas mix, I kept my profiles conservative and was sure to never exceed an NDL of 10 minutes and stayed well above an MOD of 111 feet. On the one deep dive which I made below 100 feet I used regular air, just to be on the safe side. I usually bring an analyzer but the sensor in mine had failed a week before the trip and I did not have time to replace it.

Breakfast was included in our package, but lunch and dinner were not, so we had to plan for those meals on our own. Lunch was sort of a toss-up as some went out to one of the nearby food spots while others opted to eat something in our rooms, consuming items which we had purchased at nearby shopping areas. I personally had bought a supply of protein/meal replacement bars which I ate in our room. This saved me money and time which allowed me to squeeze in a few more afternoon dives. In the evening most of us ate at the Rum Runner restaurant on the resort grounds. On Thursday evening, all of us went to Tolo, one of the local restaurants for a pleasant group meal.

On the last day, Friday, some spent the day relaxing and letting their gear dry, while others squeezed in a few more dives. Some still had a few boat dives available while others made shore dives either at the resort's reef or by traveling south to some of the sites which could be reached from shore.

By 11 AM Saturday morning we were all in a van or one of the rental trucks. We went to the airport to board our flights on various airlines going into one of the NYC area airports or Oklahoma (Mike) or South Carolina (Amy). Everyone was home by midnight safe and sound.

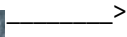
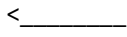
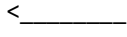
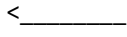
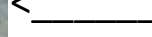
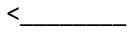




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Sea Critters we have met this year...Can U ID?



Hand the finished sheet to Nick when completed



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Kevin's Adventure in Iceland 2023

The TSSC trip to Iceland was terrific! Kevin Cushing carefully planned the trip to include several days of guided activities and one or two days "at leisure." Kevin is a gifted negotiator and despite a myriad

by Amanda Slattery



problems with the booking agency, he succeeded in acquiring a private 20-passenger bus for all our outings. We were based in Iceland's capital, Reykjavik, and we quickly found that the capital is extremely hilly. To get oriented, some of us walked to the Hallgrímskirkja, Iceland's largest church, standing atop a hill and built with soaring hexagonal columns resembling a volcanic formation. It was very impressive. Sadly we just missed entry to a concert but returned to ride the elevator which took us to the top of the tower for a 360 degree view over the city. We walked and walked and found the rainbow street where bands in the colors of the rainbow ran down the street. When

we reached the waterfront we discovered the Sun Voyager, a steel sculpture reminiscent of a Viking ship.

Then it was time for tea. We found ourselves at the Harpa, Reykjavik's Concert Hall and Conference Center, with a stunning glass façade, most of it built at an angle and looking slightly askew. It was a relief to sit comfortably in a booth at the bar where they knew just how to make afternoon tea. From there we went to Flyover Iceland, the type of roller-coaster where seats are fixed to the floor, but move in all directions as the huge screen in front soars over the countryside. I had to shut my eyes several times.



Sunday our Golden Circle Tour took us to Thingvellir National Park where we learned about the historical meeting

place of Iceland's parliament. On we went to view the huge Gullfoss waterfall, then the Geysir geothermal area and finally the Blue Lagoon. Here we donned our swimsuits and walked into the naturally-heated warm waters, plastered silica mud masks on our faces and enjoyed a cocktail in this unique outdoor spa.

Monday was a free day and the Perlan, Iceland's natural history museum, was amazing to explore. A short but bracing uphill walk from our hotel, it is located on the highest hill in Reykjavik. This museum gave us a great introduction to Iceland's unique features. We experienced a walk through an ice cave, saw a glacier exhibi-





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Iceland by Amanda Slattery tion, a forces of nature exhibition, a lava show and a northern lights show. Some of us sampled the Ice Cream Parlor and others the restaurant. In the afternoon some of the group took the opportunity to ride Iceland's ponies. Short and stocky, they have been pure bred for over 1,000 years. We had passed some in our travels and had stopped to admire these beautiful creatures.

Tuesday, our private bus took us on a long, picturesque journey across the south of the country to the Glacier Lagoon. The scenery we passed was astounding, Waterfalls, large and small were everywhere. Glimpses of glaciers high in the mountains gave way to green hillsides down which tiny streams trickled. Sunshine illuminated all. As we neared our destination we stopped at a black sand beach



where the hillside descended to the beach in huge basalt columns. When we finally reached the Glacier Lagoon the lake was dotted with icebergs carved from the Breiðamerkurjökull glacier. If you were lucky you could spot a seal swimming between the icebergs. It was fascinating to watch as some icebergs made their way under a bridge and slipped out to sea. We went over to a black sand beach scattered with icebergs left by the tide.



Wednesday it was raining gently as we drove to Silfra for our dive or snorkel between the tectonic plates. The location is in the National Park and no buildings are allowed at the entry point. We changed into drysuits standing in the open air, rain still gently falling as we listened to our briefing. Then into the invigorating cold water and a short dive/snorkel through a narrow fissure in the rock, known as Big Crack. The water was crystal clear and it was easy to see the formation known as Silfra Hall, then on to the towering wall of Silfra Cathedral, thence into Silfra Lagoon. We saw rock, rock and more rock. I was told there were fish but I was not lucky enough to see any. The experience lasted 30-40 minutes. Those who chose to had time to explore the lagoon before we were helped out at the landing area. It was a long walk back to the entry point, where we were greeted with hot chocolate and cookies. Others changed back into their clothes in the rain, I opted for a warm van.



Thursday we saw the raw beauty of the Reykjanesfólkvangur Nature Preserve with its lava formations, crater lakes, bird cliffs & bubbling geothermic fields. Then on to Grindavik, a fishing town with its old harbor. We stopped at some high cliffs where the seas a few days earlier must have been even higher as the ground inland was covered with seaweed thrown up by extraordinarily high winds. The sea was still quite rough and we spotted a lone seal in the water.

In the afternoon some of us chose to visit the Lava Show. This was a fantastic demonstration of the properties of real, terrifyingly hot, lava. We were sitting in the front row, frighteningly close and could feel the burning heat from the lava and hear the furnace behind the scenes. The lava ran down a metal gully right in front of us and was manipulated by a man wearing a silver, heat-protective gown and face shield. He used a long rod to lift lava and display its qualities. We were glad when it hardened and was returned to the furnace.





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Iceland by Amanda Slattery Some of the group went on to the nearby Northern Lights show, others found a food hall serving afternoon tea and cocktails,

Friday we visited the Snaefellsness Peninsula and once again experienced the outstanding natural beauty of the country as we saw majestic granite cliffs tumbling into turbulent ocean waters. The energetic amongst us hiked down to a black sand beach at one stop. Those of us who remained at the clifftop saw a ragged-looking Arctic fox seeking food between parked cars before slinking away over the hills and down to the beach. I was happy to see it. The Arctic fox is the only mammal native to Iceland. The afternoon took us to Kirkjufellsfoss, the most photographed waterfall in Iceland and one that was used as scenery in Game of Thrones. We looked across at the most photographed mountain in Iceland, Kirkjufell, We definitely hit all the high spots!



More highlights: As a capital city, Reykjavik has many excellent restaurants with a wide variety of cuisines. What is rather unique, however, is the number of Food Halls. While these do vary in quality, they all offer a range of cuisines under one roof, with common seating areas and rest rooms. These are far superior to the food court in your local mall. Tipping is not required in Iceland. The cost of food may be higher, but gratuities to service staff are included in prices shown and additional tips are not expected.



There is no visible trash in Iceland. There is recycling a-plenty but never any trash on the streets. There are many public, open-air, heated pools. Inexpensive and heated by geothermal means, these are a standard part of life. If you cannot get to the Blue Lagoon (which is closed at the time of writing) check out these pools. Note: several of the places we visited

are presently closed due to the imminent threat of a volcanic eruption. We wish the people of Grindavik the best as they have had to temporarily abandon their homes.

A final note on the weather. When our flight arrived the wind was over 40mph, above the threshold for the rolling jetways at the airport. We had to sit on the plane for an hour before the wind diminished sufficiently for the jetways to be used safely. We heard that another plane had had to sit for ten hours before passengers could disembark. We also had to wait until the airport bus to the city had 40 passengers on board so that it would not be blown off the road. With the weather and volcanic activity Iceland is certainly a country at the mercy of the elements.





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Diving Scapa Flow Scotland, September 2023

In September of 2023 my dive buddy, Greg Dietz, and I traveled to the Orkney islands in Northern Scotland to dive the wrecks of the World War I (WWI) German High Seas fleet. At the end of WWI while the final negotiations were taking place in Versailles, the Germans agreed to place 55 ships (Their High Seas fleet) into the protected harbor in the Orkney islands know as Scapa Flow, after first disarming.



As the negotiations to end the war dragged on, the situation became difficult for the German sailors. The German ships were not equipped for long periods away from their home port, so their ship stores of food were quickly depleted. Additional supplies had to be sent from Germany which itself was short of food due to the strain from the years of war. There was also significant stress among the sailors

who were confined to their ships in a hostile port. The poor conditions lead to at least one mutiny by the sailors. To further complicate matters, the German government had collapsed and a deadline for accepting the surrender terms was missed.

Fearing that the British would seize the entire fleet, Admiral Ludwig Von Reuter gave the order to simultaneously scuttle (intentional sink) all 55 ships on June 21, 1919. While the British navy was unable to stop the German fleet from sinking, they were able to raise or salvage all but eight of the German ships. The eight German ships that remain on the bottom are primarily battleships and heavy cursers, that were just too large to bring to the surface.

My dive buddy and I were able to dive each of those wrecks in the week that we were aboard the MV Invincible dive charter boat. We arrived in Stromness, UK after crossing from the main-



land of northern Scotland to the Orkney islands. Our dive charter boat is docked a short distance from the Northlink ferry that brought us to the island. The MV Invincible is a converted fishing trawler that has space for twelve divers. The itinerary for the dive charter called for diving two of the wrecks each day with a two-hour surface interval between dives, then returning to the port in Stromness each afternoon.

The reason for the long surface interval was because the wrecks we were diving lie between 100 and 150 feet of seawater (FSW). In addition, the wrecks are quite large from between 90 feet 450 feet



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Scapa Flow (cont)

long. Given the depths and the size of the wrecks, these dives are best suited to experienced divers with technical certifications. My dive buddy and I have quite a bit of experience with technical diving, which is fortunate as almost every dive we completed incurred a decompression obligation. Diving with us was a group of divers from a Belgium dive club and an instructor from Holland, all of whom were very experienced technical divers.

A typical day on the MV Invincible began at 7:00 when the captain arrived and started the ship's engine. A continental breakfast was served while we traveled to our first dive site. After we arrived at the dive site, our captain would give a dive briefing on the wreck and the conditions we could expect to encounter while diving. The captain would then have us make giant stride entries in two groups to explore the



wreck in our dive groups. We would reach the wrecks by descending "shot lines" to the wrecks.

The dive charter boat never tied up to any of these lines in part to prevent damage to the wrecks. Instead, the MV Invincible would hold position a short distance from the wreck and keep watch for divers surfacing. Each dive group was allowed



to dive their own dive profiles as to how deep and how long they wished to remain on each wreck. While the conditions did vary a little, the visibility on the wrecks was usually around 15 to 20 feet with a water temperature averaging around 53 to 55 degrees.

After we completed our dive, we could either ascend one of the shot lines on the wreck (the wrecks were so large that they always had at least two lines) or we could deploy a surface marker buoy (SMB) from any point of the wreck, and the captain would be waiting close by to pick us up. Diving in these conditions usually requires a lot of scuba gear, which makes for a difficult time climbing aboard a dive boat. However, the MV Invincible, like



most of the dive boats in that area, is equipped with an elevator, which makes getting back aboard our dive boat very easy!

Once we were safely on board, we would enjoy another light meal and warm beverages while we waited as the captain filled our cylinders in preparation for our second dive of the day, on another of the German wrecks. The warm beverages were very much appreciated as the weather was chilly and the winds never seemed to abate.





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Scapa Flow (cont)

Our second dive of the day would follow a similar pattern to the first dive, then once all the divers were safely on board the dive boat, the captain would return to port, while we enjoyed a warm lunch. Once back in Stromness, we were free to explore the sites that the town and the island had to offer, before we headed out to new wrecks the next day.

I personally found some of the attractions around the island, which is called the Mainland, to be as interesting as the diving. Among the sites are Skara Brae, a Neolithic community dating back over 5,000 years. There is also the Ring of Brodgar and the Sones of Stennes,



which are Neolithic arrangements of large stones that are truly impressive. In the nearby community of Kirkwall there is a large cathedral, as well as ruins of the local Earls and bishop's palace. In addition, there is also the "Italian Chapel" which is a World War II Quonset hut, that the Italian prisoners of war transformed into a beautiful church.

Unfortunately for us the weather was far from ideal, and one day were unable to leave port, as there were sustained winds of between forty and fifty miles per hour. Nevertheless, we did manage to dive all eight of the remaining wrecks as well as visit every land-based attraction that we wanted to see. I was also fortunate enough to make several new friends from the other divers on the boat that week.

Diving the wrecks of the German World War I high seas fleet is clearly not for everyone. The wrecks are at the edge of or beyond recreational diving limits, the visibility is suboptimal, and

the water is a little chilly. However, for history buffs and avid wreck divers, Scapa Flow is a must dive location and I am very glad that my dive buddy and I were finally able to get the opportunity to dive it. This dive



trip was special to my dive buddy as he completed his 700th dive!

by Joe Rinaldi





Sea Swells



Deco Stops by Liza

Sea Stories at the Explorer's Club—Saturday, November 11th 2023



Deco Stop: Hudson River Eaglefest at Teatown.

Date: Saturday, February 3rd

36th Annual LIDA Film Festival

Date: Saturday, Jan 27, 2024

Time: 7:00 p.m. - 11:00 p.m.

Location: Hofstra University Student Center Theater, Hempstead, NY

Ticket Price Includes: Films, Live DJ, Food, and Soft drinks

Admission: \$40 US pp (advanced purchase online), \$45 pp (at the door)

70th International Ocean Symposium and Film Festival Boston Sea Rovers

Date: March 16 & 17, 2024

Location: DoubleTree by Hilton- Boston North Shore, Danvers MA



The longest drum solo was 10 hours and 26 minutes and was performed by the child sitting behind me on Delta flight 963 from LA to Tokyo.



Sea Swells



Your TSSC Social and Dive Calendar

(:Post on your Refrigerator:)

2024

- ◆ Jan 11-15 Cozumel
- ◆ Jan 27 LIDA 36th Annual Film Festival, Hofstra
- ◆ Feb 3 Deco Stop: Hudson River Eaglefest at Teatown.
- ◆ March 16-17 70th Intl Ocean Symposium, Boston Sea Rovers, Danvers, MA
- ◆ March 22-24, Beneath the Sea, Meadowlands Exposition Center, NJ
 - ◆ March 25—March 30, Dubai, UAE
 - ◆ March 30—April 06, Maldives
- ◆ July 27—Aug 3, Cuba, Aggressor Garden of the Queen
 - ◆ Nov 19–22, DEMA Show, Las Vegas

2025

- ◆ 2025 July 7–14, Wakatobi, SE Sulawesi, Indonesia
- ◆ *** 2025 ??? —TSSC 50th Anniversary Dive Trip



*** (Talk to Jack if
Location for the 50th



you have a Great Idea/
Anniversary Trip)





Sea Swells



Winzig Art Deco Stop by Judy



We had an Art Deco Stop of the instillation named "ACHE" Life, Death & Letting Go by Maureen Winzig. The 14 pieces she created gave such expressions which one might feel or continue to feel after losing a loved one. She literally expressed it in a way as if these emotions of grief were tearing themselves out of you. Seems slightly gruesome but it gives the mind the visual of getting it out and letting it go into the universe. It also gave people the ability to talk about grief and to release it from themselves physically by placing written messages onto the "Hand that Releases" to the universe as part of her creation.

I thought it was valuable for our members, as I know the pandemic hit Maureen, and most likely many of us in this club, in ways that might still be holding on. This year a few of us have lost family members and beloved pets. Her show really gives people a window into how one might have felt at one time or another while dealing with

loss. She had lost her beloved scuba diving husband Mike in 2020. We all miss people differently and for longer periods and we even honor people differently, but I think she's right to tear out these emotions so that you can make room for love. She's an amazing artist with so many different mediums and she even took my special sick bunny, Coco and made a mural of him right before he crossed over. What an amazing friend up 20ft in the air (check out the picture)! But I love it and it helps me to celebrate his life instead recalling my pain and loss. I personally don't believe that death is the end; but that your energy goes somewhere! And Maureen's energy of real art is to be seen in a show.

But you can find her work on line at WinzigArt.com

By Judy D.





Sea Swells



Featured Creature—The Grey Whale



Grey Whales by Gary Lehman

In the Featured Creature column we usually discuss a species that we encounter while diving. In this issue's column, we'll deviate a little from that format: 1) we will kick around some travel ideas, focusing on a species that we do not generally encounter while scuba diving; and 2) will frame the column around a book about a particular species.

Today's species is the gray whale - *Eschrichtius robustus* - and the book is the engaging and inspiring [The Lagoon](#) by author James Dorsey. I invite you to read this captivating account over the holidays! Unfortunately, I have no photos to share for this column, because seeing gray whales up close and personal is one of my unfulfilled bucket list items.

Bucket List Alert!

Some of our readers have been lucky enough to have dived and/or snorkeled off the Baja Peninsula. Some may have witnessed the 'spy hopping' of curious gray whales, elevating their heads up out of the water to sneak a peek at us humans; or you may have been very lucky to see these whales breaching, diving -- or just enjoying life as a gray whale in the pristine waters of San Ignacio. This is on my bucket list, that is for sure. So, until we all have the chance to dive there and interact with our gray whale friends, enjoy reading this book! Just be forewarned --that it is going to cost you, because you are going to wind up booking a trip!

And 'enjoying the whales up close and personal' certainly has a high probability of occurring, since gray whales seemingly enjoy human company; the whale moms with their calves approach visitors who lean over out of the small longboats called pangas <https://www.pangaboatsusa.com/>; the whales wow their human friends with up close and personal visits -- giving us the opportunity to stroke and caress these gentle giants!

Gray Whale Legacy



Those of us familiar with marine mammals know that many species fatten up feasting on the rich seafood-life in the cold Arctic waters during the summer, and then migrate 5,000 miles south (in this instance, to the waters off Baja California in Mexico) to give birth and nurture their calves in these nursery waters. Thus is the life cycle of gray whales. They can grow up to 50', weigh north of 40 tons and live up to 80 years! They spend their summers off the Aleutian archipelago and the waters of the Bering Strait. Unlike most other whale species which prefer krill in the water column, gray whales feed primarily off nutritious amphipods little crustaceans which live on the bottom (more on this later...)

In particular, the nursery areas are about halfway down the Baja Peninsula, on the west coast of Baja -- that is, the gray whales do not journey all the way south to Cabo, then turn north into the gulf. Rather, the nursery areas are on the outside / open ocean coastline of the peninsula.

We have all seen YouTubes of gray (and other whale species -- indeed sometimes even manta rays) coming to humans to get our assistance being untangled from fishing lines. Reading [The Lagoon](#) will show how important it is -- and how fulfilling -- to assist these sentient, intelligent, friendly creatures to get untangled from fishing nets! Entanglement is one of the main risks to gray whales. (To watch an example: <https://www.oeregister.com/2022/06/16/gray-whale-is-swimming-free-after-rescuers-cut-loose-massive-bundle-of-netting/>)

Gray whales are not only an important species for life on Earth, but also are part of the culture and history of First Nation Native Americans who live in coastal areas throughout the migration path of these whales. The same holds for other whale species, as well as orcas.

I hope to get to San Ignacio someday, and bring the grandkids. There are UNESCO World Heritage sites [Whale Sanctuary of El Vizcaino - UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#) near La Paz and Cabo which is where many whale watching tours operate from. So that is certainly a starting point to plan your journey! In addition to gray whales, there are also dolphins galore, sea birds, several turtle species, sea lions, seals and even blue whales. The best time to go is mid-February to mid-March, which is the height of the pupping season.

The epicenter of all this wonderment, sheer and inspiring fun, and biolearning are the two lagoons known as Laguna San Ignacio and Laguna Ojo de Liebre. It is a great place to travel with children and grandchildren, creating a wonderful generational experience together. There are campsites -- and also a full range of hotels and restaurants up and down the income food chain; and caravansaries, gas stations, grocery stores, banks/ATMs, laundromats -- and dive shops to gear up and get whatever you might have forgotten to pack.

About Author James Dorsey and The Lagoon

James Dorsey is a certified marine mammal naturalist, cultural anthropologist, historian, tour guide -- and loves the culture of Baja and the magnificent whales which spend good parts of their lives there. Dorsey is exactly the right person to tell us about the region, the people, the history



Sea Swells



Grey Whale by Gary Lehman

and culture – and of course, the whales! You will meet the whales Slackjaw, Cyclops, Patch, and Der-vish -friends of Dorsey's which come looking for him and know his boat's engine sound and his voice. They meet him eye-to-eye and communicate their friendship. Oftentimes the visitors talk 'baby talk' to the whales, which seem to love it. Dorsey is utterly convinced the whales are trying to communicate with him and speak to him. He knows they are affectionate, fiercely-protective mothers and fathers; they don't fight amongst themselves, they play with their calves, they protect their weaker and older family members. He remembers the last time he saw beloved whale friend Cyclops – she was elderly and they both knew that it would be the last time they would see each other. Eye to eye, they embraced one last time; Dorsey relates how he journeys back in his mind to remember Cyclops during quiet moments. And you will meet the cormorants, ospreys, dolphins, sea turtles, mahi-mahi, mola mola (sunfish), rays, crabs, great horned owls, scorpions, rattlesnakes, coyotes, the saguaro cactus, landscape, and the stunning clear night skies with zillions of stars. You will spend time marveling at the small fish nursery areas in the coastal mangrove forests – a crucial part of the coastal biosphere. You will be able to practically taste the barbecued oysters and sauteed scallops with light garlic! And you'll meet the people of central Baja who are so happy to host you – and not just because of our spending. These people are spiritually connected to the whales and want the best outcomes for all concerned.

Where/How to Get there, and Ways'n'Means...

There is a higher whale census at Laguna Ojo de Liebre, but the town reportedly is ~meh~ without too much culture or nightlife to recommend it. San Ignacio has a great concentration (though smaller numbers) of gray whales, and the town is charming by all accounts – which enriches the visit to the area greatly. The beautiful Jesuit church built in the mid-1700s still dominates the central plaza. Logistically, you can fly to San Diego, Tijuana, or Cabo, and then rent a car. (Seems that signage is pretty good, so you are going to get there without too much trouble. Just be sure to make your lodging reservations in advance. By personal experience, get the full auto rental insurance package – if you get a flat, or if your battery kicks the bucket or your windshield takes a stray rock, you are liable and must pay. So my advice is to just get the full array of car rental insurance – just consider it as part of the cost of travel. (I was glad WE did when we got a flat while vacationing in Costa Rica; everything was covered...) In addition, bring cash; some places prefer cash and may not accept credit cards. And have small denominations of bills. Some proprietors accept the change as their tip and claim they can't break a bill. So, lots of small bills! (...You can still tip of course, but let it be YOUR decision as to how much, not theirs.)

Naturally, conditions and services can change - as can pricing, so in order to plan your trip the best bet is to consult with TripAdvisor and/or Lonely Planet - and do all your research before going. You can customize your trip around your expectations and requirements whatever those might be!

If you want to dig in to learn about the marine and wetland biology, eco-tourism and sustainability of Laguna San Ignacio, head over to Laguna San Ignacio Ecosystem Science Program - Laguna San Ignacio Ecosystem Science Program (sanignaciograywhales.org). Their website also has a breathtaking collection of whale sounds and song, photos and videos.

Petting A Gray Whale ?

Yes, the gray whales of San Ignacio do come over to interact with their human visitors. They invite you to pet them. Scientists also believe that the whales enjoy scraping up against the light boats for a good scratch, relieving the itchiness caused by parasites on the whales' skin. Be prepared for a fishy breath from these gray whales! After all, they eat krill! When petting the whales, just be sure to very carefully avoid touching around their blowholes. All marine mammal species get upset if anything gets close to their blowholes. That said, there is virtually no risk to this terrific marine adventure with the gray whales!

Threats to Gray Whales

Gray whales are subject to many stresses on their 12,000-mile journey from the Arctic to the Baja nursery areas. Hundreds of gray whales are washing up on Oregon and California shores. The necropsies do not detect shipping strikes or toxins as the cause of death. Scientists at Oregon State University are starting to figure out what is happening. Perhaps the most serious threat comes from global warming. Normally, global warming is a good thing for whales because it provides expanded access to open water – and krill – for the whales to feed off. Great if you are a krill-eating whale. But gray whales eat amphipods – crustaceans which live on the bottom. Amphipods' main food course is the dead algae which floats down from the bottom of the overlying ice pack. However, with less ice pack, there is less algae, thus less food for amphipods to flourish – resulting in fewer amphipods for the <skinnier> gray whales to eat. Consequently, the gray whales no longer have access to plentiful amphipod food sources which is vital for their journey south to Baja to mate and deliver their calves.





Sea Swells



Grey Whale by Gary Lehman Another threat on their journey south (and back north again) is shipping strikes on whales when near the surface, and the ubiquitous threat of microplastics, toxic pollutants, oil spills, sewage, acid rain, Navy sonar disrupting their echo-location and blasting/shredding their hearing, fertilizer runoff, mercury from coal plants, and fishnet entanglement in the Pacific waters. It must also be said though that gray whales are an intelligent and innovative species; they have survived being almost hunted to extinction, and they are capable of switching up their food supply and gulping down Arctic krill and shrimp – although they will have to compete with other whales species to do so. A new threat to gray whales in their nursery zone might be emerging -- orcas. Orcas have recently been spotted in the nursery waters. Some attacks on gray whale calves are suspected but not confirmed. More scientific research needs to be done to understand this potential threat. It would stand to reason that orcas would eventually discover these nursery grounds and make predations. Whether their primary prey in the region are sea lions and seals -and/or- gray whale calves – remains to be determined. Orcas often hunt collaboratively in packs like wolves, and they can figure things out as we know – and have driven white sharks away from the waters of “Air Jaws” Gansbaai and Dyer Island, South Africa. White shark carcasses have been discovered with the liver surgically removed (and consumed) by orcas; orcas have also been known to make predations on blue whale calves, sometimes eating just the tongues. Orcas are threatened by declining fish stocks, so it is entirely possible that this intelligent species is switching up the menu and potentially making predations on other marine mammals in order to survive. All said this phenomenon around the potential threat of orcas to the gray whales of Baja must be studied and better understood before reaching definitive conclusions.

The gravest threat though to gray whales has been averted, at least for now. The Baja peninsula is renowned for its salt flats. This is BIG business -- multinational corporations come looking to exploit natural resources. They wish to engage in large-scale strip mining for salt. Mitsubishi was seeking to establish one of the world’s largest strip-mining operations right in the gray whales’ nursery areas. The industrialized region would cover the surface area of Manhattan, Bronx, and Queens. The industrial salt mined here – 7 million cubic tons per year – would have been used in PVC piping manufacturing and in industrial chemical processing. Had this vast salt factory been built, it would have almost certainly resulted in catastrophic losses of gray whales. In one of the most monumental victories for environmental protection, Mitsubishi was prohibited from proceeding with this plan in 2000, and for the time being, San Ignacio is spared this worry. Let’s hope that economic circumstances and government considerations do not emerge to threaten the resumption of Mitsubishi or other large multinationals from making a land grab for strip mining for salt... Those readers who have a further interest in this landmark environmental success are referred to [Saving Laguna San Ignacio: 20 Years and Counting \(nrdc.org\)](#) Eco-tourism has strongly taken hold in the mindset of new generations, so continued safety seems assured for this environment. That said, rust never sleeps anytime politicians, greed and money are in the mix - so continued vigilance is important.

I hope your awareness about and interest in the gray whales of San Ignacio lagoon is raised; I invite you to pick up a copy of [The Lagoon](#) by James Michael Dorsey. Hopefully we can all work in a trip from mid-February to mid-March sometime to view & cuddle the gray whales and their calves. I think it is an especially suitable trip for families and grandparents to encourage and inspire new generations of marine environmental advocates! Hope to see you there, and thanks for reading and caring about these wonderful, friendly animals that enrich our lives.





Sea Swells



Holiday Party



Collage





Sea Swells



NOW OPEN TO FRIENDS OF THE SCUBA SPORTS CLUB

ONLY 9 SPOTS REMAIN

Optional/Tentative Land Tour July 22-26th (price not determined)

LIVEABOARD July 27- August 3, 2024



Jardines Aggressor II

<https://www.aggressor.com/boat/JAll>

Deluxe Cabin: \$3,800 USD (double occupancy)

15% DISCOUNT WITH DEPOSIT PAID by 12/20/23

15% discount reimbursed at final payment

****Prices listed are before comps.****

Included:

- 7 nights on board the Aggressor II
- Meals/beverages
- 3-4 dives per day

Not included:

- Flights to Santa Clara or Camaguey
- Nitrox: \$120/week
- Port Fee \$240
- Conservation Fee: \$120
- Airport Transfers TBA

PLEASE NOTE:

Do NOT book your flights until you have received confirmation of your spot. Our club requires membership or 10% fee added to the cost of the trip. Each person diving MUST have Dive insurance. 3% fee if paid by credit card

*The benefit of going with the group is sharing comps and commissions. You will be invoiced directly by Aggressor. Portion of trip could be tax write off (ask your accountant)

Frequently asked questions.

<https://www.aggressor.com/pages/cuba-questions>

We plan on selling this out.

Note: Optional land tours are still being worked on. (3-4 days pre-live aboard.)

Deposits due ASAP to hold your spot on the boat.

Any Questions Please Email:

diveplanner@thescubasportsclub.org