

# The Surface Times

Volume 3, Issue 11  
 December 2009



## My Red Sea Adventure

by Paul Skinner, OWSI

Recently, I had the opportunity to do a week of diving in the Red Sea. I got married in March this year and my new bride had always wanted to visit Egypt. For various reasons, late October – early November looked to be the best for us, particularly considering the climate in Egypt. We wanted to miss the extreme heat.

Somehow, I successfully negotiated a weeklong live aboard on the Red Sea at the conclusion of our honeymoon. So, on 10 November, after a really neat ten days of visiting Cairo, Alexandria and a trip down the Nile seeing spectacular sights we went in different directions. My bride flew home and I flew to Marsa Alam, Egypt to meet the Grand Sea Serpent at Port Ghalib, several hundred miles south of where the Gulf of Suez empties into the Red Sea.

The Grand Sea Serpent is a large, older vessel that carries 24 divers plus crew. On this particular trip, there were 23 divers from the UK and me, a yank! At least we all spoke the same language, more or less. No group was larger than 2 people, and there were 4 solo divers, including myself. As a result, there were no preset large groups and people mixed freely, very nice. I was buddied up with a Brit named Paul Finch, a really neat 40-year-old entrepreneur in the executive suite industry.

The first night aboard we filled out an information log on our diving histories. I was stunned. This group had logged over 30,000 dives. Most the divers were instructors or higher up the PADI hierarchy. Several worked for or owned dive shops in various parts of the UK or Europe. With the exception of two other guys, I was the least experienced diver in the group. And the experience level definitely showed in the water.

Although they had dived all over the world, most of the group's previous diving had been in the Red Sea. The Red Sea is to them what the Caribbean is to us – the closest, most convenient and least expensive quality diving spot. Sharm el Sheikh is their Cozumel. I was told I was lucky that I had not planned a trip there. They said that it was not unusual to have over seventy day boats and live boards moored at one time at the better dive sites. The most we had at any site was six which seemed awful to me!

We were on the water for five and a half days. The first day out we did a check out dive, then dove a small lagoon. These were nice but not spectacular dives. I did see a crocodile fish on the second dive. Then we steamed throughout the night and moored at a very small island called Big Brother. We were sailing in a very strong wind and the swells ranged between four and eight feet. It was pretty rough. But thanks to Bonine, I slept like a baby.

At 5:30 am the next morning, they woke us for our first dive at Big Brother. The island is a coral outcropping that pops up out of the Red Sea maybe twenty feet and supports a light house. It is about a third mile long, eighth mile wide and totally brownish tan – not a single green thing growing or even painted on it. We stayed there two days, diving the wall around this island. What side of the island we dove depended on where the sun was and the direction of the current. We were looking specifically for



<b>Inside this Issue</b>	
Sales	<b>2</b>
Creature Feature	<b>2</b>
Red Sea Adv, continued	<b>3</b>
Travel, Training	<b>4</b>
Scuba Cylinders	<b>4</b>
Sales, continued	<b>5</b>
Scuba Cylinders, continued	<b>5</b>
DAN	<b>6</b>



**We B Divin'***The Ultimate Dive Shop!*

## Don't Lose Out! Specials End Dec 31, 2009

More on page 5

**GET \$300 OF FREE MERCHANDISE WITH THE PURCHASE OF ANY DRY SUIT PACKAGE**



### Options Include

**Exp 12/31/09**

MK0 Undergarment—\$140

MK1 Undergarment—\$180

MK2 Jacket—\$180

MK2 John—\$180

MK3 Socks—\$50

EVO 3 Boots—\$130

Fusion Boots—\$138

Heat Zippered Hood—\$80

Heat Non-Zip Hood—\$70

Fleece Watch Cap—\$35

1 mm Neoprene Cap—\$20

Quick Draw Laces—\$20

5 mm Neoprene Gloves—\$80

3 mm Neoprene Gloves—\$70

6mm Neoprene 3 Finger—\$80

Dry Glove Wrist Rings—\$60

Dry Glove Rings—\$80

Dry Gloves with Liners—\$48

Complete Dry Glove Sys \$170

Short Sleeve Helmet—\$35

LS Hoodie—\$90

Ball Cap—\$25

Traveler Backpack—\$158

Military Spec. Bag—\$158

Seal Saver—\$10

Zipper Wax—\$10

## Creature Feature



**Tulip** is the common name for two or three species of large, predatory, subtropical and tropical sea snails.

They are marine gastropod mollusks in the family Fascioliidae, the spindle shells, tulip shells and their allies.

The word "tulip" describes the overall shape of the shells of these species, which is like that of a closed tulip flower.

They are predatory and will eat starfish, egg cases for most species, and

During a night dive on the Fredricksted Pier in St Croix recently I watched a True Tulip stalk, pin and eat a starfish. This was quite surprising as the starfish is significantly more mobile.



## My Red Sea Adventure, continued

Atlantic white tip sharks and hammerheads. We saw a couple of reef sharks and possibly one hammerhead. However, the coral was great. The wall dives were basically drift dives, or as Angelika, one of the 3 female divers called them, fly by. The current was pretty stiff making photography an iffy thing. However, there were a lot of great photos taken.

Due to the high seas, we missed the signature wreck dive at the Big Brother. It was just too much for the Zamoras to handle. Zamoras are small inflatable boats, which took us out to our dive sites. They held six divers comfortably or 10 in a real pinch. Due to the high seas, most of these entries were negatively buoyant back roll entries. You do a back roll entry with an empty BC bladder, kick like crazy to get to 15 feet, meet your buddy, and continue your descent. Yes, there is a trick to it, actually, more than one. But that's my secret!

One thing of note, I had to get used to meters and bars, tons and half tons (1500 psi or 100 bar and 750 psi or 50 bar respectively) and I learned some new hand signals! Since I was diving with 2 computers, I converted one of them to metric and kept the other imperial.

On day four, we moved our diving to Small Brother Island. It was a smaller version of Big Brother, only a short distance away, but with no lighthouse. More wall dives. The south wall rivaled any wall I've ever seen. Great soft corals and tons of marine life. But like the rest, due to the stiff current, it was a fly by. We did see a thresher shark here, but no Atlantic white tips or hammerheads.

After three dives at Small Brother, we saddled up and steamed overnight to Daedalus Reef. Day five was more wall dives. They were nice, but pretty much the same as the other two sites.

The wind picked up during the day and by the time we left Daedalus for our night's journey to El Phantine, the seas were eight to ten feet. We were steaming directly into the wind and swells. Occasionally, the spray from the swells crested the top of our boat and showered us on the lounge deck. Not even Bonine could save me. I went to bed at 4:30 pm to head off seasickness. I managed to crawl up for dinner at 5:30 pm and put a little food on my stomach, then back to my cabin. I'll never figure out how they made dinner that night as rough as it was. I slept eleven more hours until the 5:30 am wakeup call the next day. Turned out just about everyone was in his or her cabin immediately after dinner that night.

I was fine when I was awakened at 5:30 am for the first morning dive of day six, our last diving day. The East wall El Phantine was probably the best dive of the trip. It featured wonderful corals on the wall, lots of reef fish, and terminated at a natural platform at about sixty feet with very little current. We burned down our remaining air here to end the dive.

.Our final dive was in a cove near Port Ghalib. This was a shallow dive, looking for large sea turtles with large remoras hanging off their shells. We managed to encounter one. But due to other divers and the surge, the viz was pretty humble so my buddy and I decided thirty minutes of sand and small sea grass was enough.

During the five and a half days of diving, we did sixteen dives. The routine was identical every day. Wake up was at 5:30 am; brief at 6 am; in the water by 6:30 am. Then breakfast, brief and a second dive; lunch, brief and the final dive of the day. The sun is low on the horizon and sets around 5 pm in this part of the world.

The Grand Sea Serpent is the flagship of the Sea Serpent Fleet. The cabins are nice, very functional with good storage area. Only a few are upper and lower. The rest are side by side with a refrigerator in between stocked with soda and beer. The dining area and lounge area is huge and comfortable. The second and third decks had ample covered and open deck space with seating and sunning mats. The food was plentiful and very good. The crew was excellent.

It was not up to Aggressor standards on the diving deck. It was crowded, there was no dry area for camera preparation and stowage.

There was only a tiny closet with outlets for charging camera batteries. We suited up in two groups to alleviate the crowding. I missed the warm towels and showers at the end of the dives – a very appreciated touch on the Aggressor boats from which I have dove.

The dive guides were excellent. If you didn't attend their dive brief, which were excellent, you didn't dive.

So, now I can add the Red Sea to my live aboard adventures. Here's how I rank them: 1.Palau 2. Galapagos 3. Belize 4.Red Sea

Would I recommend the Red Sea to anyone? Not really. After talking with this group, I've realized that we have in the Caribbean almost everything that is in the Red Sea, except for a few varieties of unique fish. It would be different if the Red Sea were as close to us as the Caribbean, but it's a haul. For what it cost me to do the Red Sea, I could have done two trips to Cozumel. However, if you find yourself in that part of the world, definitely include it as





## Trips for 2009 and Beyond

### Cozumel

Christmas, December 25-28

Diver \$1266

Non Diver \$1026

Staying at Hotel Cozumel Resort this time. The trip price also includes round trip airfare on American Airlines, transportation to and from the airport, 2 dives on Saturday and 2 on Sunday. Most trips the group opts to add dives so many times we do 3 dives on Friday, 3 or 4 dives on Saturday and the 2 dives on Sunday. Since Friday is Christmas there will be no diving.

Excluding airfare, Diver \$440

### Cocos Island

October 25— Nov 06, 2010

Diver \$4235, check web site

A lush, uninhabited island 300 miles off Costa Rica's Pacific coast. Rocky pinnacles surrounding Cocos are beacons for big animals and big action.



### **Scuba Cylinders , Tank inspection and testing**

by Michael Turner, AI

## Training

### **WBD Season Pass**

Take any or all of the 38 PADI/DAN specialties offered at We B Divin' in a 12 month period. Up to 3 crew packs included.

Get your PADI Master Scuba Diver and your DAN Diving Emergency Specialist.

\$699 — **Unbelievable!**

### **Learn to Dive Package**

**A whale of a deal, tell your friends.**

Group Class Tuition, Student Materials, Personal Gear (Mask, Snorkel, Fins, Boots, Bag) chosen from a wide variety of options, and a shorty wet suit. Upgrades are available should you desire.

Because tanks are so crucial, they must be inspected at least once a year by a trained technician who takes the valve off and thoroughly checks both the tank and the valve. These **visual inspections** check for cuts, dents, stress lines, bulges, plating condition, a current hydrostatic test date, and signs of general abuse outside, and pits, corrosion, coating defects, neck cracks, and thread integrity inside. The inspector will also check for potential manufacturers' recalls. If all is well, the inspector puts the tank back together and applies a new sticker.

**Hydrostatic testing** is required every five years. This test must be conducted by a certified technician and essentially determines whether the tank is structurally sound and will not burst under pressure. The idea is to fill the tank with water and then pressurize the water up to five thirds (5/3) the working pressure of the tank. There are several ways to test the cylinder hydrostatically. The most common method is to place the tank into a water-filled pressure chamber, and then see how much the tank expands under pressure by measuring the amount of water displaced. DOT regulations state that permanent expansion of the cylinder after such a procedure must be less than 10% of the expansion under full test pressure. If it's more, the cylinder is unsafe and can no longer be used.

**Visual Plus** is a non-destructive testing (NDT) device which utilizes eddy currents to detect neck and shoulder cracks, folds or other similar imperfections in aluminum cylinders such as scuba, SCBA (all metal, hoop-wrap or full wrap), beverage, medical, industrial gas cylinders, fire extinguishers, etc.

An electromagnetic wave is introduced into the metal of the vessels near the area which is desirable to inspect for imperfections (the threaded area). The wave causes currents to flow in a circular manner in the metal. They are called eddy currents because the flow is circular. An imperfection can increase the path that the currents have to flow and so make the material appear higher in resistance in that region where the imperfection is present. This generates a spike on the computer generated report which alerts the technician to a problem that requires further investigation.

Hydrostatic testing alone does not reveal cracking in the neck/shoulder area of aluminum cylinders unless they are leaking. Visual Plus identifies 100% of these defective cylinders... Don't leave it to chance!



### A Word from Our Sponsors



#### Free Airsource

Purchase an Aqua Lung or Sea Quest BC, regulator, Suunto computer and take any scuba training course and receive a free airsource.

Offer valid through 31 December 09



#### Save \$150 Instantly

\$150\* instant rebate on the purchase of a **Cobra, Cobra3, D4, D6 or D9**  
Offer valid through 12/24/09

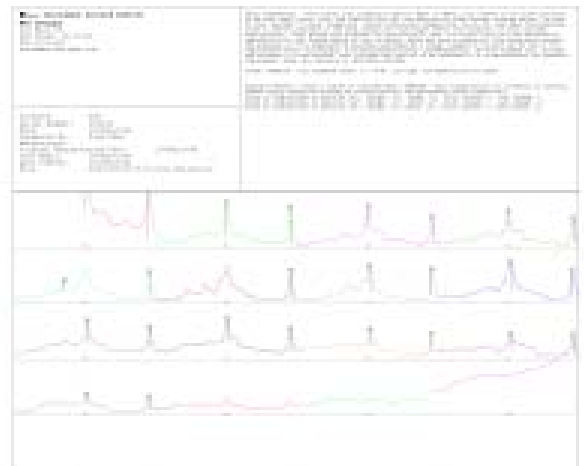
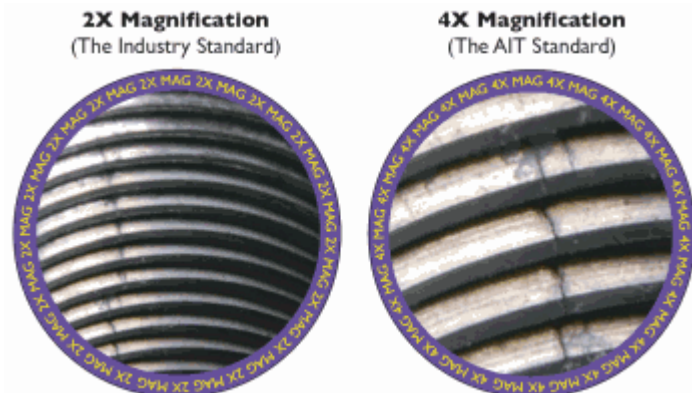


Free backpack and logbook (\$75 value) with purchase of HelO2 or Vyper Air. While supplies last.

#### Scuba Cylinders continued from page 4

See a sample printout of a vessel with an imperfection in the neck by clicking on the chart below.

This is an example of a crack in the neck area of a scuba cylinder.



**We B Divin'**

*The Ultimate Dive Shop!*

**The Surface Times**

8451 Boulevard 26  
North Richland Hills, TX 76180

817-605-8833, voice and fax

E-mail: [editor@we-b-divin.com](mailto:editor@we-b-divin.com)

We B Divin' is your personal resource for scuba training (PADI), equipment sales, service, and travel.

We pride ourselves on individualized training, especially for people with water related anxieties. Our rental gear includes SeaQuest weight integrated BCD's (women's and men's), computers, and regulators for state of the art training and the ultimate in safety.

Remember, enjoyment and safety are enhanced by comfort and proper fit. We will personally fit you, whether your primary interest is diving or snorkeling.

We offer both group and individual travel opportunities. Both singles and couples are welcome. Singles may ask to room share or can choose the single supplement option. Everyone is welcome - divers, snorkelers, non-divers, shoppers, etc.

**Think Outside the Bowl!**

There is much to learn, many places to go and much to see.



Come learn with us, go places with us and see with us.

**We're on the web!**  
**[www.we-b-divin.com](http://www.we-b-divin.com)**

---

## Divers Alert Network

### DAN Travel Insurance

This is Dan's newest product. I am sure that I have not reviewed every Trip Cancellation and Interruption policy available out there on the market, but this one is very competitive in benefits as well as cost. Also, of course, when we use this

product we are supporting DAN which is always a plus.

Travel insurance is good for those who want to plan a trip but have pending concerns like the health of a loved one. It is very valuable when planning a BIG trip like Galapagos. Many times trips like this must be planned far in the future

and we simply cannot know what life will put on our plate in the interim. So this type of insurance protects us from a total loss.

Check the details from our web site by clicking here

**[DAN Dive Insurance](#)**

---

## Divers Alert Network

### Membership

DAN is the only organization I am aware of that is actively pursuing medical dive research. They provide assistance to all divers (regardless of membership status) through 800 phone numbers and will accept collect calls from anywhere in the world. This alone is

worth our support with membership fees of \$29 per year. The included subscription to Alert Diver is just a bonus.

### Dive Insurance

This is the best option for Medical Dive Accident Coverage that I have reviewed. There are three plans from \$25 to \$70 per year covering not only

medical coverage for a dive accident but extra transportation, extra accommodation, lost diving equipment and much more.

I cannot stress enough how valuable it is to have this coverage. Check the details from our web site by clicking here

**[DAN Dive Insurance](#)**