



Northern California Rainbow Divers (NCRD)

Buddy Line

November 2009

Trip Report - Egypt!

Sharon Ponder led NCRD, in cooperation with Greg Hamman's Undersea Xpeditions, to the wilds of the Red Sea and on a land tour of the stunning antiquities of Egypt in October. Nineteen divers, mostly Rainbow Divers, flew from spots on three continents to participate in this trip of a lifetime.

Of course, we toured the pyramids, saw the spectacular Solar Boat recently reassembled over five painstaking years, toured the vast Cairo museum, visited temple sites such as Karnak and Luxor, and wound our way down into the tombs in the Valley of the Kings.

Also we dove the islands below Hurghada in the Red Sea. We hit the beginning of the peak season, and contended with seven to twelve other liveaboards at every site. Underwater, there seemed to be room for all. Just a few comments from our travelers:

Sharon Ponder

Our checkout dive in Soma Bay at Tobia Arbaa (pinnacles 4) was incredible. The pinnacles were lush with life with lots of fish.



Some of my favorites: scrawled file fish, picaso triggerfish and a new one – the Starry Pufferfish (huge). Later of the trip, the islands of Big Brother and Little Brother offered beautiful walls with lots of soft coral and a ton of fish, also the famous “shark dive” on which I saw a hammerhead. Also saw a whitetip shark and two grey reef sharks here. Daedalus Reef was another incredible wall with the soft coral and fish. New for me was the sighting of a Clown Coris, an Axilspot Hogfish

(juvenile) and also a Torpedo Ray (this small white ray produces an electric shock of 250 volts, if you touch it).

The seas turned rough later in the week, and we skipped our planned day at Eliphanstone, instead heding inland for Ras Shona (south and north), where we did a couple of shallow reef dives with less viz but wonderful sea life: huge turtles, crocodile fish, my favorite Spade fish, a huge Spiny

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President's Corner by Peg Stone

I just returned from an amazing trip with other Rainbow Divers to the Red Sea and Egypt. We shared this trip with Undersea Expeditions, led by Greg Hamman, a very positive experience. And I think that traveling with a group of divers – and a group of GLBT divers – made all the difference in the world, on both the land and sea portion of this trip. The experience ranks up there with the top events of my life, a truly memorable adventure, with friends, experiences, sights, and memories for years to come.

Traveling in a foreign country where the signs are unintelligible, the ability to learn the language in advance extremely limited (for a language dunce like me in particular) and where the culture is very different from my own, really stretches and intimidates me. And it can bring out the worst in a lot of people. One thing I find about divers, in general, is that they are adventurous, curious, and flexible. As we crept through narrow passageways, hunched to pass through a tight airless corridor, I was surprised to find a touch of claustrophobia in divers who thought nothing of deep, dark, and scary dives. But derring-do, in general, ruled the day. And gay people, especially those of us who started our gay lives categorized as mentally ill, are, I think, a little more sensitive to the mores of those around us. I found myself, thankfully, in a group of people who chose to cover their shoulders, arms, and legs in the conservative south of Egypt, instead of parading around in spaghetti strap halter tops

and short shorts. It felt respectful. And I found my fellow travelers kind, in gentle and subtle ways. Traveling on land, with a group, clambering in and out of busses, on a schedule, in a boiling hot climate, dealing with a culture where a little gift of money is a normal part of business (for, say, allowing your bus to pull out from the curb at the airport), and where airplane reservations may or may not exist when one arrives at the airport, can draw out snarls, impatience, nastiness, and churlishness. This group had a truly awesome tolerance for all those travel bug-a-boos. Some people are going to hit their limits with the group process; some people are going to find that “seen one temple seen them all” creeps into their mind on about the third day; some insane people are going to go off the deep end and start talking about the Jungian collective unconscious. In other words, everyone is going to react differently to experiencing 5,000 year old pyramids, temples, tombs, mummies, and artifacts, day after day after day. And I found this group openly accepting of people’s different reactions (except maybe my Jungian speculation, but hey, that was over the line!).

“Not going on the tour today? Good decision,” people said. And it reminded me of the Rainbow Diver’s fundamental attitude toward diving: you can call a dive at any time for any or no reason, and get support. What a great group of people: gay divers! I’ll be traveling with them again!



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CLUB POLICIES

Board meetings are held once a month and are open to any member in good standing. If interested in attending, please contact any of the Board members listed above for location.

Membership dues are \$35/year, \$55/year for domestic partners at the same address and \$20/year for a newsletter-only subscription to addresses >150 miles from the SF Bay area.

Advertising is available for \$8/month to club members for a business card-size ad, or for \$10/month for non-club members. If you are interested in advertising, please contact the editor. NCRD does not warrant, recommend or guarantee the products or services contained in advertisements in this newsletter.

Unless otherwise noted, all monies paid for club-sponsored events are non-refundable.

Egypt! (continued)

Balloonfish and another new sighting – the Whitemargin Stargazer swimming across the sand and burrowing in the sand bank with just its eyes showing. We then headed back towards Safaga for a night dive in the shallows – sighting the usual suspects: octopus, eels, and some even small cuttle fish!



highlight: dropping down to visit a swirling school of seven hammerheads. Dives tended to be deep and long, but were well planned with long surface intervals. Visibility varied from 100ft+ on most dives, to 40ft at the occasional murky mooring. Boat crew and guides were excellent.

All the travelers handled the many flights of the trip with seasoned good

Dennis Nix

The reefs are incredible. Colors are vivid. We were able to do deep dives as well as shallow dives. Shallow (40-50 feet) are the most vivid colors I've seen. It's like when Dorothy landed in Oz. I love the parrot fish, angel fish, lots of Scorpion fish. We watched movies every night in the upstairs lounge. The crew of the Emperor Elite were friendly, warm, and funny. They did everything to make our trip enjoyable. Sharon and Greg kept all the logistics running smoothly: a great trip!



Kathi Doster

The reefs of the Red Sea are in excellent condition, with an incredible variety of soft and hard corals, and abundant fish. Every dive had two to six fish that were new to me, many unique to the Red Sea (Red Sea banner fish, crown and masked butterfly fish; bluespine unicornfish, orange stripe and bluethroat trigger fish; starry, masked and white spotted puffers; bluetail trunkfish; blue spotted stingrays; various scorpionfish and crocodile fish), and old favorites: titan and

Picasso triggerfish, Indian bird wrasse, clown coris, common and clearfin lionfish, and turtles. Fish were very friendly and unafraid. Got to buddy up with a Napoleon wrasse, got circled (several times) by an oceanic white tip shark. Another shark

humor, and we soldiered through the Egyptian heat and endless logistics of group travel by bus from site to site on land, rewarded with 5000 year-old structures at stop after stop. This trip was definitely one of those Lifetime Peak Experiences. Soon, like the Roman Empire, the American Empire will pass into the dusts of time. The Pyramids will still stand watch over the blue waters of the Nile.



NCRD Holiday Party!!

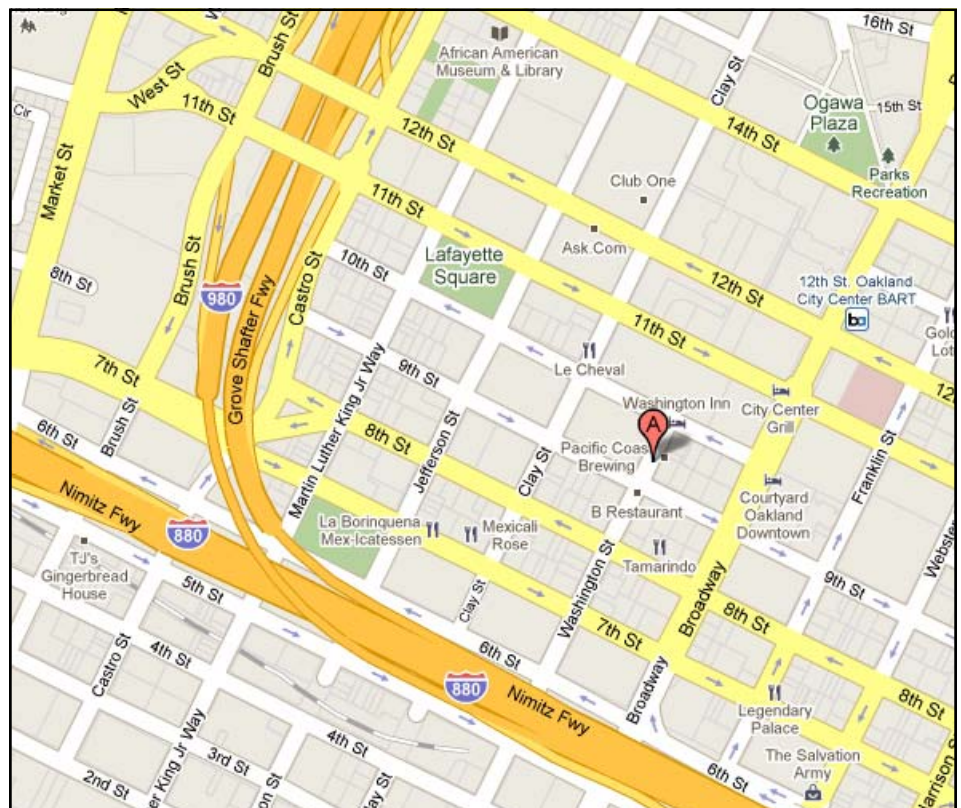


This year's Rainbow Divers holiday party will be held at the **Pacific Coast Brewery, at 906 Washington Street in downtown Oakland, on Thursday, December 10, from 7:30 PM till 9:30 PM.** The Brewery offers a wide selection of its own brews, as well as other brands on tap, sodas, waters, and wine. The club will host a great food spread for all rainbow divers and their buddies and significant others. Bring along that non-diving partner to meet your underwater co-conspirators, that friend you've been trying to get to try diving, and call your old club buddies to rendezvous at this festivity! We mean to make a great night of it!

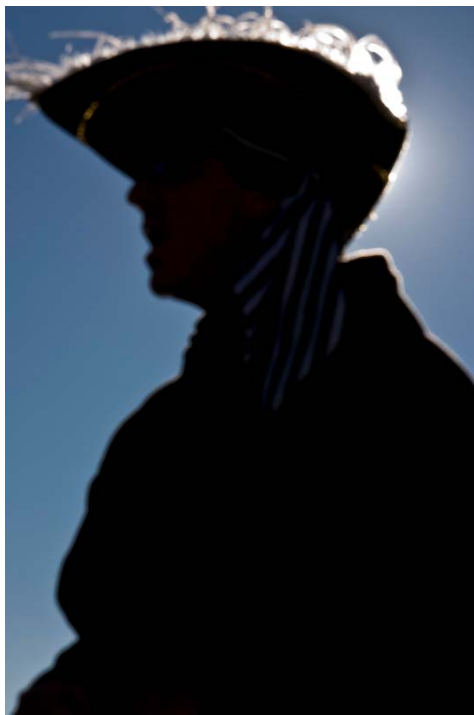
Rumors have it that our Egyptian travelers may wear their galabias, and fish stories will abound! The notorious nudibranch outfit that won "best costume" on the Halloween night dive may even be on display! Catch up with your friends who only dive in that *other* temperature of water, find out who will help run the club next year, hoist a few to toast to a new year of diving resolutions, and generally escape the misery of shopping and working during the December rush! Many a future dive trip gets its initial impetus at this annual event: come put in your two cents worth on where *you'd* like to spend your diving holiday next year!



**Pacific Coast Brewery
906 Washington Street
Oakland, CA 94607**



Deep Dark and Spooky Diving: Hallowe'en by Peg Stone



Pirate Captain Phil...AAARGH!!!

Instead of shoveling massive quantities of sugary treats down the gullets of the local kids on Hallowe'en night, I found myself 80 feet below the surface of Carmel Bay in the pitch black, wearing an insane home-made colorful facsimile of a nudibranch over my hood, blowing bubbles with Olivia. Above, through the graceful kelp stipes, we could see the bottom of the Cypress Sea, lit by the full moon.

(Pirate) Captain Phil Sammet found yet another reason to turn two in-the-bay dives into "let's go 'round the corner and do some real diving." (The claim was an inshore "red tide.") The boat was festooned with skeletons, devils, snakes, rats (or at least mice), and various bones. Chef Larry had whipped up Hungarian

Ghoul-lash served with Lizard Gizzards and Gobbledy Gook. For dessert: Lady Fingers (complete with finger nails made of almonds: spooky!).

A full load of 15 divers had signed on for this merry Hallowed Eve's plunge, a mix of Rainbow Diver's sluttiest cold water fiends and various and sundry friends. The prospect of a boat night dive out at Peekaboo (which I still think of as the Wash Rock, and which has various other names as well, it seems) and Butterfly House had drawn the local dive nuts like moths to a flame, and we all splashed with good cheer into the inky deep.

Ralph and Larry found a prickleback monkeyfaced eel; Olivia and I saw a rather mature treefish, several hundred miles from its native habitat in the

Channel Islands. Nudibranchs ruled the night, and we saw five or six kinds in abundance. The rockfish and ling cod were just as surly as in the daytime. The sites were magnificent: strawberry anemones coating all the rocks and hydrocorals sticking up like purple deer antlers.

The weather held good, the waves generally sloshed just enough to help up pop up on the swim step, viz was paradise and the second dive, all agreed, was somehow warmer than the first.

Lauren thrilled us all by removing her dry suit to reveal underneath a fabulous red evening dress, and everyone agreed to meet again next year for a repeat of the spookiest, finest night dive of the new century!



A truly terrifying Larry Chow

2009 / 2010 Calendar of Upcoming Events, Local Diving & Dive Trips

Events

NCRD Holiday Party
Thursday, December 10
Pacific Coast Brewery
 906 Washington Street, Oakland
 7:30 PM - 9:30 PM

Local Diving

Saturday, November 21
 Breakwater Afternoon and Night Dive (Free)

Sunday, November 22
 Point Lobos Dive (\$15)

Saturday, December 12
 3-Tank to Carmel on the Cypress Sea (\$110)

Sunday, December 13
 Point Lobos Dive (\$15)

Far Away Dive Trips

May 3-12, 2010
Maldives, Indian Ocean, South Asia. Live-aboard, wait list only

November 23-December 1, 2010
Thailand Live-aboard

NOTE: Events and dive trips may have changed since this printing—please see latest details at www.rainbowdivers.org and click on **Calendar**



Northern California Rainbow Divers
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