

THE REEF SEEKER



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December - 2019



ANOTHER DIVE BOAT FIRE

As you may have heard by now, there was ANOTHER dive boat that caught fire and sank, with circumstances similar to the sinking of the Conception over Labor Day. This time it was the Red Sea Aggressor I on November 1.

The circumstances are eerily similar: The fire broke out after everyone had gone to sleep (12:30AM this time), battery charging is one of the leading candidates for the cause, the fire spread very quickly, no smoke/fire alarms were heard, the main stairway exit was blocked by flames, and the boat burned and sank. This time, only one person died (18 passengers and 12 crew managed to escape) because one of the passengers smelled smoke and woke up and alerted everyone else. It is presumed the passenger who died may have lingered too long in her cabin and was overcome by smoke inhalation before she could escape.

As with the Conception fire, you have to view this in three distinct areas: (1) What caused the fire, (2) Why did it spread so quickly, and (3) What measures can be taken to ensure the fire gets put out or at

least slowed down so passengers can escape.

The idea of batteries-as-ignition-source is a bit puzzling and hopefully more research will be done on that. Because the underlying question, is, "Are these things only catching fire on boats?" If lithium-ion rechargeable batteries are that dangerous, shouldn't we hear of battery fires every day? Shouldn't houses be burning down? And maybe they are, but it's just not publicized.

Or is it something to do with charging these things in a salt-water environment? We certainly know that prolonged exposure to salt air will cause corrosion. Is it a case where after a certain amount of time at sea that something happens to the batteries and they short out and catch fire?

Or is it something as simple as with the proliferation of rechargeable batteries nowadays, and many people buying off-brand extra batteries, are cheap knock-offs the ones that are catching fire? (Many boats have now gone to an "no overnight charging" policy which avoids the middle-of-the-night fire but doesn't necessary solve the underlying problem.)

I'm still puzzled and concerned by how quickly these fires seemed to have spread. Put simply, that's not supposed to happen. The building

standards, which include types of materials to use and resins and paints and stuff like that, are supposed to at least slow down the spread of any flames if not inhibit them totally. But in both cases - and in the case of the Red Sea Aggressor, eyewitness survivor accounts confirm this - the boats seem to have become engulfed in just a few minutes. The cause of that really needs to be discovered.

This isn't to say you shouldn't feel like you can't go on liveboards. Shortly after Conception, we did 9 days on the Manthiri in the Maldives and on December 5, we'll be getting on the Nautilus Gallant Lady for a 6-day Cabo Pulmo trip.

But this does mean is that you should be a little bit extra vigilant. Make sure you know what the escape routes are. Know where your life jacket is. Ask to see where any fire hoses are and be shown how to activate them. Inquire as to what the overnight watch situation is. Check out the functionality of the smoke alarms. (And remember that pushing the TEST button only confirms that the horn works, not that the unit actually detects smoke and will go off.)

As these investigations continue, we will do our best to keep you informed of what's being learned, as whatever insight is gleaned will benefit all of us.

CABO PULMO BOUND

We're getting ready to leave Wednesday morning for Cabo San Lucas and from there to Cabo Pulmo in the Sea of Cortez, a UNESCO World Heritage site and marine protected area where the diving is fabulous, the biomass is immense, and the critters can be huge. We should get in four full days of diving Cabo Pulmo and may even - weather permitting - get in a dive or two at Gordo Banks, a fabulous deep-water pinnacle (similar to Farnsworth Banks) which is just east of Cabo San Lucas.

We'll be doing all of this from the luxury of the 116' x 22' Nuutilus Gallant Lady. Not sure if we'll have Internet access or not but if we do, we'll post our Top 10 Daily Pix like we do for other trips on our FaceBook and SmugMug pages. So keep an eye out and enjoy the trip with us vicariously.



TRAVEL WITH US IN 2020

We've now got our full foreign travel/vacation sked laid out and we hope you'll find something there that fits your interests and budget. Here's the condensed version of what we've got in mind. (Fuller descriptions along with links to previous trip reports and

pictures can be found on the Reef Seekers website.)

MARCH - YAP IMMERSION

10 days of diving in Yap with manta ID class, photo workshop, fish ID, ½-day land tour of Yap, and a whole lot of fun. Mantas, sharks, and Mandarinfish will all delight you. One of our favorite places to go.

MAY - BONAIRE

Diving once again with our good friends at Buddy Dive. Bonaire is known for accessible dive sites and very reliable conditions. And the house reef at Buddy Dive is excellent.

AUGUST - ISLA MUJERES

Everyone wants to see Whale Sharks and here we can guarantee them. It's the largest congregation of Whale Sharks in the world, up to 800 individual animals. Wow!!! Plus we'll explore some cenotes, dive the Cancun Underwater Museum, and do a couple of reefs as well.

SEPTEMBER - GUADALUPE

Everyone also wants to see Great White Sharks and this is the place to do it. Three full days of cage diving with - apologies to Jimmy Buffet - fins to the left, fins to the

right, and but there's other bait around. A really unique experience and a bucket-list dive.

OCTOBER - INDONESIA

Pristine walls, marvelous muck sites, and the legendary Lembeh Straits where unusual critters are the norm. There's no better place to explore this area than Murex Dive Resort and that's where we'll encamp for 9 glorious days. You can also add on a few days exploring Singapore on the back end.

DECEMBER - DATES TBA

We've done two trips to Socorro (200+ miles south of Cabo San Lucas) and were blown away each time. It's time to get blown away again. Hammerheads, manta rays, Clarion angelfish, and even the occasional whale make this an enchanting trip. Plus the dives at Roca Partida will blow your mind.

We love taking you diving and we think we've got a pretty good smorgasbord of offerings for the coming year. Let us know what interests you or what you need more info on, but the bottom line is that we should get YOU signed up for at least one trip with us in 2020. Give us a call at 310/652-4990 and we can discuss the possibilities.

2020 DIVING VACATIONS

March 16-29 • Yap Immersion

May 15-23 • Bonaire

August 1-8 • Isla Mujeres

September 9-14 • Guadalupe

CLASSES & LOCAL DIVES FOR NEXT YEAR

We've got the local schedule completed for next year as well and you can see some of it to the right (at least through February).

Once again, we'll be offering non-certification classes in Fish ID, Photo Workshop, Navigation (which is done at Vets Park followed by an optional dive), and Tables & Computers (which is a freebie since we think you should know about this stuff and today's training simply doesn't do an adequate job). There is one class we offer that DOES result in a certification card and that's NAUI Nitrox. Each class is offered at least twice in the calendar year and sometimes, if there's enough interest, we can create a special class for you.

We'll also be running a variety of day trips to dive in the Avalon Underwater Park. These are three-tank affairs with loads of fun. If you don't want to commit to a full day, there are Night and Squid Dives to choose from, as well as single-tank daytime beach dives. All of those are done at Veterans Park in Redondo (bring quarters).

In addition, we'll participate in three special diver-oriented events in the first half of the year. Those are the 39th annual Avalon Underwater Cleanup (February 22), Divers Day at the Aquarium of the Pacific (March 14), and - of course - Chamber Day & Eve which are both on May 6.

We'll give you a full printable schedule in the January newsletter but if you're the enterprising sort, that same sked is already available

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Sat.	Dec. 14	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Thu.	19	Redondo	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	Jan. 4	Redondo (Vets)	Beach dive (single tank)	\$25
Thu.	9	Redondo (Vets)	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE!!!
Wed.	15	- CLASS -	- PHOTO WORKSHOP -	\$25
Sat.	18	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Thu.	Feb. 13	Redondo (Vets)	••• Squid Dive (night) •••	FREE!!!
Sun.	16	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Sat.	22	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Cleanup	\$150
Wed.	26	- CLASS -	- NAUI NITROX -	\$75

on our website. Just go to the homepage, open it up, and print.

Hope to share the ocean with you in 2020!!!

AVOID LAGUNA BEACH FOR A WHILE

Talk about ruining a holiday . . .

Beaches in the Laguna area are shut down for a while because of a raw sewage spill. Many ocean and bay water areas from Pelican Point at Crystal Cove in Newport Beach to the Poche Beach interface in Dana Point/San Clemente are closed, according to the Orange County Health Care Agency.

The spill happened late Wednesday afternoon. A sewage main at the Ben Brown Golf Course in Laguna Beach apparently ruptured, allowing the sewage to start leaking out. All affected beaches will remain closed until water quality testing deems them safe to reopen. (A few opened Saturday morning)

You can get more info on the closures at: <https://ocbeachinfo.com>. And if you're in the affected areas and detect a weird odor, you can call the South Coast Air Quality Management District at 800/288-7664 to file a complaint.

GIFT CERTIFICATES

Just a reminder that we still do Gift Certificates if you're trying to think of that perfect holiday gift (like a trip to Yap) but don't know how to wrap it. The Gift Certificate certainly doesn't have to be a full foreign trip. It could be a day trip to Avalon or even just a fixed dollar amount to apply as the recipient sees fit. But the point is, if you're looking for something dive-related to give to someone on your list, give some thought to a Gift Certificate from Reef Seekers.

MERRY/HAPPY WHATEVER

There's a meme going around pointing out that there are 29 holidays recognized by 7 major religions around the world from November 1 to January 15. So it would seem that, when someone wishes you a Merry/Happy/Prosperous Whatever, and it isn't the Merry/Happy/Prosperous Whatever that you observe, the correct response would be, "Thanks!! You too!!!" So from all of us here at Reef Seekers Dive Co., regardless of what you may be celebrating or observing this time of the year (including those who observe nothing), Merry Christmas . . . with a side of Happy Hanukkah.

SAD NEWS FROM BONAIRE - MURPH HAS DIED

Those of you who have been to Buddy Dive in Bonaire have doubtless run into Murphyn Henar, better known just as Murph, one of their top dive guides since 1993. We were quite saddened to hear that last week, on November 26, Murph passed away suddenly and unexpectedly (not dive-related). He was 61.

Murph had some health issues of late and had a pacemaker installed a few years ago but seemed generally healthy. And he was certainly always quick

with a smile. Probably one of the happiest-go-lucky people we've had the good fortune to know, as well as being a great DM. And he was (almost) always able to find his "special friends" at various dive sites. I remember one time we dove "Something Special" and it really WAS something special because Murph found all five of the frogfish he had previously seen there plus Wil Lemley found a new one to boot.

Murph will definitely be missed and our hope is that Bonaire decides to name a dive site after him. He certainly had an impact on the place that will be felt for a long time to come.



PICTURE PAGE - Murph's special friends

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2019)



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