

Turtle News

Issue 10
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Forthcoming Trips and Holidays

- Maldives Liveaboard Easter
- Red Sea, Sharm May - £492
- Red Sea, Brothers Liveaboard - July
- Ireland, August, 8-Days - £485
- Oban September 4-Days - £175
- Shark Diving Bahamas October - From £1,150
- Red Sea Wreck Week Liveaboard November
- Red Sea New Year Party Week

Totally Wrecked



The Red Sea is famed for its colourful coral and abundant marine life, however, the dangerous currents and treacherous coral reefs that sit just below the surface throughout the Straits of Gobal have left the seafloor riddled with wrecks. Many of the Red Sea wrecks lie well beyond the range of the day boats and so a liveaboard is the only way to really get to see these underwater wonders.

The weather in the Red Sea can be fickle at the best of times and in November it is sometimes

impossible to cross to the wreck Mecca of Sha'ab Abu Nuhas, Sha'ab Ali and Shag Rock. However, on this occasion we were blessed with superb conditions and a fantastic weeks diving.

Our first wreck was the Gianni D. She sank in 1983 as the result of what can only be described as a freak navigational faux pas! Today she lies in two distinct sections, her stern, bridge, companion ways and accommodation area almost completely intact and begging for further exploration. The engine room is a photographers dream.

Below, the gigantic rockers are clearly visible, and above glassfish shimmer in the sunlight pouring down through the ventilation hatches. Lying at a 45 degree angle makes swimming around inside the wreck quite disorientating but its always easy to find your way out. My buddy, Chris and I, managed to spend our entire dive inside the wreck, exploring the steering gear room, engineer's room (complete with vice and lathe), galley, captain's quarters and crew bathrooms. The stern

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MIDSUMMER RIVERBOAT PARTY

Thursday 17th July

Tickets £22.50 - On Sale Now

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section of the *Giannis D* is like a wreck divers playground and personally one of my favourite dives.

Our next wreck was the old P&O passenger mail-ship, *Carnatic*. She sank in 1869, allegedly taking with her a cargo of port, copper ingots and £40,000 worth of gold coins. Today, the wooden decking has completely rotted away leaving a series of supporting beams, which are covered in a profusion of colour and life. One of the best features of the wreck is the highly photographic stern, where you can (if your bum is small enough) swim through the large (ish) openings, which were once the windows of the first-class saloon. Another superb feature of this wreck is the frequent presence of dolphins, who were kind enough to put in an appearance whilst we were hanging on our safety stops.

To complete the trio of wrecks along the northern edge of Abu Nuhas, we dived on the wreck of the *Marcus*. The wreck itself is intact and slopes down the reef to a depth of about 30 metres. The stern section, with its coral encrusted weather deck and railings is exceptionally pretty. However, the real fun is inside the wreck. We managed to enter her engine room via the skylights above and although its a tight squeeze, we were well rewarded. The natural light percolating through from above creates a surreal atmosphere and a challenging photo opportunity. Passageways lead off of the engine room but without any natural light visible we wisely decided to line off before venturing any further. We found our way to the machine room, complete with drill stand, grinders and lathe. Retracing our steps we headed back to the engine room past rockers and generators to our exit above. Exploring this vessel is a thrilling experience. For the cool-headed there are plenty of more challenging penetrations but deep inside the engine room is no place for mistakes or uncertainties.

On day three of the trip the weather was holding fine and therefore we were able to reach the west side of Gobal Island and dive the famed *Rosalie Moller*. The 3,963-ton cargo ship, often referred to as the sister-ship of the *Thistlegorm*, sits perfectly upright in 45 metres, almost completely intact and largely undisturbed. Following her sinking in 1941, she remained undiscovered

until 1993 and since that time she has received remarkably few visitors. The first thing that you notice as you descend onto the *Rosalie* is the abundance of fish, the whole wreck is virtually alive with glassfish. We dropped down onto her *Titanic* like bow, a truly magnificent sight. On the foredeck the winch gears are clearly visible and the deckhouses are open for exploration. Moving aft along the inboard companion ways, it is easy to swim from room to room, the wooden bulkheads and flooring long since rotted away. Heading deeper into the wreck it is possible to venture into the engine room with its intact handrails, gauges and telegraph. From here we exited through the skylight and then swam through into the engineer's mess and galley. These workshops still retain an air of working life, pots and pans are still standing on the stove and of course no wreck would be complete without the obligatory vice! There is so much to explore on the *Rosalie Moller*, but of course time and decompression limits are never on our side.

After the *Rosalie I* felt that nothing else would measure up. However, the legendary *Thistlegorm* rarely fails to impress! One of the big benefits of diving the Red Sea wrecks from a liveboard is that you don't have to dive the *Thistlegorm* with the rest of the throng-



ing masses. We sat at anchor just to the west of Sha'ab Ali, enjoyed a late lunch, snorkeled with the dolphins and watched as the flotilla of day-boats headed back to Sharm. When we tied into the wreck we were one of just three boats ... perfect!

For those of you who might be unfamiliar with the *Thistlegorm*, here is a quick history lesson. She was sunk by German Heinkel bombers in 1941, loaded with a cargo that included rifles, munitions, aircraft parts, Wellington boots, trucks and motorbikes, all destined for the 8th English Army in North Africa. Unfortunately she never made it to her final destination, instead fate has left divers

with one of the most fascinating wreck dives outside of Truk Lagoon. The wreck was originally discovered in the fifties by a young explorer called Cousteau. However, having unearthed one of the most important wrecks in maritime history, Jacques Cousteau somehow managed to lose the coordinates, not once but twice! The wreck was finally rediscovered in 1990 and curiously, the entire contents of hold number three were missing. Since its rediscovery the *Thistlegorm* has become one of Egypt's biggest tourist attractions and sadly the sheer number of divers visiting the wreck each day has stripped away nearly all of the coral. However, it is the cargo that most divers come to see.

During our first dive we focused on the bomb blast and stern section of the wreck. In the tangled wreckage of hold number 4 there are cases of ammunition scattered around, two Bren gun carriers and several heavy artillery shells. As we continue towards the stern the two guns come into view and make for an impressive sight, silhouetted against the blue above, with a school of snappers hovering overhead. Rounding the stern, we swim past the huge prop, polished back to its brass by countless divers giving it a "lucky rub". Our second dive on the *Thistlegorm* was conducted at night and in the darkness the wreck took on a whole new meaning. We were the only group on the wreck and the visibility was much improved. As we made our way inside it felt almost as though we were swimming through ink, the darkness was oppressive. The familiar swim-throughs looked decidedly unfamiliar without any ambient light to guide us to the exit points and at times it was difficult to tell whether we were heading deeper into the wreck or making our way out of it. Wreck penetration is certainly not for the faint-hearted but it's a fantastic buzz.

So if you like the sound of classic wrecks in warm water, that you can actually see and penetrate safely, get yourself booked on this year's wreck week ... but hurry space is limited and this one always fills fast.

Words by Lesley Clark

Pictures by Ray Clark

Seal Appeal

It's a long drive to the Farne Islands, but definitely well worth it. Although we were stuck in the compulsory Friday night traffic, it was a nice feeling to be heading out of the city. Six hours later and we are in the pub at Beadnell, a little village up in the far north east corner of England.

On the Saturday morning we got up and headed to breakfast - a good old fry up, nothing better to burp back up into your regulator at 20 metres! Just when the weather seemed as though it may be about to get the better of us the sun made a welcome appearance and so we clambered onto the boat, kitted up and some of us proceeded to revisit our breakfast. However, this was not about to put us off, intrepid divers that we are (could be misconstrued for idiotic) and out onto the swelling seas we went. Our first dive was a relatively shallow affair at 13 metres, but to play with seals you don't need to be too deep. Finning along with my buddy, Debbie, we were busy upsetting a crab when Debbie suddenly turned around to find a seal tugging at her fin! The seal was very inquisitive and interested to see who was invading his waters! The variety of sea life was enough to keep us entertained throughout the 40 minute dive - crabs, blue jellyfish, urchins, star fish and of course the seals. The next dive proved a little more challenging as we headed off for a drift dive. As we struggled to prevent the current from pushing us past the safety of the shielding rock (as we were told not to go beyond this point) I spotted a huge lobster hiding beneath a rock. Alas, he wouldn't come out for supper! Back on board the boat, Debbie asked me if I had been pointing out a scissor fish ... marked at 10 metres?? Our journey back to Beadnell was slowed down because we had to collect Sharon and Nick who had gone round the "don't go round the rock" and were now making good progress towards Norway. When asked for an explanation, Nick's answer was (and I kid you not) "but there wasn't a sign telling us where to stop." But even if there had been a sign he probably wouldn't have seen it because he was too busy racing hermit crabs with Sharon!

The second day was even better. We dropped down to around 20 metres at the start of the dive before heading back to the shallows. Here we saw two



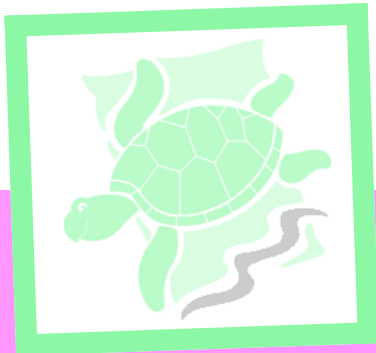
seals playing together, darting in and out of the rocks. Just as Paula tried to point out a crab, Debbie grabbed my arm and started flapping it up and down. I thought something was wrong, goodness knows what she was trying to tell me, first the crab sign then the wiggling fish sign and then her arms did something completely alien. At this point it crossed my mind that the copious amounts of whiskey she had consumed the night before may not have completely left her system ... (I found out later that it was due to a seal wrapping itself around her leg). We swam into the next cut in the rock, at about 12 metres, thinking that some seals may be around and again we were not disappointed. Seals were darting in and out of the crevice, going from the surface down to about 20 metres and back again - they make it look so easy. As I watched with fascination I felt Debbie tap me on the leg. However, as it turned out, it wasn't Debbie. Instead I found a seal clamped to my left leg. He was using his fins to keep himself attached and he was gazing up at me, hugging my leg. I thought that he would soon get flighty and swim off, but he didn't. He stayed there, just nibbling at my fins and scratching his teeth on my dry suit. He even let me tickle his chin and stroke his head; I was awe-struck, giggling like a school-girl, flooding my mask and completely oblivious to anything else. I was so engrossed that I forgot about the extra weight attached to my leg and I got to the point where I didn't know whether to clear my mask, play with the seal, equalise my ears or frantically

pump air into my dry suit. He played there, attached to my leg, for at least five minutes, maybe longer. When he eventually let go I was quickly reminded of all the extra air in my dry suit as I shot upwards, struggling to dump the air.

On Monday we made a very early start ... 5.30am (the things we do for diving) to ensure that we could catch slack for our dive on the wreck of the Somalia. This is a big wreck sitting at around 30 metres and just as the sun rose, we jumped in. Not being the most prepared of divers, I of course didn't have a torch and so it turned out to be more of a night dive than a wreck dive. This was also Debbie's deepest dive to date and she coped admirably (however I think she may have been narked again as she claims to have heard police sirens at 27 metres.) We had a nice swim about and saw tyres, bottles, some huge cod and wrasse hiding under what I think was left of the engine's boilers. The final dive of the day was back to the friendly seal cove, although we were slightly disappointed as the seals didn't come as close. However, we did spot a very cute seal pup hiding in the kelp - very sweet. There was a bit of fin tugging and Ray got some great footage of a seal playing on the bottom - it nose dived straight into the camera! A very pleasant end to the weekend's diving.

Many thanks to all those who were there for making it a great weekend - Paula, Mick, Debbie, Touché the Brave, Nick, Sharon, Phil and Andy.

*Words by Louise "The Cat" Dalton
Pictures by Touché the Brave*



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Mon - Fri : 10.00am to 6.30pm
 Wed : 10.00am to 8.00pm
 Sat : 10.00am to 5.00pm
 Sun : By appointment only

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Cures for the Common Cold

It doesn't matter which way you look at it, diving in the UK is cold and at this time of the year it is probably more accurately described as bloody freezing! However, many of us mad fools still insist on taking the plunge and if you are one of them, then this article is for you. First it is important to note that diving in water below 6 degrees should not be considered normal diving, it is abnormal, extreme diving and should be approached with care. The main problem that we have to deal with is the cold that seems to seep into your bones regardless of how many layers you wear. Well the trick is not how much you wear but what you wear. The nice people at Fourth Element have come up with perhaps the ultimate drysuit base layer. Xerotherm is constructed from Polartec Power Stretch, which has been used on several Everest expeditions and it really does work! Worn next to the skin it kept me significantly warmer than I had been with my traditional thermals. The full three piece outfit (includes socks) cost £124.00 (£111.00 for club members) and we currently have all sizes in stock. Now, the next problem that we have to deal with in cold conditions is the dreaded free-flow. Your regulators reduce the pressure in your tank to an ambient pressure that is comfortable to breath. This important pressure drop generates a drop in the temperature of

the internal parts of the regulator. Some parts of the first stage can reach minus 55 degrees!! The already cold water in contact with the very cold parts is prone to freezing, which results in a free-flow. However, there are a few things that we can do to help prevent this from happening. Always try to AVOID PURGING YOUR REG, both in and out of the water. The increased flow of air through the first and second stage will certainly encourage it to freeze. If you have to fill an SMB use your Octopus (generally less prone to free-flows) or better still use your exhaled bubbles (saves air too). Although the pressure drop in the second stage is not as great as the drop in the first stage, the second stage has to deal with the very high water vapour content of our exhaled breath. The water vapour easily condenses on the cold parts and again is prone to freezing. At this time of year the air temperature is often much colder than the water and therefore the usual practise of giving your reg a couple of sucks just before jumping in should be avoided at all costs. DO NOT BREATHE FROM YOUR SECOND STAGE UNTIL IT IS SUBMERGED IN THE WATER. Finally don't forget to plan your dives 4 metres deeper and stay warm between dives, being too cold is a sure way to get bent.

DIVE SAFELY THIS WINTER

Courses

- Advanced Open Water**
 - Orientation 3rd April
 - Open Water 5th & 6th April
 - Orientation 1st May
 - Open Water 4th & 5th May
- Dry Suit Specialty**
 - Orientation 31st March
 - Open Water 5th April
 - Orientation 28th April
 - Open Water 4th May
- Enriched Air Nitrox**
 - Academics 3rd April & 1st May
 - Open Water 6th April & 5th May
- Rescue Diver & Emergency First Response**
 - Academics 21st, 22nd & 27th March
 - Pool 20th, 22nd & 24th March
 - Open Water 23rd, 29th & 30th March
- DAN Oxygen Provider**
 - 25th March (Evening Only)
- Divemaster**
 - Commencing April
- Assistant Instructor & Instructor Development**
 - Weekend course May or ANYTIME by arrangement.

Congratulations

- Open Water**
 Craig Harbour, Chris George, Colin Pluckrose, Yasmin Bay, Andy Hunt, Colin Shulver, Richard Cuthbert, George Cranmer, Lee Cranmer, Tracy Millet, Shaun Grogan, John Gladding, Mario Garcia, Andrew Norton, Shaun Lovatt, Paul Gumble, Amanda Tennant, Helen Clark, Paul Low, Gill Kirk, Alex Charge, Jessica Charge, Hazel Brockhurst, Dianne Kennard, Tanya Hodge, Chris Hands, Milad Amirian
- Advanced Open Water**
 Steve Plummer, Andy Aston, Hazel Brockhurst
- Dry Suit Specialty**
 Steve Plummer, Andy Aston, Claire Giltrow, David King, Paul Low, Paul Gumble, John Gladding, Chris Hands
- Enriched Air Nitrox**
 Mick Walsh, Paula Walsh, Sarah Corrigan, Graham Saunders, Jim Barr, Michelle Hatwell
- Equipment Specialist**
 Tyrone Davies, Paul Gumble, Paul Low, Andy Aston, David Norton, David Mingay, Daren Davies, Steve Allan
- Underwater Naturalist**
 Mitch Compton, Hazel Brockhurst

TO BOOK ON ANY OF THESE COURSES OR FOR ALTERNATIVE DATES, PLEASE CALL RAY, LESLEY OR DAREN AT THE DIVE CENTRE.