

Turtle News

Issue 16

October 2008

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Truk Off and Dive!

It was like something from a horror movie. The blackened eyes stared back at me from a rust-reddened skull, fused into the twisted metal by the furious fire of February 1944. I was deep inside the engine room of the "Yamagiri Maru", and here was the tragic human face of the Japanese suffering, inflicted by the Americans during Operation Hailstone. It was with a sense of relief that I emerged from the tomb, into the bustling blueness of the reef that now encrusts the



freighter. This is the paradox of Truk- so much death and destruction inside the wrecks, but so much life and hope above

decks. Despite the warmth of the water, an involuntary shiver juddered through my

body!

It had taken us an interminable 48 hours to

get to Truk- four flights; ingenious methods of redistributing several tons of excess

turfed through a hole in the wall. At least the vigorous security checks here were not

baggage (!!); a riot in protest against the government in the Philippines; ridiculously thorough and repetitive security checks in the heat and humidity of Manila; the Kowalski Affair on Guam, where brute force won the day as Shrek bashed the contentious bulbs from their sockets; and our arrival in Weno at the "international terminal", a converted cricket pavilion, where our luggage appeared somewhat unceremoniously,

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Scrub up and put your glad rags on for the most celebrated event of the year!

**The Annual Dinner and Dance, Sat 16 December
Whitewebbs Leisure Centre, Enfield
Tickets now on sale for just £35.00**

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for items of international terrorism, but for contraband alcohol- binge drinking on the other side of the world is even more of a problem than it is in this green and pleasant land! A rickety minibus whisked us



The "Odyssey"

through a mixture of jungle and shanty town, disgorging us on to a palm fringed beach, where we piled into an aluminium

landing craft before chugging out into the bay. And there, flooded in light was the "Odyssey".



Cabin 8, the "Odyssey"

The minute we stepped on board, the rigour of the journey faded away as we were greeted by fruit cocktails, canapés, and, more importantly, cold beers! (And because the charter was all-inclusive the beers were free!)

The "Odyssey" is sumptuous and can only be described as a floating hotel. The en-suite



Long lance torpedoes, Heian Maru

cabins are luxuriously appointed, and are kept incredibly clean by a team of hardworking housekeepers, despite the best (or worst!) efforts of the occupants!

A large saloon hosts the most amazing culinary experiences, as each meal tries (and normally succeeds) to surpass the



Periscopes, Heian Maru

one before it. A comfortable lounge boasts an impressive array of audio-visual equipment, with an extensive music and video library to boot (although Beaver did of course bring some of his "special" dvd's). The ship is sufficiently big for its passengers to lose themselves in a spot of quiet contemplation, or to join the camaraderie on the spacious sundeck. The

divedeck is vast and well organised, with more than enough room for 16 divers to kit up in. There are also large tables for those cumbersome video and camera housings. It's no wonder that the "Odyssey" was voted the world's best live-a-board 3 years in a row!

In the protected, tide-free waters of the Truk Lagoon, the "Odyssey" moves from site to site, anchoring above the wrecks. After a briefing, the announcement is made that "the pool is open", and divers effectively pick their own time to make the dive. The guides are always on hand to take guests on tours through the magnificent wrecks, but most of us preferred to do our own exploring. It wasn't unusual for us to enter the sea in a big group, with buddy pairs heading off in different directions, be in the water for over an hour, and then only meet up as a group again on the 5m trapeze!

Every time we entered the water it was like travelling back in time to 2 days in 1944, when the Americans attacked and neutralised the Japanese naval base in the Truk Lagoon. Although the Japanese had withdrawn most of their battlefleet, little could be done for the merchantmen, and their hulks now litter the anchorage seabeds. Not only are the wrecks full of the paraphernalia that an army needs to run a war, but there are also the personal items of the sailors who crewed the Marus.

Over the 10 days of our charter, we made 30 dives, visiting 18 wrecks. Each dive was remarkable in its own right- there is something very special about being able to get deep inside a well preserved wreck ,and

experience a moment of history, frozen in time. None of us will easily forget the magnificent



Compressor, Fujikawa Maru

"Fujikawa Maru", with its extraordinary engine room and tool shops, complete with lathes, drill



Zero fuselage, Fujikawa Maru

pressor. The forward hold, containing Zero fighter plane fuselages, wings and cockpits, was particularly poignant.



Stern Telegraph

Crew bathrooms, with rows of urinals and wash basins, are eerily well preserved, as if ghostly sailors might walk in at any moment to relieve themselves! Billed as Truk's signature dive, the "Fujikawa" does not disappoint by day or night!

Protected by a strictly enforced conservation order, the wrecks abound with crockery, sake bottles, gas masks, bullets and bombs, fire



Engine room, Fujikawa Maru

extinguishers, lanterns, telegraphs, compass

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binnacles and helm wheels. Particularly memorable highlights were the torpedoes and periscopes on the submarine tender, the "Heian Maru"; the crews' bicycles



Bicycles, Kiyozumi Maru

hanging in the holds of the "Kiyozumi Maru"; the glass dials and windows of the "Shinkoku Maru's" fuel transfer pump; the deck guns on the "Fumitzuki" destroyer; the captured anti-aircraft guns on the "Nippo Maru",

pointing wildly skywards; the inclinometer and precision clock in the engine room of the "Rio de Janeiro Maru" (the



Transfer pump, Kiyozumi Maru

clock is frozen at the moment the Maru sank!); the crates upon crates upon crates of saki in the "Rio de Janeiro's" holds; the 5-seater Nissan staff car on the "Amagisan Maru"; and

the immaculately kept engine room in the "Kensho Maru", complete with mercury filled thermometers,



Shark feed, Pizion Reef

panels of circuit breakers, and oil flow indicators to the main bearings.

Truk wasn't all about chunks of old metal. Every wreck has turned into a glorious artificial reef, smothered in hard and soft corals, and



Up close and personal!

inhabited by a host of colourful reef fish. Many of our safety stops were made on the ships' kingposts, being entertained by gobies and damselfish. We were fre-

quently escorted by eagle rays, and reef sharks could be spotted patrolling in the blue. Midway through the trip we left the Lagoon and made an exciting dive on Pizion Reef. Here the guides carried "shark sticks", and a clever pulley system saw an SMB shooting up to the surface, dragging a frozen tuna head down to our theatre in the reef. The already agitated sharks suddenly went into frenzy mode- it was amusing to see the increase in bubble output as 40 or 50 writhing grey shapes decimated the chumsicle, yards from where we were sitting!

However the dive that captured almost everybody's imagination was the "San Francisco Maru". For many, this 60m wreck was their deepest dive to date, and involved a foray into decompression. The penalty was well worth it, as the unspoiled artefacts are breathtaking. The forward hold is stacked deck high with a wall of hemispherical beach landmines, the rear hold is full to the brim with long lance torpedoes and depth charges, and an avalanche of bullets greets the diver in hold 4. If this isn't enough, the 2 Isuzu water trucks, and 3 light battle tanks should excite even the most jaded wrecker! While the engine room is not the most spectacular in the lagoon it is deep and challenging. There are some very nice, coiled fire hoses mounted on the wall beneath the engine.

Sadly our ten days on the "Odyssey" seemed to flash by in the blink of an eye. All too quickly we were kitting up for our final dive on the "Kensho Maru". For anyone observing from the surface, this dive would have provided an amusing sight. Kirsty was completing her Wreck Specialty, and the observer would have seen three divers disappear into the wreck. All would have been peaceful for a while, but moments later the tranquil serenity would have been shattered as dust and silt exploded from every orifice in the wreck! Deep in the ship, Kirsty vanished in a pea-soup fog of silt, as her buddies did their best to leave no sediment undisturbed! The observer

would have seen first one, and then two divers emerge, both giggling uncontrollably, to the point of flooding their masks. Finally the Ferret herself emerged, shaking her head at her buddies' antics, while she reeled out of the wreck!

Our trip ended on the peculiar note in which it had started- we were rather unceremoniously evicted from the "Odyssey" at 7.00am, and dumped on the same palm fringed beach, where we had last



Battle tank, San Francisco Maru

stood on dry land ten days before! The "Odyssey", refuelled and provisioned, steamed off into the expanse of the Lagoon, leaving the Adventure Divers' waifs and strays to contemplate their fate! Still, it wasn't all bad as the Blue Lagoon Resort had internet access, telephones and an excellent massage, not to mention the all important beach bar!

Truk was a truly memorable trip for many reasons, not least of all the outstanding company.

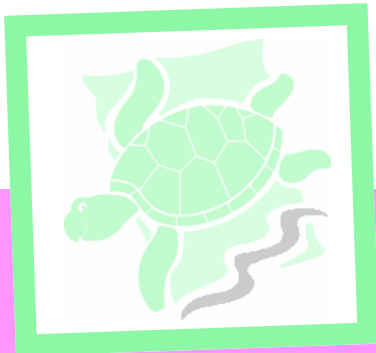
Thanks to Touche the Brave, who organised this adventure nearly 2 years ago; Cinder's; Shrek and Donkey, whose tire-



Adventure Divers waifs and strays

less efforts kept bits and pieces of our equipment working, and got my torch to Truk; Pete and Dianne; Mark; Rosco; Jamie; Steve, who produced an awesome video (fancy a job on the "Odyssey" ?); Neil Freak-or-Unique; Annie, for looking after Chris; Chris, for looking after Nik and me; Krusty the Ferret; and of course my buddy, the Beaver, for whom no hole is too small, and for whom every crevice is a challenge! So was it a good expedition? Put it this way- most of us viewed the trip to this remote diving Mecca as a once in a lifetime opportunity. Having been there and experienced the remarkable diving, none of us would pass up the chance to become a serial Trukker!

Article and Photographs by Ant Collins.



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FOR A FULL LIST OF COURSES, VISIT THE WEBSITE. TO BOOK ON ANY OF THE COURSES, CONTACT RAY AT THE CENTRE.

Society News

It's back at last! The cobwebs have been dusted off, and Turtle News makes a welcome return to brighten up those dull autumn evenings! Adventure Divers has enjoyed a busy year, travelling further across the globe than ever before. There is no doubt that our April expedition to Truk and Palau racked up the air miles, including some very comfortable ones in Emirates Business Class, between Dubai and Manila! You can read the first instalment of the epic adventure in this issue of Turtle News- the article sort of ran away with itself, but such a big trip needs a big write up, and there were so many pictures to choose from that space became a real issue. Watch out for the report on the beautiful islands of Palau in the next issue.

2006 got off to a great start in Egypt, with Adventure Divers seeing in the new year at Sharm el Sheikh. My thanks to Steve Biddle for submitting an article on the team's antics- look out for this one soon.

May found the gang back in Hurghada, enjoying the view from Ray's balcony at Mastaba, while puffing up a storm on the hubbly-bubbly! Colin Steele has written a great piece about the holiday and the apartments. We are hoping to make much more use of the apartments in the coming year, both for holiday and course purposes. Fancy learning some new dive skills in warm, blue water, surrounded by colourful fish? We know

where we'd rather be teaching! Watch this space for details of Advanced Courses, Specialties and Rescue Diver in 2007!

Local diving has been largely successful, and Mitch has continued to keep "AD" purring over the waves. He is now qualified to teach an excellent Boat Handling Course, so any aspiring skippers know who to get in touch with!

We were involved in a couple of excursions to Normandy during the summer, but lack of support and last minute withdrawals made them costly affairs to run- remember that we try to organise the trips *you* want to do. Help us to keep them running by supporting the trips!

On a less happy note, we are all aware of the heart condition known as PFO- about 1 in 4 people suffer from it. Significantly, if you are afflicted, you are probably more likely to suffer a bend. Get yourself checked out if you suffer from repetitive migraines, or experience a rash on your abdomen after a dive. You may be at risk. Worryingly, 3 of the "Trukkers" were diagnosed with the condition after spending 10 days full of nitrogen. Happily, all are being mended!

We wish Ray a speedy recuperation from his most recent episode- see you in the water soon, mate!

Finally, congratulations to Andy Garton on passing his Instructor Exams. Welcome to the team!

See ya in the blue! Ant.

My Holiday

In April I went to Sharm el Sheikh to go diving. I went with Ocean College and did seven dives from four different boats. The sites I went to were Ras Katy (both ends), Temple and Middle Garden. The fish I saw and could identify were Parrot, Lion, Angel, Scorpion, Picasso, Anemone, Goat, Puffer, Crocodile, Butterfly, Banner, Anthias, Grouper, Napoleon wrasse and Bird wrasse.

One anemone fish did not like me and attacked me for several minutes. I managed to get a lot of pictures of fish and coral, but most of them are blue.

I completed three Adventure dives- Peak Performance Buoyancy and Underwater Navigation at Ras Katy, and Drift along Temple.

The things I liked were seeing all the fish and meeting new people on the boats and on the coaches. The things I did not like were getting the salt water in my eyes and being stung on the arm, neck and chin on my first dive.

When I didn't dive I snorkelled the little reef in front of the Kannabesh Hotel beach and saw lots of fish.

I enjoyed it at Sharm and you would too.

Article by Jade Woolley (aged 10)

Jade started diving a little over 18 months ago with a Wednesday night Bubblemaker-Ed.