

# Turtle News

Issue 11

May 2003

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### Forthcoming Trips and Holidays

- Plymouth RIB Diving, July
- Cornwall RIB Diving, August Bank Holiday
- Ireland, August, 8-Days - £485
- Oban September 4-Days - £175
- Shark Diving Bahamas October - From £1,150
- Red Sea Wreck Week Liveaboard November - £825
- Red Sea New Year Party Week

## Mantastic Maldives



Expectation and anticipation hung over the little boat drifting across the featureless expanse of Indian Ocean. "Go! Go! Go!" came the call from the guide and we were away, plunging into the warm blue water, free-falling towards the reef below. As the current barreled us past the coral formations, we finned valiantly for the bottom and dropped into the relative shelter of a small outcrop. Once again we had missed the drop zone. Painstakingly slowly we worked our way back into the current, leopard-crawling across the reef, finning furiously over

short exposed stretches, until, on the edge of visibility, I made out the silvery streams of divers' bubble columns. I turned to beckon the others over, and found myself staring straight into the gaping maw of an alien spaceship, as an enormous manta ray appeared out of the plankton cloud. It was followed by two others, and, as we settled on the bottom of the Dhonkalo cleaning station, we couldn't help but wonder at the effortless grace of these ballerinas of the deep. The rays were obviously curious about the strange invaders of their realm and ap-

proached us cautiously at first, but gained in confidence as they realised we meant them no harm. Eventually they would bank elegantly over our group, hovering about us and shivering with pleasure as our bubbles passed through their gills. I shan't forget the sight of Mother, ducking beneath a 4m giant as it dwarfed her in its shadow! This is what we'd come to the Maldives for, and the islands were yielding their treasure in buckets full! Sadly, decompression constraints forced us to abandon the site

*(Continued on page 2)*

## MIDSUMMER RIVERBOAT PARTY

Thursday 17th July

Tickets £22.50 - On Sale Now

(Continued from page 1)

to the mantas, and, as we ascended our SMB lines, we were swept along the channel over queuing ranks of diamond shapes awaiting their turn at the cleaning station.

Back on the "Sea Queen" the group was buzzing with excitement, and we settled down to yet another delicious alfresco meal prepared by our excellent chef. His desserts were a little too tempting for some - suffice it to say that Goat's belly expanded several inches in proportion to his brave assaults on cheesecake and trifle! The manta experience had

been magnificent, but we couldn't have begun to dream of things to come.

Who could possibly forget the frustration of kitting up and tumbling into the dive dhoani on two occasions, only to trawl fruitlessly in the blazing sunshine while our elusive quarry dived deeper? Imagine the satisfaction then, when the Captain came quietly into the saloon and said "OK! Whale shark by the side of the boat." Pandemonium ensued and we leapt off the dive platform, practically landing on one of the ocean's gentlest giants. We spent nearly an hour snorkeling on the surface with this beautiful little female, resplendent with her tiger stripes and leopard spots. It was humbling to think that this four and a half metre leviathan was only half grown! She seemed to relish our company, and showed just as much interest in us as we did in her! There were a few sunburned backs after this episode, but all agreed that the pain and redness were worth it!

In addition to the mantas and whale shark, other elasmobranchs featured highly on our sightings list. I didn't



think I would be forgiven for nudging my neutrally buoyant buddy on to the resting zebra shark, but when it then took off and showed itself to the rest of the group, I earned a reprieve. The sight of Spaniel gesticulating furiously outside a low overhang roused our curi-

osity on another dive, and we were excited to find a rather large nurse shark stretched out in peaceful repose. I find it a little amusing that we became so



blasé about seeing white tip reef sharks when I think what a big event they are in the Red Sea! At Miyaru Kandu we were treated to a formation fly past by a squadron of 15 spotted eagle rays - the Red Arrows eat your hearts out! Of course Maaya Thila, with its resident population of frenetic grey reef sharks was a favourite with everyone, although the night dive here proved to be the ultimate experience. Imagine being nudged out of the way by a pack of hunting sea wolves, having white tips slide off the reef above you, and suddenly appear beneath your fins. Imagine seeing the leering grin of a giant moray as it lunges for a butterfly fish trapped in the glare of your torchlight. Imagine the riot of colour as strawberry and orange cup corals feed voraciously in the darkness. Imagine the spectacular shape shifting and colour changing of that underwater chameleon, the big red octopus. Imagine enormous pink stonefish and jam-like blobs of nudibranch. Imagine stumbling over gigantic sleeping turtles and then escaping from the site as mayhem breaks out between rival gangs of sharks and eels. Imagine all of this and imagine Maaya Thila at night. After such an exhilarating dive there was only one way to wind down, and the "Sea Queen" provides the Lizard Lounge, complete with chilled tunes and nightly lighting shows in the tropical thunderheads!

As much as this trip was about big things, it was very definitely about the little things too. Mother and I had become posh slug anoraks as we scoured the reef for nudibranchs. Once the liquorice allsorts wart slug had become commonplace, we moved on to miniature sea hares and flatworms. Eventually our patience paid off, and we found a really beautiful tritos chromodoris which

prompted jubilant underwater celebrations. Of course none of this means much unless you too are a posh slug anorak.

It's only after time and distance have put some perspective on this amazing trip that I realize how lucky we were to see leaf fish, mating octopi, juvenile oriental sweetlips, green and hawksbill turtles, mantis shrimps and squat shrimps, snake eels and the elusive long nose hawkfish. The experience of talking to, and stroking Frank, an adult Napoleon wrasse seems totally surreal. Perhaps most incredible of all was the promise of frogfish on Tuesday at 11.15am. By my watch it was 11.28am when we were peering at one of the sea's most peculiar inhabitants. Of course, no self respecting English diver could go anywhere without exploring at least one hulk of twisted metal, and we



were treated to a couple of fine specimens. The "Maldives Victory" with its awesome penetration tour through the mess area and galley, via the officers' quarters and captain's bathroom to the bridge, got the wreckies amongst us going. Being tied up with reef hooks while enormous giant morays wriggled about his dangly bits also got Goat going on his 100th dive!

I will take incredible memories from this amazing trip - stunning overhangs festooned with blue and yellow corals, the riot of colour that accompanied us on every dive, the packed ranks of fish that met us on every reef and of course our moving encounters with giants of the deep.

Many thanks to Ray, Mother, Beaver, Goat, Spaniel, Al-Qaeda Annie, Jugs, Yoda, Rosco and the BSAC Book Club - Ian, Kevin and Brian. You made it a privilege to leave some bubbles amongst these jewels of the Indian Ocean, man.....

Words by Ant Collins  
Pictures by Mother



# Diary of an Unlikely Scuba Diver

## Personal Details

**Name:** Dianne Kennard

**Occupation:** nice safe desk job

**Age:** a bit old to be taking up this sort of thing

**Fitness:** none that you'd notice

**Sports:** to be avoided. Occasional scrabble. Took up skiing at 35 (but that's another story...)



## Diving History

3 ½ months of pool sessions (should take 5 evenings)

Open water weekend in November at Stoney Cove (let's not go there...bad weekend with a nightmare ending)

## Red Sea Trip

### Aims, in order of priority:

- avoid drowning
- see some fish side-on
- complete qualification as an open water diver, preferably but not essentially before Saturday afternoon
- establish once and for all whether I can do this or not
- avoid drowning.

## Monday

3 dives today. All very scary. Hyperventilating at the surface and have trouble descending even with extra weights. Remember that my only previous attempt to swim in the open sea from a boat was not successful. Have some mask problems which take coaxing to sort out, and at one stage refuse to swim down into what looks like a Stoney-Cove-style abyss. Am finning frantically and hyperventilating. For the 3<sup>rd</sup> dive we have to jump in quickly one after the other and swim to another boat - very stressful. During the last dive I feel exhausted and am finning

frantically with my arms as my legs have given up. As my tank and weights seem to be sliding about I do not feel in control or able to manoeuvre properly and am having to grab the instructor to change position.

The good news is that the instructor indicates that I have passed and am now a diver.

I had expected to be so wowed by the fish that I would forget my fear. Disappointingly this doesn't happen and I can scarcely remember what I have seen.

Cannot sleep due to claustrophobic thoughts of being trapped underwater, unable to land on the coral and unable to surface for fear of boat propellers.

## Tuesday

Feel absolutely terrified. The drive that got me into the water at Stoney Cove and yesterday has gone now that I have qualified. The fish were good but against a background of that level of stress they don't even appear real; like watching snatches of a video out of the corner of my eye. Get kitted up but refuse to get in, and cannot be coaxed in for the second dive either.

Sit on the boat watching the beautiful Sinai mountains, which is where I should be. Taking up scuba diving was a crazy idea; I've given it my best shot but now is the time to stop.

Am subsequently persuaded to come on the boat the following day if only for the ride.

## Wednesday

Sit out the first dive as it's likely to be difficult. Am coaxed in for a second dive (one-to-one with another instructor) but this has to be aborted: cannot descend as I have a row of 1kg not 2kg weights on. A stupid mistake on my part. The third dive is more successful and we descend to a significant depth only gradually. Some strange retracting eels are a distraction but I still find myself longing to get out.

Decide to see out the week, spot a few fish, then quit. If I can be this persistent, better to channel the same level of energy into something where I have natural aptitude rather than something I am plainly not suited for. Start planning my photographic website and consider learning a bit of Arabic.

## Thursday

Skip first dive as it may be difficult.

Second dive is a very impressive deep wall of coral with what seems to be a different fish every inch. Scary but I am supervised from above and below.

Work out that the reason I am finning excessively is that I am subconsciously trying to fin back up to the surface.

Over dinner and log books, instructor signs me off as an open water diver, albeit with some caveats around supervision. Much handshaking and inspirational talk. A proud moment. But I genuinely cannot decide whether to carry on after the week.

## Friday

Diving colleagues have gone off to big deep wreck somewhere.

I am sent off on an easy boat to share another instructor with one other hopeless case. He and I agree that we'll make plenty of stops on the sand and just sit looking at the coral.

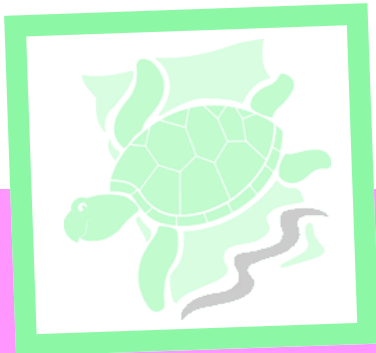
Aforementioned new diving buddy is *even worse than me*. He ends up with his fins in the air after jumping in, and aborts second dive due to leg stiffness. I allow myself a tiny feeling of smugness - just what I need.

Cope fine with first dive which is close to the shore - a gradual descent to a sandy sea bed that I can land on frequently, with outcrops of coral. No abyss problems. Eyeball a fish for the first time. Second dive is a bit more challenging as it's a wall but not a deep one; here the coral and fish are amazing.

Realise with hindsight that expecting someone like me to keep up with "normal" trainee divers was completely unrealistic. This should have been predictable, given my previous record. Better anticipation of certain problem areas might have meant that some of the Monday/Tuesday trauma could have been prevented.

*A word from the Instructor : I would like to praise Dianne for her pluck and dedication. Despite the extra time and effort required on her part I hope she will agree ... it was well worth it! Everyone who helped Dianne to reach her goals should also be proud of their achievement. Special thanks go to Ant Collins, Chris Christou and Steve Groome.*

*P.S. Since completing her Open Water Course, Dianne has dived in Tobago and taken a keen interest in underwater photography.*



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# Society News

In March the gods provided us with a short spell of spring sunshine and the perfect backdrop for our Rescue weekend down at Newhaven. In fact the conditions were so clement that Daren took the opportunity to celebrate his 100th dive with a dip in the English Channel! Unfortunately, since then the weather has been very unkind to us and our initial incursions down to the South coast have been scuppered by howling winds torrential rain and mountainous seas. However, a hardy few souls did brave the 10 foot swells out of Portland and managed to get an excellent dive on the M2, where the "viz" reached a better than expected 6mts ... not bad considering the conditions!! The weather slowly improved over the late May Bank Holiday and at last Mitch was able to put the RIB to work. She ran like a dream and those who stuck around enjoyed some good diving with mill pond like conditions for most of the weekend. As we write, the weather seems finally to be taking a turn for the better and hopefully we can make up for lost bottom time. There are still places on our trip to Plymouth in early July and Cornwall in late August. Venturing a little further a field there are also spots available on our 8 day trip to Southern Island. Here you will find some of the very best UK diving. The area is renowned for its wrecks, steep drop-offs, abundant marine life and stunning visibility. High-



Daren Goes Skinny Dipping

lights of the trip will include the Kowloon Bridge, the largest shipwreck in Europe, and the German sub U-260 , which sits virtually intact at 45mts. Finally, don't forget the summer Riverboat Disco on Thursday 17th July, tickets are £22.50 each and drysuits are optional!

## Courses

- Advanced Open Water**
  - Orientation 10th July
  - Open Water 12th & 13th July
  - Orientation 14th August
  - Open Water 16th & 17th August
- Dry Suit Specialty**
  - Orientation 7th July
  - Open Water 12th July
  - Orientation 11th August
  - Open Water 16th August
- Enriched Air Nitrox**
  - Academics 10th July & 14th August
  - Open Water 13th July & 17th August
- Rescue Diver & Emergency First Response**
  - Academics 1st, 2nd & 7th August
  - Pool 31st July, 2nd & 4th August
  - Open Water 3rd, 9th & 10th August
- DAN Oxygen Provider**
  - 5th August (Evening Only)
- Divemaster**
  - Commencing November
- Assistant Instructor & Instructor Development**
  - Weekend and midweek courses at ANYTIME by arrangement.

## Congratulations

- Open Water**  
 Rachel Budden, Alan Mair, Samantha Ayling, Gareth Corbett, James Small, Daemon Bostock, Heidi Ellis, Ben Minaei, Susan Ayling, David Rowsell, Jim Poole, Liz Letch, Mark Barrington, David Crossal, Heather Gear, Steven Gear, Lucy Abbott, Pauline Salisbury
- Advanced Open Water**  
 Mario Garcia, Julie Carslake, Kim Lord, Pauline Salisbury, Liz Letch, Brett Blackmore, Neil Taylor, Darren McCarthy, Sarah O'Neill
- Dry Suit Specialty**  
 Borak Gunduz, Richard Cuthbert, Augusta Winstone, David Felton, Julie Carslake
- Rescue Diver**  
 Jonathan Freedman, James Harris, Deborah Harris, Steve Plummer, Sarah Corrigan, Joseph Richardson
- DAN Oxygen Provider**  
 Dave Bell, Mitch Compton, Dave Norton, Daren Davies, James Harris, Deborah Harris, Steve Plummer, Brain Watson, Gary Watson
- Divemasters**  
 Mitch Compton, Dave Bell

TO BOOK ON ANY OF THESE COURSES OR FOR ALTERNATIVE DATES, PLEASE CALL RAY, LESLEY OR DAREN