

Adventures in the Underwater Classroom



By Captain Kirby Kurkomelis

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Cover: Kirby Kurkomelis boarding Wahoo ladder

Photo: By Rick Kleinschuster

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DISCLAIMER

Scuba diving with compressed air involves inherent risks which can result in serious injury or death.

This guide is not a substitute for a scuba diving standardized training course from a recognized scuba training agency.

The Underwater Archeologist and wreck diver are especially prone to injury, since his or her focus may be else where. Safety procedures must be second nature for the underwater explorer to survive.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kirby Kurkomelis was certified in 1966 open water diver. Today a Master Instructor P.A.D.I. (Professional of Association of Diving Instructors), Wreck Diving, Deep Diving, Search and Recovery, Night Diving, Underwater Navigation, Cold Water Diving, Scientific Collection Instructor, Paramedic Jumper, Dry Suit Diving, Underwater Photography, Nitrox Instructor and Oxygen Administration BLS (Basic Life Support), Instructor for Dive Professional with on site Neurological Assessment ,AEDs, Underwater Naturalist, with professional, Hazardous marine animals training, Underwater Archaeological and Environmental Planning , Diving Safety Officer (USMMA), Scientific Diving, Public Safety Diving Instructor U.S.S. San Diego, Oregon, U853, U.S.S. Bass, Expeditions, Scientific Diving Officer, Level I, II, III, IV, OSHA Health and Safety. Capt. Kirby is presently the Diving Safety Instructor for the United States Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA), and has taught scuba at S.U.N.Y Martine College, research projects in the past have dealt with Pollution in the "New York Bight", and studies of horseshoe crabs on the East Coast, Kirby has a specialties in marine technology and sciences. He is currently training scientists and technicians to perform a variety of underwater research. Other specialties include precious metals, gold, silver bullion and assaying. Kirby is also a member of the American Academy of Underwater Science, also A Scientific Diving Instructor.

*Captain Kirby holds advanced specialties in Public Safety Diving, Black Water Diving, Black Water Search Operations SAR, Rapid Deployment Search and Rescue / Recovery, Dive Tender, Rapid Response and Recovery Diving, Drowning Investigations. Kirby was an alternate Captain on the **R.V. Wahoo**, running weekly expeditions to offshore wrecks for scientists, oceanographers and divers. Currently offering specialty *training* to local police and fire municipality's scuba and water rescue teams in Public Safety dive training. Kirby is a licensed *United States Coast Guard Merchant Marine Officer* (Master License). Specialty in *Maritime Technology* in Vessel Operations, editor of the *Sub Aqua Journal*, *America's first wreck diving magazine* with his monthly column entitled *Kirby's Corner*. Kirby has published over 200 photographs and articles in other magazines. His book "Introduction to Scientific Diving"*



Andrea Doria Cup Saucer and Silver
Photo by Captain Steve Bielenda



USS San Diego Compass
Author's Collection

Preface

It seems like yesterday. But it was a lifetime ago. I was sitting on a sandy beach with my Father. I was a kid seven or eight years old. It was Beach 8 Street. This sandy beach had enough room for a towel. We lived on Beach 9 Street.

The water was a crisp blue-green. The visibility clear. I was always interested in the ocean. I was day dreaming about my uncle John Kurkomelis an Underwater Demolition Team member (UDT) diver from World War II. He and I would sit for hours and tell me stories about his diving adventures in the south pacific and of the team of UDT divers.

Then suddenly! A man in an all black suit came out of the water. The diver had all sorts of equipment on him. I ran over and began to talk with him. The diver explained to me the learning process.

After a few minutes which I thought was a life time. I ran back to my Father. I was in awe. I looked straight into my Father eyes and said "Dad", this is what I want to be when I grow up, an underwater explorer!" My father smiled. The adventure begins....

This book is an accumulation of short stories and articles from the Sub Aqua Journal years. The late 1980's to the early 1990's. The people, the stories, fun, the history. This is the second book in the Underwater Classroom series.

Many people have sent me their pictures for this e-book and I am unable to verify the source of all the pictures, if you see a picture that is your copyright please e-mail. I will remove it from this e-book I will remove it on the next site update. Or if you wish I can credit you for your picture. Because the copyright of these pictures could be held by thousands of people or is lost in obscurity I am in a position to give permission for the use of any of the pictures on my site.

I would like to thank the following friends for their time, patience and knowledge, Captain Steve Lombardo, Don Finck, Joel Silverstein, Sub Aqua Journal Team and Captain Steve Bielenda ****

I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank all who have donated their pictures for this guide. Many of these pictures are from my collection. It is these scuba professionals who made this publication possible.

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A Whale of a Story



Beluga Whale
Author's Collection

It was a cold and wintry morning. I wanted to stay home, read the Sunday paper. Listen to some music. It reminded me of a similar day in March of 1986 News Flash... White whale sighted swimming underneath Long Beach Bridge. In less than five minutes my equipment was packed. I raced in the rain to pick up my friend Richie. Once in the car, the engine screamed ten minutes later, Atlantic Bridge and then the Long Beach Bridge.

At the site Richie was complaining about the cold rain. Richie thought I was crazy to jump over the rock jetty into the cold dark waters of Reynolds Channel. I geared up and entered the water myself, while Richie stayed warm in the car. On the verge of hypothermia and ice forming around my mask rim, I terminated the first of many searches.



Kirby Kurkomelis
Diving Safety Officer

Over the next few weeks I kept a constant vigil under the bridge. Suit on, equipment ready and camera glued to my palm. I stood in knee high water, agonizing at every white cap that the wind brought in. When I wasn't diving I gathered information about whales. They are the world's largest mammals and friendly, singing songs while traveling the ocean in pods searching for food. What was this one doing in the Reynolds Channel?

As the month of April arrived I put my boat in the water. My first destination, Reynolds Channel. In search of the whale. Suddenly off the port quarter I spotted her, lost and traveling in a circle.

She was a Beluga whale (*Delphinapterus leucas*) about six feet long. The baby whale started playing with my boat, splashing water onto the deck with a characteristic smile. I got her to follow me and after a while the whale made it out of East Rockaway Inlet back into the Atlantic. Waving farewell to Baby, her new nickname, I turned my boat and headed toward home.



Beluga Whale
Author's Collection



Kirby and Beluga Whale

The diving season was off to a great start. Warm blue-green water surrounded the East Rockaway Inlet, bluefish chasing spearing onto the beach. While diving on the 27th street wreck-an old tug rumored to be a rum runner now in 15 fsw-with my friend Joel, we explored the boiler standing four feet off the bottom.

On closer inspection the boiler was alive, covered in orange sponge with little anemones camouflaged from crabs. Laying quietly a goose-fish with its mouth open waited for a crab to fall off a broken pipe above. Heading north along her broken planks I could see where blackfish swam cautiously in and around the wreck's broken pipes and hull plates.

Suddenly a great shadow blocked out the sun; the sea bass swam for cover. Instantly my buddy was in the boat looking down at me. Floating neutral I saw a large white animal about 13 feet long stalking me.

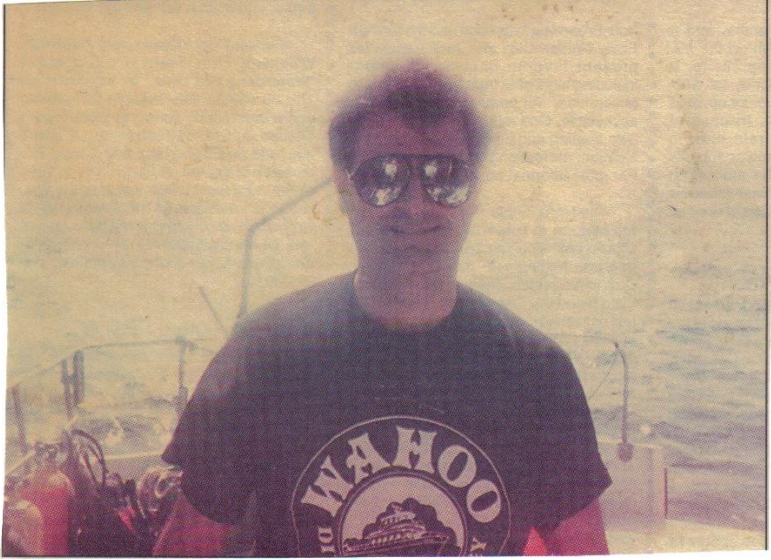
Looking up through the blue-green haze, I turned towards the anchor line to encounter my friend Baby. With a slight caress of her nose against my body, together we toured the wreck like old pals.



Photo
Courtesy of Capt Steve Lombardo



Photo
Courtesy of Capt Steve Lombardo



Author



Author's Collection

H.M.S. Culloden

It was the team's last expedition for the year. The Seahunt Dive Team headed out towards Montauk Point, New York. To dive and explore the **H.M.S. Culloden ship wreck**, a British war ship! The **Culloden**, along with two other vessels the *America* and *Bedford*. Standing guard at the entrance to Block Island Sound. A group of French War ships, running a British blockade in 1781.

That night a terrible storm took the **H.M.S. Culloden's** heart and soul. The **Culloden** ran aground in 25 feet of water (fsw) on the North shore of Montauk Point. Overlooking the Montauk Light House. The British anticipating that the French would try to salvage her, set fire to the **H.M.S. Culloden**. The British burned the **H.M.S. Culloden** to the water line and she sank in 20fsw. Where the **Colluden** rests today, which is now called **Culloden Point**.



British Warship
Author's Collection

The team headed down a long set of wooden stairs on to a rocky beach. It was 11am and it was low tide. Wind out of the south at 5mph. Large boulders line the water edge as the team discusses their dive plan. The plan was to document the remains of the ***H.M.S Culloden***. using underwater video.

There was wave action when the team hit the water. I fell twice, but managed to get my balance. I set my compass along with my team 330 degrees towards the wreck. The team was following a heading that many divers have taken before. Final safety check. In my briefing I mention that because this site is the easterly point of Long Island, one could get caught in an outgoing tide and get swept away. That 's why I chose the incoming tide.

We had time to do the dive and get back to shore. Of course when you dive off the beach there is a great chance that a diver will be pulled out further by the fast moving current. Which at this time was the team's only problem. But the team had extensive fast water experience and we were ready to go. We headed out in search of history.

The ***H.M.S. Culloden*** beckoned us. The water temperature was 50 degrees and the visibility was 20 feet, we continued on until we came across a small debris field. It was ribbing and planking. It was 3 feet wide and about 25 feet long.

The team was in 20 feet of water. In the distance ahead, we could see 3 distinct objects. The team moved closer. The objects were gigantic iron cannons. Some weighing 10,000lbs. What a find.

The team moved on. Out of the corner of my eye. I could see a pile of cannon balls. They were the size of bowling balls, about 60lbs each. To my extreme right was a large broken Steel lobster trap. The team was 40 minutes into the dive.

It was time to start heading back to shore. We reversed course. There were a few bottle nose spotted sting rays around the cannon along the bottom. Their blue spots shining brightly. The bottle nose skates are electrically charged and can deliver a shock to you. We continued on along the sand and gravel beds passing ballast stones and rock grabs.

Our course was due south. Our distance from shore was about 150 yards as we swam across broken timbers. There were piles of empty mussels scattered along the bottom. We did not have time to study the reason why they were broken.

The rocks in the water, which look like ballast stones were getting bigger. One could hear underwater that the waves were breaking on the beach. There was a cross current running from the west to the east. The water started to get shallower. My dive buddy Steve was ahead of me.

The current along with the wind had pulled us a couple hundred yards down the beach, our dive time was now 55 minutes. We made it in safely. We had plenty of video. Our next adventure is...

A few months back I had a chance to visit the **H.M.S. Culloden** Museum in Long Island New York. I was impressed with the history and artifacts of the **H.M.S. Culloden** and the information I gathered. And this is what I found out.



Cannon

Courtesy of Captain Steve Lombardo

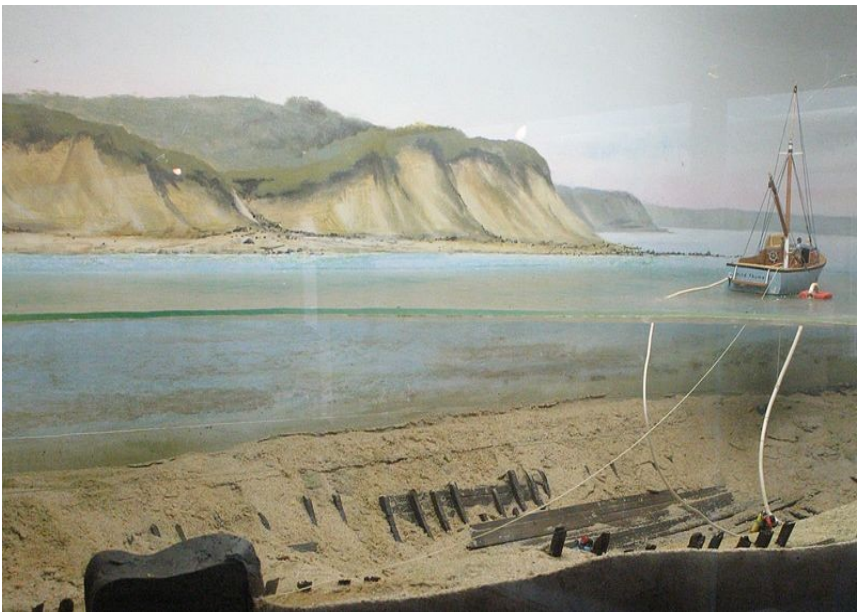


Spotted Skate

Author's Collection

In 1971 Professor Henry W. Moeller, an undersea archaeologist associated with Dowling College, discovered the keel and large wooden beams resting in between 10 ft and 15 ft of water 150 ft off **Culloden** Point. A gudgeon imprinted with the name **Culloden** was recovered. Subsequent recovery efforts brought up a 32-pounder cannon as well as copper sheathing. A sketch of the outline of the ruins showed the ship resting on a large boulder.

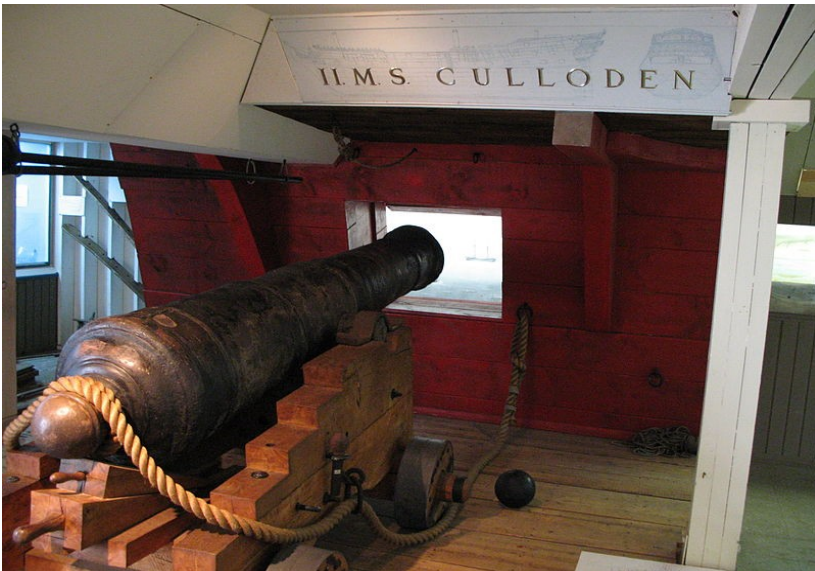
Since 1979 the wreck site has been listed on the National Historic places which prohibits SCUBA DIVERS from taking artifacts from, or otherwise disturbing the wreck and its artifacts.



H.M.S. Culloden underwater
Courtesy of the Culloden Museum



Culloden Point
Author's Collection



H.M.S. Culloden Museum
Author's Collection

Clarks Beach

My Secret



Sub Aqua Journal Friends

Photo by Joel Silverstein

I had just finished teaching a group of underwater explorers. It was time to take my new friends on their first underwater tour.

Clarks Beach or commonly called secret beach is located in the town of Greenport, Long Island. This area is home to a variety of marine life that inhabit this rocky shore on the northern tip of Long Island Sound. Small gravel stones make up this site and large boulders which were deposited over time from the arctic protrude out of the water.

I discussed the divers' dive plan. The divers took a compass heading off the beach, which was south. With excitement in the air, the five female divers were ready.

Our visibility was 20 feet. The air temperature was 72 degrees. A mild current guided us through this magical world of Jules Verne.

The first creature we came upon was a pipefish (*Syngnathus fuscus*) standing guard at the entrance to his domain. I guided the divers north, the bottom started to change to small boulders with seaweed and kelp reaching up to grasp the sun rays. Underneath, tucked away in a crevice. In a large boulder, a colony of sea urchins (*Arbacia punctata*) fed on a piece of brain coral and barnacles that encrusted the rocks. Signaling each diver not to pick them up. Their needle like spines which protrude from all directions, can cause an allergic reaction if they become broken in your skin.



Sea Urchins

We headed northeast passing a huge boulder. To my surprise swimming around it was a school of beautiful Queen triggerfish (*Paracirrhoeus typus*) with painted blue stripes on her face chasing small crabs that were feeding off the algae on the rock

Queen triggers travel from the Caribbean to as far north as Massachusetts. Queen triggerfish are the most common of all triggerfish. Their hardiness and ability to survive under abnormal conditions make them a prize for the tropical fish enthusiast. This fish can be dangerous; it has very sharp teeth and a vicious tail which is used when annoyed. The Queen trigger continued to swim with us for a while.



Queen Triggerfish

About 75 kick cycles out, I adjusted our course heading, 90 degrees. It started to get a little deeper, 20 fsw. I could see two divers adjusting their BCD's.

We came upon a large fluke, about 10lbs camouflaged in the sand waiting for a fisherman's worm to feed on. Boulders were everywhere, red and white sponge covered most of the rocks. Bergalls were always present ranging from 4-8 inches in size.

The group was amazed at the abundance of marine life. The current picked up. Out of the corner of my eye I saw bluefish off in the distance. I signal to the divers to keep a sharp eye for the different types of jellyfish which we have encountered.

One was very close, a Lions mane (cynea capillata), with yellow-red color and 18 inch long stinging tentacles. On close inspection there were juvenile Butterfish swimming in and out of the jellyfish's realm. Under the protection of the jellyfishes tentacles. Some people are sensitive to a jellyfish's sting. My divers gave this one a wide berth.

It was getting time to head back to the beach. Our course was south by southwest. Everybody was having a great time.

Suddenly we picked up a hitch hiker; a Striped bass who guided us to a drain pipe which lead us to shore. One by one the divers broke the surface. Wonder in their eyes, ecstasy in their breath. I thought to myself, who's next?

The **Roda**

A dive on a British tramp steamer sounded like fun. We headed around Jones beach jetty. The waves slashed icy water in our faces as the wind blew at our backs, our boat rounded Jones Inlet. Determined to get out despite worsening weather and wave conditions, this was to be our last dive of the season.

My dive buddy Don Finck and I held tight to the rail of the boat skimming across the waves. We were two divers looking for lost souls of the sea.

The **Roda** ran aground during a raging storm in February 1908. She broke in two amidships, her heavy cargo of ore spilling into the sea. Like most ships that ground on a sand bar, the vessel was forced inshore on Tobay beach. In 20-30 feet salt water (fsw), her bow and stern now close to the surface marking her territory as time goes on. Yet they had once been awash.

As an artificial reef, the **Roda** is home to many different types of marine fish such as bluefish, blackfish, tropical fish, striped bass, sea bass, fluke and flounder to name a few.

Heading towards the **Roda**, all I could think of were the large schools of blackfish that had a greenish color. To me, they tasted different too, probably due to the copper ore (rumored to be mixed with silver) the fish ingest through mollusks in their food chain.

The ocean's pounding opened up her hull, badly twisting it and littering the shallow bottom for an area of 315 ' long by 44' wide abeam.

Divers still find artifacts: bottles, brass items and cargo that the crew pushed overboard to lighten the ship; even the life boats were set adrift , the crew used the last lifeboat to get off safely as the ship broke apart in the surf

Nearing the **Roda**, Don slowed the boat down to a halt. I threw the anchor off to the edge of the wreck site and into the sand so the outgoing tide would not drag our boat across the shallow wreckage.

Carefully we slipped over the side, each cutting the water like a knife. As though we were entering enemy territory. We made sure not to hit any part of the steamship's ribs that come within inches of the surface, reaching towards the surface like plants welcoming sunlight. To my disbelief, the anchor had landed into a stray pile of wreckage next to a large horseshoe crab.

The sand bottom was covered with broken hull plates and greenish rocks (copper ore). The visibility was about 10 to 15 feet, not bad for a wreck a few hundred yards offshore.

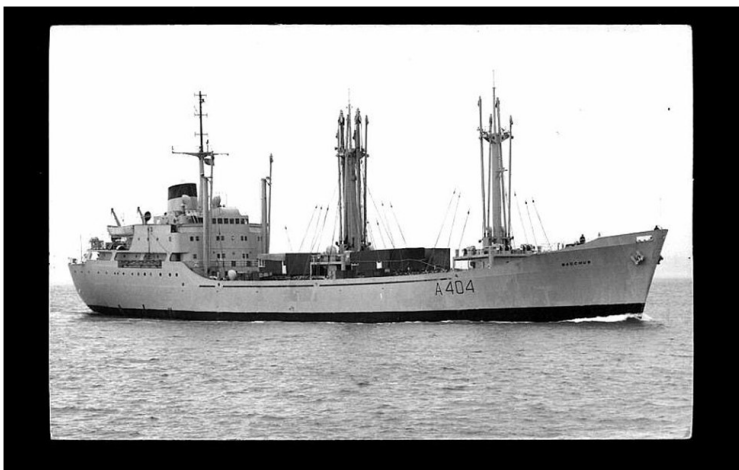
Within her skeletal remains schooling blackfish calmly stood guard over their pylons despite a fast current running east to west. But Don and I had a problem. We could not remain neutrally buoyant.

The current kept pushing us into the wreck, banging us around; the blackfish seemed to have it under control. Struggling to maintain buoyancy, we endured. Our wetsuits bore the battle scars of rust as we rubbed the side of the wreck.

Between her ribs we found a safe haven from the rip current outside their remains. There in this entrance, close to one of her joints was a good size lobster. She was green so I left her to stand guard. Moving along her fragile skeleton we could see that although the years have not been kind to the **Roda**, she is covered with lots of marine life.

Different color sponges from orange to white cover the light side of her old hull, tiny shrimps dance across their little fingers in the surge. Anemones fixed tightly to their host, nematocysts (stinging cells) reaching for small minnows that stop to pick up food off the barnacles. These mollusks can tear a wet suit and gloves if the diver is not careful. (I need a new Pair!)

Large rock crabs patrol the broken clamshells that fisherman toss over the side to entice the green blackfish out of their holes.



Tramp Steamer

Closer to the bottom I found a brand new anchor and chain lodged near her propeller shaft. "Another one for my collection" I thought as I cut off the rope. Don had his hand in a hole reaching for a lobster. He pulled it out and turned it over. She was a female with eggs so he released her for next time. This day we would be buying dinner on shore.

It was getting late, so we decided to backtrack our way back to the anchor. Still waiting at our entry point in the ribs, was our green lobster friend. Watching the traffic at the anchor line was our other friend the horseshoe crab (*Limulus Polyphemus*) feeding on broken clams. We headed up the line as the tide was going out, our boat safety floating down away from the wreck, we boarded.



Orange Sponge
Author's Collection

Bass Run

The current was strong and fast, just the way I like it, about 3 knots. The visibility 15 feet. Clear enough for me, ok for the stripers. My drift would be long, about a mile. I can still remember the name- *bass run*- a phrase used by a group of spear fisherman over 30 years ago, when I spent my summers diving in and around the East Rockaway Inlet, New York. There were free divers like Ronnie, Tommie, Bobby, Brad and Monkey John. Great spear fisherman with an 8 foot Hawaiian spear. Most spears were made by Ronnie, a great spear fisherman and diver.

While suiting up my DUI suit, I went over my dive plan with my dive buddy Don Finck. He'd stay in the boat and follow my drift, keeping a sharp eye out for speeding boats in the inlet. My equipment was simple and easy to put on. A spear/mask/fins/snorkel. My big knife, and a stringer to carry my bounty.



Author

Photo by Don Finck

My starting point would be the Atlantic Beach Bridge, where there is a four knot current on the outgoing tide. Over the side I went. By the time I loaded my sling I was coming upon the bridge. In one breath the bottom came up fast, 35fsw. Blackfish everywhere, a few shorts (stripers), nothing to talk about. I headed for the surface. Behind me lay the boat still drifting under the bridge. I did the span in one breath swimming along the bottom.

I started making my way across the channel to the Atlantic Beach side. Boats buzzed by me. Don acted as my blocker. Each dive was different, sand bottom to mussels, broken pilings that hold many secrets. Suddenly, a 35+ pound striper crossed my path...

I fired, scraping the gill plate. He disappeared into the haze. The veins in my legs strained to power me to the surface. My air bubbles guided me up. I gasped for air. Another breath and I was down. On the bottom, I hear the snap of his tail in the distance. But the striper was nowhere to be found. I was tired, and headed to the surface. I was cold. The water was taking away my body heat every second.

The East Rockaway Inlet came up fast. The jetty was close at hand. Big waves crashed on the jetty with a swift current pulling towards the rocks. I signaled to Don to stay a safe distance outside the wave zone. Danger lurked behind every wave, with razor sharp rocks waving to me.

Any spear fisherman worth his salt knows that getting caught between the waves and the rocks means death. I tried to time the wave sets. They were too erratic, coming from all sides. White water everywhere.

Taking a deep breath, I went straight down. A blackfish weighting 10 pounds crossed my sights. I fired- he was mine. Another wave hit, I strung the fish, and a lone striper swam quietly by me. I noticed a small nick on his gill plate. A quick reload. Then a huge wave hit me and threw me into the rocks- almost breaking my back.

I surfaced screaming. "Come back you striper"! Another wave hit, barely catching my breath, flinging me onto the rocks. This time I could feel the barnacles ripping my flesh. I slid down the rocks slowly in agony. Burning with desire, I got out of the way of the next wave.

Every muscle in my body hurt. I was cold and tired. The waves were getting bigger. In the distance, Don was waving me in. No, I was hungry. Hungry for striper.

Down and deep I went. The great surge picked up my tired body like a piece of seaweed and crashed it into the barnacle encrusted rocks.

My lungs were ready to burst. I could barely catch my breath. Out of nowhere a heavy object slammed into my chest, knocking out the rest of my air. I swallowed a ton of water as I gasped for breath. In the center of my chest lay a 35 pound stripe bass. Almost as surprised as I was, he glared at me with his fishy eyes. I had little strength left for the fight. The striper had just enough to flip his tail, whack me in the face and knocking off my mask. The striper swam. I aimed and fired! A hit and into the sunset. I smiled as I struggled into the boat. Looking back at the jetty I thought, "Just another day in paradise"...



Author
Author's Collection

Oregon

It seemed like a dream. The water was dark blue and the sun rays shinning on the deck of the boat. The team entered the water. A large Lions mane jellyfish crossed my path with its gleaming blue-green tentacles dangling 4-5 feet behind her. One could see little fish that are immune to the jellyfish's poison. Sucking in and expelling water like a blue mist running across a midnight sky. A small group of Pilot fish ducked for cover inside this living minefield.

It reminded me of a great movie I once saw about a big squid looking for a few friends to munch on. But I felt at home sinking fast. At the bottom of the line lay the Cunard Steamship **Oregon**. Moving closer to her massive outline in the sand, I could feel the presence of a great spirit. Her smoke stacks lay silent now, half buried in the sand. Making great homes for large lobster. Nearby lay her riggings, a road map to her past. Her decks have given way, leaving a mountain of artifacts with vast amount of life swimming in and out of the wreckage. Walls of giant sea Anemones and White sponges decorate her broken hull which is scattered along the bottom.

The Steam Ship **Oregon**, built in 1881 was to be one of the largest and fastest steamers of her time. She was 518 feet long with 54 foot a beam. Her high speed steam engines broke all transatlantic records.

One dark morning in 1886, en route to New York from Liverpool, the Oregon collided with an unknown schooner. It could have been the Charles R. Morse of Maine. She was reported missing that night. All hands went down with the schooner.

Staying afloat for eight hours, all the passengers on the **Oregon** were rescued.

With the pumps working throughout the night the ship slowly sank.

Today the Steam Ship **Oregon** lies in 130 feet of water (fsw), 21 miles southeast of Fire Island Inlet. Our boat in this dive was the R.V. Wahoo. The captain had anchored the boat in the stern of the wreck, just behind the steering quadrant. Divers started getting ready.

We entered the water, using the anchor line as we descended down to the wreck site. Coming into view was the steering quadrant a magnificent sight. Hiding under the rudder between broken hull plants was an eight-pound lobster who was trying to back into his hole. Too deep to reach in. Swimming in the direction of the rudder, I notice plenty of large mussels sharing space with dancing brown scallops.



Cup and Saucer
Author's Collection

I started to fill my bug bag with some scallops. Half buried in the sand was a piece of broken china. Reaching down for it, a lobster caught my eye as he stuck his head out of his hiding place. The dish didn't move. The lobster found its way into my bag along with the dish. With the current pushing me gently backward, I ventured forward to the boilers in search of some dishes.

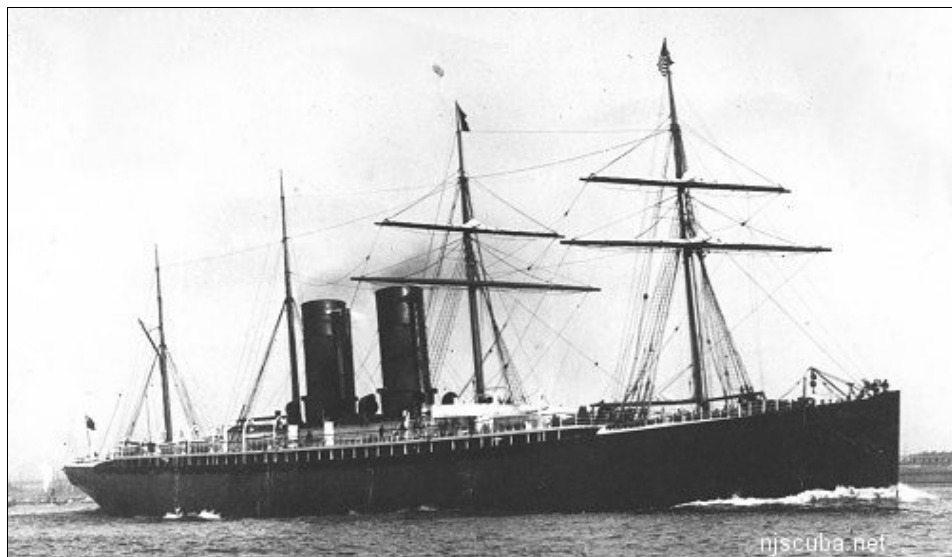
Along the way I saw two divers working on a porthole. In the distance, cod fish were swimming in and out of her twisted rubble enjoying the cold water. The water temperature was 50 degrees. With 20 minutes into the dive, I began to think about finding more china. A rare but prized find, from this wreck.



Brass Porthole
Author's Collection

Torn fishing nets adorn the Steam Ship **Oregon's** stern, snaring and trapping small fish or the unlucky diver that is not paying attention. I could see crabs on the webbing enjoying their free meal. Plenty of hooks and sinkers to go around. Lying underneath the webbing was a small cup, opening up my bug bag; the two lobsters tried to make a break but failed. Off in the sand at the end of the crow's nest lay a large debris field.

It was 25 minutes into the dive, time to head back to the anchor line. In the distance those two divers finally attached their lift bag to the porthole. Up she went in a cloud of bubbles. The divers followed. By the time I reached the anchor line there lay a torn lift bag and porthole...



Oregon
njscuba.net

Flash Backs

It was the night before Christmas, not a creature was stirring, not even a diver on this cold winter night. Sitting back in my favorite chair. Sipping a warm glass of brandy. In the fire place a log burned. I was skimming through my photo album. With each page, a fond memory raced through my mind. Looking back, I didn't take enough pictures, Bob Roth, Don Finck, Elliot Blum and Steve Bielenda. Where has the time gone.

We were all on the boat yesterday. But the images held fast in my mind. I started to recall some of my best moments. Frame by frame. Some snapshots were hazy, others like a lion-fish-razor sharp spines burned like the sting of a jellyfish.



Author

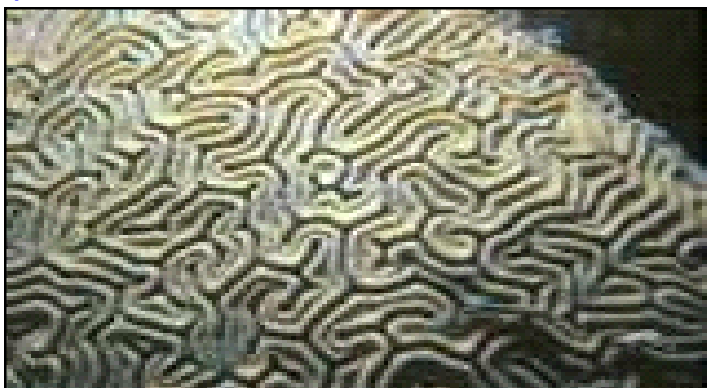
Photo by Joel Silverstein

Any wreck diver knows that it is very difficult to search and recover objects while taking pictures at the same time. I recall diving back in the 60's on beach 8th street in Far Rockaway, NY. On the first jetty, south of the parking lot, where the bulkhead has been replaced.

At the end of the rocks. A few feet from the surface on low tide, a small piece of white coral started to grow and flourish in these cold northern waters. The size of the brain coral was about six inches across surrounded by orange sponge. Always a nearby butterfly fish feeding on this new addition to a living reef. Some divers had taken pictures, I didn't. Today the coral has grown to a size of six feet across.

One of my first dives was the Iberia, an old tramp steamer that sunk in 1888 in 60 fsw. I remember lobsters at every turn, blackfish 10 pounds or better swimming out and around her hull plates.

A porthole waits for some lucky diver to recover it. Her boilers stand tall in the sand to mark the diver's location and way back to the line. Today the bulkheads have broken down; cargo crates filled with sand instead of dates. Wreckage scattered and twisted. The lobster hunter has to work for his dinner. Now I have to throw back my short lobster.



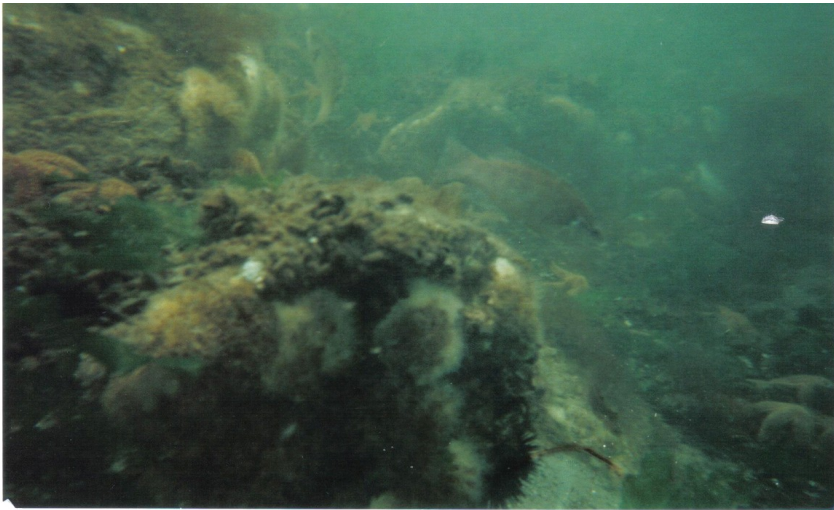
Brain Coral

Small fish feed and reproduce, all part of the food chain. They in turn enable larger marine life to grow and spawn new life.

Two of my favorite in shore man-made reefs are the Rockaway Beach Reef and the Atlantic Beach Reef, both about five miles southeast of the East Rockaway Inlet, New York. Both with plenty of marine life.

At the Rockaway Reef, we found plenty of tires with lobsters hiding in them. (I made sure to bring my spear gun along so I could take a sea bass or two for dinner tonight).

Diving both of these local reefs can be fun for catching tropical fish. Because the reefs are located close to the Gulf Stream current. Tropical fish like butterflies, file fish, and even an occasional parrot fish and a black and white spotted eel. Each fish making his way up here late in the season and inhabiting the shores of New York and New Jersey.



Rockaway Reef
Author's Collection

Although the depth of these reefs is only about 35 -50 fsw, the visibility is usually a good 15-20 feet at high slack tide.

Don't be surprised when you come across an Ice Cream truck or two at the Atlantic Beach Reef, surrounded by schools of blackfish. These two, are an interesting part of the artificial reef system.

Be careful when you stick your hand in for an ice cream pop, there may just be a large lobster there! We pulled a 17-pounder out of a door in the area next to a sunken barge filled with concrete pipes.

So the next time your buddy wants to go diving on a living reef with lots of life, you can pull out your secret map and head south...



USS Algal Artificial Reef

U853

German Submarine

The year was 1971, this would be the first of many dives on the **U853** off Block Island with a group of veteran wreck divers on the old Helen II out of Montauk, New York. The wreck sits in 130 fsw (feet salt water) off Block Island.

The **U853** was a type IXC German U-Boat, she was 259.9 feet long and 22.5 feet wide and displaced 740 tons.

There were many rumors concerning the sinking of **U853** whether or not the boat received orders from the German high command to stop fighting. Many of the U-Boat commanders were young elite fanatical members of the German Navy.

It was my first U boat. I became addicted. I was so excited, and I didn't know if I was coming or going. I suited up my new blue Bailey wet suit. Placed my new diving computer on my wrist (SOS meter)

My dive partner was named Jeep, oh his name seemed funnier than a name like Kirby. Once down the line we crawled inch by inch kick by kick along the bow. We encountered a school of pollack, 30 pound class or better swimming around the conning tower. The wood planking gone, the ribs not exposed yet. Great for pictures. Deck gun still in place.

The U-Boat was alive with marine life. Plenty of Northern Red Anemones were firmly attached to her rotting hull. Between her planks we could see fat rock eels. On further examination one could still see torpedoes in her tubes. We continued our dive along the deck. Wood planking rotted away over the years.

Reaching the conning tower, I looked down the hatch. It was dark and clear. I thought to myself, about the lost treasure that so many divers spoke about. If I could only get inside to search. I'm sure that I would find it. Then suddenly my dive partner had succumbed to nitrogen narcosis. He had his legs wrapped around the deck gun, swinging upside down back and forth. I kept looking back and forth, treasure or diver, treasure or diver? The treasure won out. I headed for the hatch.

Head first I dove into the hatch and got stuck upside down. My feet swinging in the breeze. I was stuck upside down in the hatch way of the conning tower. Now that's a picture. To boot my dive computer (SOS meter) rolls off my arm into the sub. That's \$85 dollars that fell into the sub. Just ten feet away. I have to think fast! There's goes my dive plan.

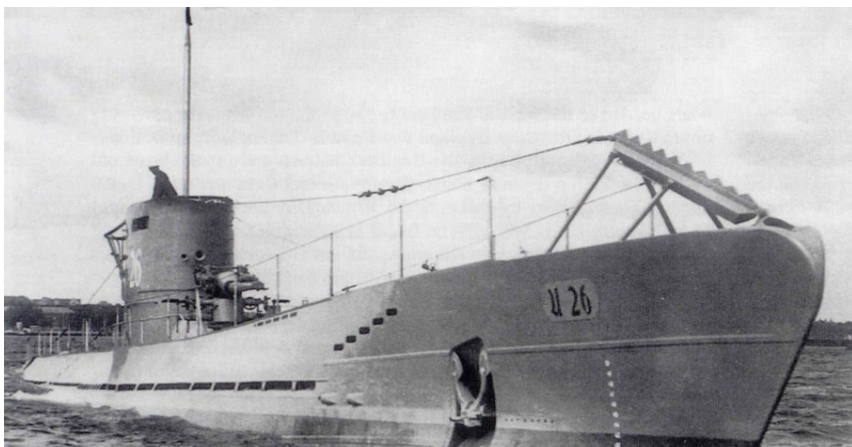
I decided to remove and replace my scuba unit (double 80's), reverse myself and put them back on.

Once on the deck, breathing thru my regulator. I could see Jeep having his way with the deck gun. My eyes still glued to the open hatch and my computer below decks. I did the unthinkable!

I took a few breaths from my regulator and while holding my breath I free dove the wreck in search of my computer and treasure. This seemed pretty easy, a couple of breaths later. My computer (SOS meter) said it was time to head up. I grabbed Jeep and headed up the line.

Jeep and I did an extra long hang about 20 minutes. Once on the dive boat, after we took off our equipment Jeep came over to me and said. Kirby I think I got pretty narced out on the bottom.

I said to Jeep what do you mean? I thought I saw you swimming around the sub without scuba. I brought Jeep closer. I said don't tell that to anyone! They will think that you were hallucinating under the water and they will not dive with you. We shook hands and he promised not to tell...



U26
Uboat.net



U 853
Uboat.net



U853 Winter Garden Railing
Author's Collection



U853 Winter Garden Railing and Deck Gun
Author's Collection



Shells



U Boat Dry Dock

The U.S.S. Turner

We had gotten a late start, it was already 10 a.m. and there was a line at the gas dock. We had to slip in as fast as possible to beat the other boats in line. Finally, at 10:30 we were headed out of Debs Inlet toward the Rockaways. The sea at the time was 1-2 feet and the wind was out of the south at 3mph.

My crew that morning, Don Finck and Dennis Bram, they had been diving on my boat for years. Our goal that day was lobsters and plenty of them; of course we had all our lobster permits. Lobsters, lobsters, and more lobsters. That all we could think of that day. And the best place we could go for them was the inshore wreck of the ***U.S.S. Turner...***

The ***U.S.S. Turner***, a destroyer, was at anchor a few miles off the Rockaways, New York when she exploded and sank one cold winter night in 1944. So close to the beach, yet too far to swim it, she makes a great dive for anyone who can get there by boat. But like all wrecks she has her problems. The ***U.S.S Turner*** lies in the middle of the shipping lanes to New York Harbor, so you must always have someone onboard your boat while diving on the wreck.



USS Turner

The sky was clear and we could see the Jersey Highlands in the distance as we steered out of Debs Inlet towards the site. We could notice the change in the color of the water as it went from blue-green to blue. The white water ran from under the boat. All we could think of was those large critters running around the **Turner** in and out of their holes.

The loran numbers that I had proved to be correct. Don threw out the red buoy; Dennis tossed out the anchor into the blue. I set up the dive flag. We could see that many of the other boats were filled with fisherman trying to catch different types of fish that also inhabit this wreck site.

After discussing our dive plan, Don went off the boat first into the water then I followed.

We had decided to leave Dennis behind to keep an eye on the boat while we were diving.



Sea bass
Author's Collection

At 30fsw we hit a nasty thermocline. That's a layer of water having a different temperature, usually occurring close to the surface or deep in the sea). Lucky for us we were wearing our full suits including our boots, hoods and gloves to reach out and grab those large bugs. At the bottom we made sure that our anchor was set securely, and then Don and I headed out in front of the anchor line. The first thing we saw was a large sea bass chasing small crabs around the wreck.

The **U.S.S Turner** lies in 50 to 60 fsw on a hard, sandy bottom. The wreck is scattered over a large area.

Lump after lump of large metal mountains. Easy to cut your wet suit. Her shape is nearly unrecognizable.

But within these many piles of wreckage you can find artifacts and lobster. I caught a glimpse of Don with a five pound lobster in his bag and his hand in a deep hole. And, what do you know, he pulled out an eight pounder with his claws snapping away, looking for some fingers to chop off. He was too big for Don's bag, being the good buddy that I am, I put the large lobster in my bag for safe- keeping, ha ha.



Skate

Author's Collection

The water was pretty clear for this location, we estimated 25 feet of visibility with a water temperature of 54 degrees at the bottom. The more we swam around the more lobsters we found so our bug bags were filling up quickly. We were 35 minutes into our dive when I noticed a large skate swimming along the bottom, feeding on a small fish. I wished I brought my camera. But Don did.

The dive had gone by so fast. It was time to head back to the anchor line. Thus making sure we removed the anchor from the sand so we could pull it back aboard the boat easily.

At 15 fsw Don and I began our safety stop for 5 minutes. While holding on to the line we felt a strong current pulling us away from the boat. As we broke the surface, the waves had reached 5-8 feet and Dennis said, "It's about time you came up, let's hit the road! By the way, did you catch anything?"



5lb Lobster
Author's Collection

A Few Tails

The sky erupted with thunder, lightening and heavy rain. Seconds before, I had just finished snapping the snap on the boat cover closed. A few minutes earlier my dive buddy Don and I pulled our boat into a nearby bar and grill on the water to sit out the storm before our dive. Don had brought along cold cooked lobsters from our previous dive. The kind you get when you order your lobster appetizer in your favorite restaurant.

While discussing our dive plan I looked into my dive bag, making sure that my lobster permit from New York State was up to date. It entitles me to take up to six lobsters per day. [Check regulations in the state you are diving-there are sometimes variations in the limits and measurement.] Don had already checked his permit. Great. 12 juicy crunchy lobsters between the two of us. Don passed the tartar sauce for my second lobster to calm me down.

I turned over my lobster to examine the shell or carapace, composed of chitin impregnated with calcium salts. A bright calcium shell. Both antennae were especially long-for this lobster they serve as tactile and chemical senses-an alarm bell when danger is close.



Blue Claw Crab
Author's Collection

I guessed that the antennae were not long enough to save this lobster from my plate.

The wind picked up, the boat was bouncing on the dock. My nostrils flared-I could smell the French fries coming from the restaurant. I sipped my soda with anticipation.

Like other crustaceans, crab, crayfish and lobster, molting is a common event. The lobster molts seven times during the first summer. A soft flexible cuticle-shell is formed, allowing for growth. The old shell is then dissolved or discarded. At this point the lobster is most vulnerable to attack or disease.

Don looked at me and said "Did you stay up all night and study this" It's my marine science creeping up on me. Lobstering is one of my favorite activities except for wreck diving. Many other divers agree. Lobsters can be found hiding under rocks, coral, inside wrecks, tires and just walking along in the sand. In search of food.



Northern Lobster
Author's Collection

The best time for lobster hunting is at night. Using a bright light, all you have to do is seek out those beautiful reddish antennae and shine your light into their den.

The lobster will usually take a look to see who's there. Reach in quickly, deep into the hole. If he bites your fingers it may seem like he got you- but you got him! Just remember to carry your lobster gauge; make sure your lobster meets state and local size limits from the eye socket to the first joint. Also a big bug bag.

Those that don't measure up, what lobsterman call "shorts "are illegal to take. Don't forget to check for eggs under the tail. "Berried" females are to be left behind so they can lay their eggs.

But the best part of lobstering is knowing the size of the lobster to be taken. I always look for the size of the claws. Usually the bigger the mitts, the bigger the lobster weighs.

The lobster has two claws, a round claw called the crusher, and the other called the scissor. The crusher is designed for crushing clams and other snacks.

The scissor is sharper, less powerful than the crusher, and much faster. It's designed for grabbing things that swim by. It's the crushers most people worry about. Lobsters take their sweet time to let go once they've their vise-grip on you.

It looks like the day is going to be a wash out. Leaning back in his chair, rubbing his belly. Don thanked me for the lecture, asking when I was going to speak next. My answer was next month...

Lots of Life

Each year thousands of divers will pack up their scuba gear and fly south to dive a reef. They will spend thousands of dollars on travel, diving in some foreign country where the creature comforts are less than satisfying. Making sure to pack their cameras and flash, their secret reef map in hand.

Knowing by name what type of tropical fish they will immortalize on slide film. Butterflyfish, seahorse, groupers, moray eels, triggerfish and their favorite, spider crabs.

I think it's time to let the lobster out of the bug bag. You don't have to look any further than your own back yard. The Eastern seaboard, including the shores of New York and New Jersey are filled with living reefs, manmade fish havens, and of course sunken ships that go back hundreds of years. Some of these occurred naturally, some planned, others by accident.



Butterflyfish and Seahorse
Author's Collection

The bottom composition of Long Island and New Jersey waters is mostly sand and naturally quite barren. Artificial reefs provide a habit for all types of marine life that establish a colony and flourish: thus the beginning of the food chain. Over the past 40 years, planned reefs have been built by private organizations, clubs, fisherman and marine biologists. Except in New York where Albany takes the money and does nothing.

These unique reefs consist of many things. Thousands of tires stacked in pyramid shapes, cars, barges, concrete blocks and ship wrecks.

In the 1990's a 459 foot-long ***U.S.S. Algal*** (an auxiliary cargo attack ship) was sunk by the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife as a reef. (New York does nothing). Located offshore of Shark River Inlet, the ***U.S.S. Algal*** is now a great attraction to marine life, fisherman and divers.

The amount of marine life that inhabits these reefs is so abundant; it's like having your own fish tank. Each reef's makeup is very complex because many micro organisms in coral, shellfish and plants serve a special function in the ecosystem. They feed the lobster, blackfish, sea bass and fluke. On the deeper reefs one can find cod, ling and pollack. Reefs have many different profiles.

A big factor in attracting different size marine life is the height of the reef. Whether two feet high and scattered across the bottom, or a high profile of a sunken ship, the taller the reef, the larger the life.

Man made reefs are a photographer dream, especially for macro work. Anemones attach themselves to the nooks and crannies. Little creatures like shrimps swim around them. Sponges, which contribute to the reef building progress.

Acara

We head south out of Jones Inlet with the wind in our faces and a cold breeze to our backs I zipped up my wet suit jacket as we turned east past the jetty. The sun was already setting- it would be a perfect night for a dive. The seas were calm-like a sheet of glass-as we raced to our destination.

The **ACARA** was a steel-hulled British steamship built in England in 1898. On a cold and foggy night in 1902. Looking for the entrance to New York Harbor, the **ACARA** sank-carrying a large cargo of Chinese teas, spices and 14,800 tin ingots-when she hit the sand bar in 25fsw just east of Jones Beach.

Now, commonly called the **Tea Wreck**, she lays a good 500 yards off the beach broken up into three large pieces, making a great home for many types of marine life. Thinking back, I was introduced to the **Tea Wreck** in 1971 by two divers, Don Finck and Bob Roth, both YMCA Instructors. Whose expertise in wreck diving and catching lobsters has always been a learning experience for me.

On my depth recorder there was a large rise-about 10 feet off the bottom. My dive partner, Don slowed the engine down as I threw the hook, he put the engines into reverse to hook the wreck. We made sure that our safety equipment- lights, surface float, strobe light which we leave on the line, was attached securely. We donned our gear.

Once in the water, we saw a school of bright orange squid with blue spots feeding on spearing as they darted in and out of our bright lights. Swimming over the wreck we watched a large school of blackfish dashing in and out of the wreck, closely followed by small sea bass hunting for crumbs.

Since the **Tea Wreck** is badly broken up and her decks have collapsed, many lobster roam her remaining ribs and debris field.

There goes Don reaching for another lobster I had my light on. Floating along the deck ever so quietly, I saw two large red antennae slowly moving into a hole. Quickly, I reached inside with my right hand-but my flashlight went out in my left hand. I was in the dark, unable to reach my back-up light and couldn't see Don's light either...

Then my hand became stuck in the hole and the lobster started biting my fingers. In the distance I saw my buddy's beam then, miraculously, my light went on as soon as he arrived.

Figures. I made sure to grab the bug and put the vicious critter into my bag. "And let that be a lesson to you!" I said to the lobster as soon as he was safely inside my bug bag. (In my mind I was already boiling the pot of water). There are also plenty of artifacts to find, if you are willing to dig, boat anchors, old bottles and plenty of tea wrapped in silver paper. But tonight's mission was to find lobsters, so I continued my search. Don of course, was already reaching for another lobster. "Does that make 4 or 5 he's got?" I wondered.



Acara
Photo courtesy of Suffolk Marine Museum

Swimming along her ribs west one can see white coral and orange sponge that grows on the **Tea Wreck's** rusty hull. Peering in I noticed her wooden decks still seem to match each other so neatly. Plenty of old bottles littered her decks.

I watch small minnows dance across the top of the deck while my second lobster ran for cover from my light. Continuing west along the her hull I noticed a fast current running the distance of the wreck, due to the shallow depth and wave action. So the best time to dive this wreck is on high tide.

Looking down at my bottom timer I realized it was getting late. 35 minutes into our dive. We had gotten 8 lobster total. Not bad. We started back towards our flashing beacon (strobe light).

At this point we have awakened many interesting friends-who were happy to see us go-so I pulled the anchor out of the wreck. Slowly moving up the line. I took a last look back and to my surprise, a little pilot fish with yellow and black stripes had followed us up the line. Inquisitively. He hung around with us for part of our safety stop.

Once our masks had broken the surface, the weather and seas had changed and it was time to pull up stakes and go home. As I looked back from the boat, I knew I would be back again to dive the **Tea Wreck** with the same enthusiasm I had for it 20 years ago.



Author's Collection

The SS DRUMELZIER

Returning from an early day of offshore diving we decided to spend the afternoon on a shallow wreck. Within miles of any inlet lie many shipwrecks scattered along New York shores, giving divers a chance to go back in time when seafaring ships ruled the high seas. Adventurous divers searching for lost treasures can weigh anchor almost anywhere in Long Island waters.

The **SS Drumelzier** (alias Fire Island or Quadrant Wreck) was a British freight steamship that left New York Harbor on December 25, 1904. Sailing into a raging storm she ran aground on a Fire Island sand bar.

The storm was to be the year's worst and claimed the body of the **SS Drumelzier**. Today her twisted and scattered remains can be found a few hundred yards south of Robert Moses State Park in 15-20 feet salt water (fsw).

In the distance there was a diver down flag bobbing in the surf. Approaching the area, we slowed down and drifted towards the wreck. We discussed our dive plan concerning the other divers on the site in the water looking for their bubbles. And any part of the **SS Drumelzier** peering through the surface.

Thinking about my shipwreck research I knew how the Master helmsman Martin Ekaberg must have felt that winter night. Holding tight to the wheel while the waves broke over the bow, he had to use all his strength to stay on course in the rough seas, as he had many times before. Ice was forming on her decks.

The cabin was cold, damp with the sweet smell of cherry tobacco.

Lighting a pipe behind him was Captain Nicholson. With 30 years of storms and treacherous tides journeying from India ocean to Scandinavia. Captain Nicholson cleared New York Harbor on a northeast course along the shore during the worst storm in history. In New York Harbor.

Wave by wave everlasting darkness the **SS Drumelzier** steamed forward, her crew wary of the superstition, "We shouldn't have sailed on Christmas," The engine's powerful vibrations through her decks felt as though she the ship would explode on the next wave.

Blinding snow made steering the ship almost impossible. Waves began flooding over the decks and iced formed on the rails, sky and seas merge into one. Cool sweat ran down Ekaberg's face distorting his vision. With a sickening thud and sudden lurch his greatest fear came true. Grounded!



SS Drumelzier
Courtesy Suffolk Marine Museum

Freezing snow and water were everywhere throwing cargo about, iron and copper ore spilled into the sea. The masthead spit in two on the deck and later, even the smoke stack was torn from the deck as thunder erupted in and around the ship. At the same time the keel flattened out. Amidst the bellows of the crew in the Persephone roared as smoke flooded the lower decks. Captain Nicholson stood fast urging, "Courage men, the storm will pass by morning." Vainly the engines screamed in reverse tearing the hull apart. It would take four days for Captain and crew to all be rescued as only a small life boat could navigate close enough through the storm and powerful surf.

The cold water felt good against my face. We checked the anchor against a fast current. (Remember always swim into the current at the beginning of your dive so you can drift back with it at the end when you are tired). A lone bass seemed to fly by us swimming east, heading for cover. Working our way west, I encounter the shell of the wreck that was the **SS Drumelzier**.

Her rudder quadrant can be found easily and is visible at the surface at dead low tide. With its strong currents, surges, and plentiful ribs careless divers can be injured at this site. I did have hopes of finding some artifacts today buried beneath the few remaining hull plates and around the sand bottom but I could hear boats running overhead.

Looking up I wondered if they were going to hit us. We made sure to stay close to the ribs, while cutting miles of fishing line that runs rampant through the wreck.

A little later into our dive still fighting a fierce current, I signaled my partner that I was tired. This was not as easy as usual. It was time to head back, this time with the current...

Thomas Dunlap

Wheels Anyone?

I had my Far Rockaway football jacket on with the hood up over my head this early October morning boarding the Jeanne II. The weather report called for sunny skies with temperatures reaching the high 60's in the afternoon: still there was a chill in the air. Our destination was the Liberty Ship **Thomas Dunlap**, just west of Ambrose Light.

Pushing my way into the cabin I found the group trying to stay warm. Most of the divers were excited about this wreck. In the corner a diver was bragging about an artifact from his last dive, a brass wheel three inches across. This peaked my interest, I hadn't found a brass wheel in years.

The **Thomas Dunlap** was a Liberty Ship serving in WW II. There are many stories concerning her sinking in the war but the Dunlap's secret went to her grave and still remains a mystery today. (Maybe she was hit by a torpedo or a mine from a U boat). Her hull is broken, twisted and scattered over a large sandy bottom where large schools of bluefish roam.

There were 2751 Liberty ships made during WW II. The Liberty ships were 441 feet long and 56 feet wide. Her three-cylinder, reciprocating steam engine, fed by two oil-burning boilers produced 2,500 horse power and a speed of 11 knots. Her 5 cargo holds could carry over 9,000 tons of cargo, plus airplanes, tanks, and locomotives lashed to its deck. A Liberty ship could carry 2,840 jeeps, 440 tanks, or 230 million rounds of rifle ammunition.

Liberty ships were prefabricated: made out of steel and cement due to the shortage of raw materials at a cost of \$2,000,000 dollars each. They were named to represent the courage, support, and fighting spirit of the American people during the Second World War. Usually built in one day, and designed for one transatlantic voyage, most liberty ships had a short life span. Their sole purpose was to deliver troops and cargo.

Liberty Ships carried a crew of about 44 and 12 to 25 Naval Armed Guards. Some were armed with:

6 20 mm machine guns

One 3 inch bow gun

One 4 or 5 inch stern gun

Two 37 mm bow guns



Thomas Dunlap

The water out west was more green than blue. Descending down the anchor line was slow. A lone striped bass deliberate in her stride searching for small bait fish passed me by. My old friend the jellyfish kept me company along with a couple of hundred friends, sparkling in the green mist.

There was trouble on the line, a diver could not clear his ears. So I signaled to him to go up a few feet, take his time and try again. I waited until his ears had cleared then continued down the line.

Looking back down I could see the wreck about 30 feet away. I let the line go, disturbing a school of porgies floating quietly over the wreck waiting for a herd of approaching spearing. Pushing them aside I ventured on.



Underwater Explores
Author's Collection

I swam along the portside of the wreck towards the stern, where I could see brass pipes. Leaving them aside for the other divers, I saw large hull plates littering the bottom creating plenty of nooks and crannies for lobsters to hide. Maybe under all this debris lay a buried wheel; that would be a prized artifact.

Sticking out of the sand was a steel propeller blade scarred, battle weary, and lifeless. No doubt concealing a past journey across the North Atlantic. Blackfish dashed in and out of her hull plates chasing sea bass, and a rock crab rested motionless waiting for a piece of the loser.

My mission was simple; enjoy the dive. In the distance I could see the boilers, standing tall about 15 feet off the bottom, encrusted with soft white and yellow coral. Barnacles fought anemones for space, orange sponge creeping up the side of the boilers. At the base I spotted my five pound lobster, finally.

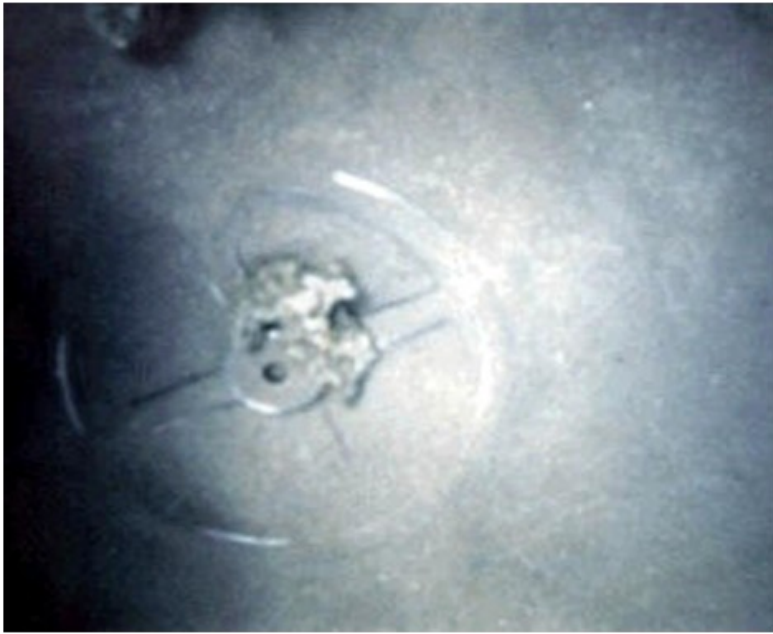
The struggle began. As I reached deep into the hole, the lobster began biting my fingers and my mask up against the boiler began to flood. Pulling my hand out I let go of the lobster.

Clearing my mask, there it was the biggest wheel I ever saw! It was three feet across attached to the boilers. Happy, happy, happy. Boy did I feel great. Checking my down time, I was at 72 fsw with 36 minutes into the dive. How do I get it off with no tools?

Out of nowhere divers descended on my wheel! Yanking and pulling on *my wheel!* I shouted though my regulator, almost biting my mouth piece in half. "Don't touch my wheel! It's mine! "

The wheel didn't move a hair. After a few frustrating minutes the two divers gave up. This made me happy; the sea urchins still have a place to hide. They lay perched on the boiler camouflaged by their dark brown color with short needle- like spines protruding from their bodies in all directions. Remember, their spines can cause illness if removed forcefully.

The divers signaled me that they were on their way up and I headed back to the anchor line. With one last look I waved goodbye. The **Thomas Dunlap's** secret will be safe with me...



Brass Wheel

U.S.S. San Diego

By Captain Steve Lombardo

A bright red sun rises over the Eastern Horizon as the RV Garloo heads towards my favorite shipwreck, the Armored Cruiser **USS San Diego**. Commissioned the *USS California*, the 500' long ship was launched in 1904, part of Theodore Roosevelt's "Great White Fleet".

After 15 years of distinguished service, the ship suffered a massive port side explosion on July 19, 1918, and sank with the loss of six lives. Later it was determined that the U-156 had been laying mines in the area, although Captain Christy was convinced to his dying day that it was a torpedo.

Well, there will be no loss of life today, not if I can help it. The mission is to place a Memorial Plaque on the shipwreck commemorating the sinking and those who gave their lives on July 19, 1918, 90 years earlier.

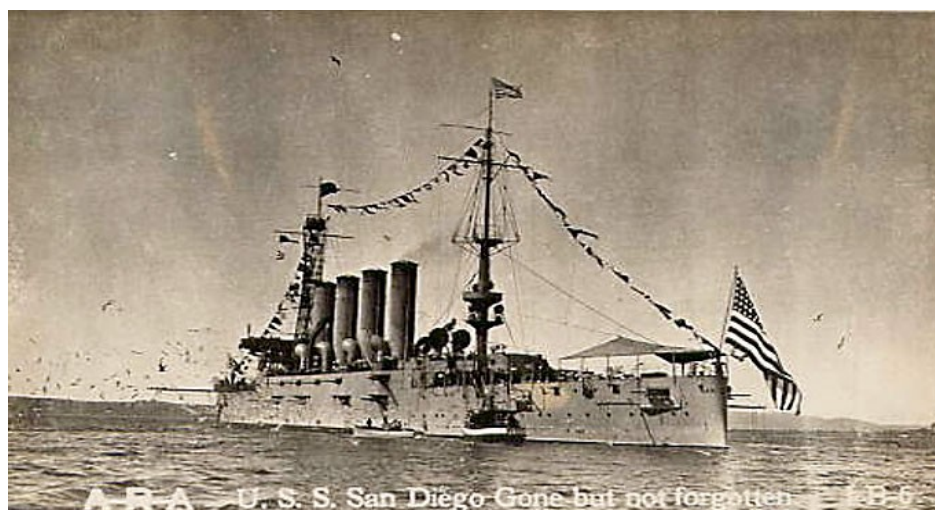
We quickly reach the location of the **USS San Diego**, 13.5 miles Southeast of Fire Island Inlet. We are in 110fsw of flat, calm ocean water, a diver's dream. The sensation that this will be a great day runs through the boat. The tie-in is efficiently accomplished. The team is ready to splash into the water.

Everybody is treated like royalty, as if they were in the Caribbean, resulting in the dive boat being called "the Garlibbean". But once the team is back, it's my turn to venture into the dark side.

Entering the warm, clear blue water, I feel confident in the fact that there are two full 120 cubic foot tanks on my back, with plenty of air for my Poseidon Odin regulators.

The commemorative plaque is in my gloved hands, attached to a lanyard for safety. If all goes according to plan it will be secured by tie wraps at the location of the explosion hole. The rule is "Plan your dive and dive your plan" but any diver worth his salt knows how rarely everything goes according to plan.

Descending through the jungle of jellyfish that surrounds the shipwreck, I approached the light side on the docking keel (starboard) and immediately start kicking for the corresponding structure on the dark side. Reaching the dark side docking keel, I turn left and start forward, pulling and gliding as the docking keel disappears, only to reappear and grow for another hundred feet or so. Now it's time to drop down the dark side and enter the explosion hole. I hovered for a moment of silence and thought to myself. "Brave men, dark waters"



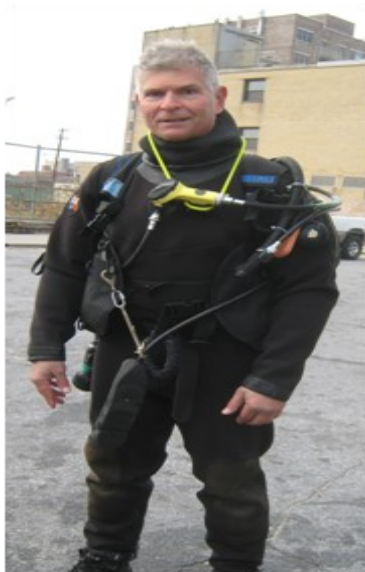
**ARA Post card of the USS San Diego
"Gone but not forgotten"**

I detach the commemorative plaque from the lanyard and secure it just inside the hole with tie wraps. After a minute of silence, I proceed down the cofferdam to the torpedo room. Traversing the large open space, I swim under the twin overlapping Torpedo tubes and forward towards the exit.

Seeing a lobster, I grab it despite the fact that I neglected to bring a bug bag. Good, no eggs on the belly, it's a keeper. Swimming towards the exit hole on the light side, I suddenly find it almost impossible to breathe!

Popping my alternate air source in my mouth, I am relieved to find it working perfectly. Then I notice what the problem was – the lobster I grabbed is holding my air hose in his crusher claw!

Rising up the anchor line to my safety stop, I have a chance to reflect on a beautiful dive, and anticipate how good my lobster dinner will taste.



Capt. Steve Lombardo

Sharks

The Ten Deadliest Sharks



Author's Collection

Sharks

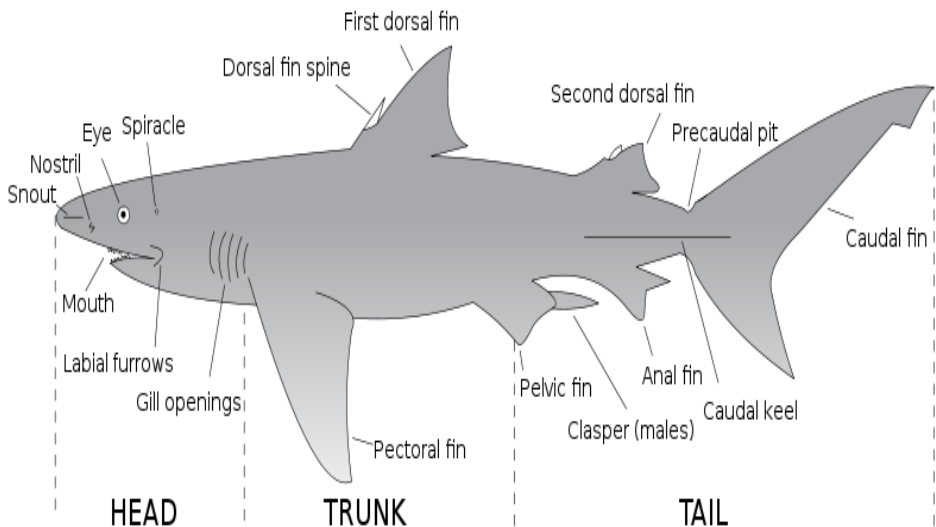
Sharks can be found in all the world oceans. Over the years I have seen many sharks in the ocean and on the fisherman's hook. It always amazes me that these creatures instill great fear into the unsuspecting diver who enters the water. Every time a diver dives in the ocean there is a thought in the back of his mind. That the diver might run into a shark. The thrill of adrenaline and adventure enables the diver to venture into the cool blue water that surrounds us.

Sharks are a type of fish with a full cartilaginous skeleton and a highly streamlined body. According to the fossil record the earliest known sharks date back more than 420 million years ago. Since that time, sharks have diversified into over 500 species, ranging in size from the small dwarf lantern shark, a deep sea species of only 6.7 in in length, to the whale shark, the largest fish, which reaches approximately 39 ft and which feeds only on plankton, squid, and small fish by filter feeding.

Sharks are found in all seas and are common down to depths greater than 6,600 ft. They generally do not live in freshwater, with a few exceptions such as the Bull shark and the River shark which can live both in seawater and freshwater. They breathe through five to seven gill slits. Sharks have a covering of dermal denticles that protects their skin from damage and parasites, and improves their fluid dynamics so the shark can move faster. They have several sets of replaceable teeth. Each year new species of shark are being caught.

Well-known species such as the Great White shark, Tiger shark, Blue shark, Mako shark, Bull shark, Ocean White tip shark and the Hammerhead shark are apex predators at the top of the underwater food chain. These animals have extraordinary skills as predators. Their survival is under serious threat from fishing and other human activities.

I have listed here the Ten deadliest sharks starting at number 10.



Author's Collection

Lemon shark, *Negaprion brevirostris*, is a Shark in the family Carcharhinidae, that can grow to 10 feet (3.0 m) long. It is known as the lemon shark because, at certain depths, light interacting with the local seawater can give this shark a tanned and yellow pitted appearance, much like the surface of a lemon. Some Lemon sharks have been sighted as far North as Long Island, New York.



Lemon Shark
Freesharkpictures.com
#10

The **Blue shark** (*Prionace glauca*) is a species of requiem shark, family Carchinidae, that inhabits deep waters in the world's temperate and tropical oceans.

Preferring cooler waters, blue sharks migrate long distances, for example from New England to South America. Although generally lethargic, they can move very quickly.

Blue sharks are viviparous and are noted for large litters of 25 to over 100 pups. They feed primarily on small fish and squid, although they can take larger prey.

Blue sharks often school segregated by sex and size, and this behavior has led to their nickname "wolves of the sea".



Blue Shark

Freesharkpictures.com

#9

The **Hammerhead sharks** are a group of sharks in the family Sphyrnidae, so named for the unusual and distinctive structure of their heads, which are flattened and laterally extended into a "hammer" shape called a "cephalofoil". Most hammerhead species are placed in the genus Sphyrna while the winged-head shark is placed in its own genus, Eusphyra. Many, not necessarily mutually exclusive, functions have been proposed for the cephalofoil, including sensory reception, maneuvering, and prey manipulation. Hammerheads are found worldwide in warmer waters along coastlines and continental shelves. Unlike most sharks, hammerheads usually swim in schools. Some of these schools can be found near Malpelo Island in Colombia, Cocos Island by Costa Rica and near Molokai Island in Hawaii.



Great Hammerhead Shark

Freesharkpictures.com

#8

Sand sharks, also known as sand tiger sharks or ragged tooth sharks, are lamniform sharks of the family Odontaspidae (or sometimes - but incorrectly - referred to as Carchariidae). They are found worldwide in temperate and tropical waters, including on both sides of the Atlantic coast, but most notably in the Western Indian Ocean and in the Gulf of Maine. There are four species in two genera. Sand sharks are the only shark known to surface for gulps of air. They store the air in their stomachs which allows them to float motionless in the water as they hunt for prey.



Sand Tiger Shark
Author's Collection
#7

Grey Reef shark (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos*, sometimes misspelled *amblyrhynchus* or *amblyrhinchos*) is a species of requiem shark, family Carcharhinidae. One of the most common reef sharks in the Indo-Pacific, it is found as far east as Easter Island and as far west as South Africa. This species is most often seen in shallow water near the drop-offs of coral reefs. The grey reef shark has the typical "reef shark" shape, with a broad, round snout and large eyes. This species can be distinguished from similar species by the plain or white-tipped first dorsal fin, the dark tips on the other fins, the broad black rear margin on the tail fin, and the lack of a ridge between the dorsal fins.



Grey Reef Shark
Freesharkpictures.com
#6

The **Short Fin Mako shark**, *Isurus oxyrinchus* ("sharp nose"), is a large marckerel shark. Along with the closely related longfin mako (*Isurus paucus*) it is commonly referred to as a "**Mako shark**". The shortfin mako inhabits offshore temperate and tropical seas worldwide. The closely related longfin mako shark, *Isurus paucus*, is found in the Gulf Stream or warmer offshore waters. It is a pelagic species that can be found from the surface down to depths of 150 m (490 ft), normally far from land though occasionally closer to shore, around islands or inlets. One of only four known endothermic sharks, it is seldom found in waters colder than 16 °C (61 °F). In the western Atlantic it can be found from Argentina and the Gulf of Mexico to Browns Bank off of Nova Scotia.



Mako Shark
Freesharkpictures.com
#5

The **Oceanic Whitetip shark**, *Carcharhinus longimanus*, is a large pelagic shark inhabiting tropical and warm temperate seas. Its stocky body is most notable for its long, white-tipped, rounded fins. This aggressive but slow-moving fish dominates feeding frenzies, and is a danger to shipwreck or air crash survivors. Recent studies show steeply declining populations because its large fins are highly valued as the chief ingredient of shark fin soap and, as with other shark species, the whitetip faces mounting fishing pressure throughout its range.



Ocean White Tip Shark

Freesharkpictures.com

#4

Tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*, is a species of requiem shark and the only member of the genus ***Galeocerdo***. Commonly known as sea tigers, tiger sharks are relatively large macropredators, capable of attaining a length of over 5 m (16 ft). It is found in many tropical and temperate waters, and is especially common around central Pacific islands. Its name derives from the dark stripes down its body, which resemble a tiger's pattern and fade as the shark matures. Its diet involves a wide range of prey, including crustaceans, fish, seals, birds, smaller sharks, squids, turtles, sea snakes, and dolphins. The tiger shark is considered a near threatened species. While the tiger shark is considered to be one of the most dangerous sharks. The tiger is second on the list of number of recorded attacks on humans, with the great white shark being first.



Tiger Shark
Freesharkpictures.com
#3

The **Great White shark**, scientific name *Carcharodon carcharias*, also known as the **Great white**, **white pointer**, **white shark**, or **white death**, is a large shark found in coastal surface waters in all major oceans. The great white shark is known for its size, with the largest individuals known to have approached or exceeded 6 meters (20 ft) in length, and 2,268 kilograms (5,000 lb) in weight. This shark reaches maturity at around 15 years of age and can have a life span of over 30 years. The great white shark is arguably the world's largest known extant macro predatory fish and is one of the primary predators of marine mammals. It is also known to prey upon a variety of other marine animals including fish, pinnipeds, and seabirds. It is the only known surviving species of its genus, *Carcharodon*, and is ranked first in a list of number of recorded attacks on humans.



Great White Shark
Freesharkpictures.com
#2

The **Bull shark**, *Carcharhinus leucas*, also known as **Zambezi shark** or unofficially known as **Zambia** in Africa and **Nicaragua shark** in Nicaragua, is a shark common worldwide in warm, shallow waters along coasts and in rivers. The bull shark is well known for its unpredictable, often aggressive behavior. The bull shark can thrive in both saltwater and freshwater and can travel far up rivers. They have even been known to travel as far up as Indiana in the Ohio River and Illinois in the Mississippi River, there have been more reported attacks involving bull sharks than any other sharks. They are probably responsible for the majority of near-shore shark attacks including many attacks attributed to other species. However, bull sharks are not true freshwater sharks (unlike the river sharks of the genus *Glyphis*).



Bull Shark

Freesharkpictures.com

#1

Suggested Reading & Viewing

American Museum of Natural History
Manhattan, NY 10024

Kirby Kurkomelis
Introduction to Scientific Diving
Seahurtdivers@aol.com

New York Aquarium
Brooklyn, NY 11224

Old Ship Picture Gallery
contact me@photoship.co.uk

Skin Diver Magazine
1951-1990's
Petersen Publishing Co
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Sub Aqua Journal Articles
Joel Silverstein, Publisher
Kirby Kurkomelis, Writer
1988 -1995
Seahuntdivers@aol.com

US Merchant Marine Academy Museum
Kings Point, NY 11204

Sharks
St Martin's Press
New York NY 10010

Freesharkpictures.com

NJSUBA.com

Wreck Valley Series
Daniel@aqaeexplorers.com



Ideas come and go, dreams last forever
Kirby Kurkomelis