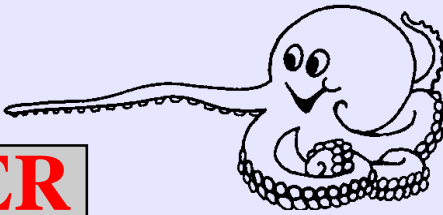


THE REEF SEEKER



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U.S Coast Guard photo

GULF SPILL UPDATE (THE GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING)

Things are still rather dicey in the Gulf.

One piece of good news coming out today is that Hurricane Alex, although it's going to make landfall as a Category 2 storm, has taken a sharp left turn and is now heading due west into Mexico. That likely means, even though a storm surge will be generated, it will be nowhere near as devastating (in terms of the spill) as it could have been had the storm stayed on its original NW track and made landfall in Texas.

For me personally, I think some of the most depressing news that's coming out of all of this is how unprepared everyone was for what happened. It turns out that the emergency plans BP had in place, which they had to submit in writing, were nothing more than cookie cutter plans for a spill in Alaska, since they talked about protecting

the "walrus and otters" in the region. Good job as not a single walrus or otter has been killed by this spill. Of course, that may have something to do with the fact that those animals don't live in the Gulf. BP might as well have pledged to protect swimming unicorns too.

It's also distressing to realize that that the U.S. Government, in the form of the MMS, had oversight that was sorely lacking. These are the folks who are supposed to be protecting us and checking to see that safeguards are in place. These are the people who should have seen that the emergency plans were total B.P.S. And this lack of oversight doesn't just stretch back to the Bush administration, but carried over into the Obama administration even after they pledged to do a better job of monitoring the industry. Yes, changes are now occurring and MMS is being broken up and many employees fired for conflicts of interest, but at the cost of what we're seeing in the Gulf. Some of it is simply too little, too late.

It's also a little distressing, if not somewhat hypocritical, to see all these politicians who for years have been staunch supporters of oil drilling off the Louisiana coast, suddenly bemoaning the response of the federal government to the spill. This is not to say that it's all been done as good as it should

have been, but for once I'd love to hear someone say, "I was for drilling before this spill but in hindsight I think my position may have been wrong."

I think the awakening that many people in the region are having was best summed up by a fisherman interviewed on one of the network news shows the other night. He simply said, with some emotion in his voice, "We're going to have to live with the results of this for the rest of my life."

There's also a very serious, and not too often examined, question of where all the oil actually is. There's no doubt a lot of it is on the surface. But it's not ALL at the surface. There are estimates of underwater plumes of oil that may stretch for miles.

The spill rate estimates were revised upward (again) on Tuesday and it's now thought that as much as 60,000 barrels a day could be gushing out of the ruptured well. Note that the estimates are usually in barrels, which is a smaller number than discussing this in gallons. Why take "barrels"? Because a smaller number doesn't seem as bad as a bigger number. That's part of the spin we've been subjected to, by all sides, from day 1 of this tragedy.

A BARREL of oil contains 42 GALLONS of oil. So what we're

really talking about is roughly 2.5 MILLION gallons of oil every day being pumped into the Gulf. The spill happened 71 days ago (as of this writing) so that means as much as 179,000,000 (that's one hundred seventy-nine million) gallons of oil has been dumped into the Gulf.

To put it in perspective, the *Exxon Valdez*, spilled 11 million gallons of oil in Prince William Sound, and oiled about 1200 miles of Alaskan coastline. So basically, we have another *Exxon Valdez*-size spill in the Gulf every five days. Which means that since April 20, it's like having 14 Exxon Valdez accidents.

We have no idea what the long-term cost to the wildlife or the ecosystem will be. You've all doubtless seen the pictures of birds trying to lift their heads out of oily muck and it's heartbreaking. I'm personally concerned about the use of the oil dispersants and whether or not this will cause further damage to wildlife.

Although the EPA came out with a study today that found the dispersants not to be toxic and didn't recommend any changes, it's important to remember that these things do exactly what the name implies: disperse the oil over a wider area. And while the concentration drops (so instead of thick muck, it's a light sheen), it doesn't go away. Out of sight (or less in sight) is not out of mind or out of danger.

I see the problem as being that the dispersants don't just disperse the oil horizontally. They disperse vertically as well. So instead of a thick muck that might be easily skimmed or at least tracked (but

will certainly foul shorelines in a major way if not picked up) the dispersants spread it out and down into the water column.

Logic indicates that by spreading it deeper in the water column, even if it's only 20-30 feet, it is more likely that fish and other animals swimming through this will be affected by it. It may now harder for them to swim under the obvious thick slick (or they may just not see it because it's been dispersed) and they may unwittingly be swimming into a fine mist of suspended oil that will affect their gills and other organs. Again, the long-term effects are simply unknown but don't appear promising.

And now there's concern that Florida Manatees, who winter in the Gulf, may be affected by the oil should it get into the Loop Current (which doesn't appear to have happened yet) and be carried down the western coast of Florida.

So all in all, a difficult situation no matter how you cut it. And when you realize that the main people with the technology to stem this flow are BP and other oil companies, you really tend to get the feeling that the foxes are guarding the henhouse.

Hopefully things will get better

and hopefully this will serve as a wake-up call for all of us. We're not going to be able to wean ourselves off of oil dependency overnight. But we not only need to do something about that, but also take a little more seriously the dangers imposed by our methods of finding oil. And we must do our best to look seriously and closely at those dangers, doing everything we can to mitigate them so as to make the Deepwater Horizon accident a footnote in history and not a precursor of things to come.

FLOWER GARDENS TRIP CANCELED

At least this one's not for lack of interest because we had enough folks to make a go of this. But the Flower Gardens trip is officially canceled because BP has leased the boat we were going to use, the *Fling*, to help in the cleanup/recovery process. In fact, we got a note from the *Fling* just two days ago announcing that they're canceling their entire rest-of-the-season schedule, not just our trip.

But we will definitely look into doing this again, perhaps in 2011, once things in the Gulf have settled down.

2010 DIVING VACATIONS

July 9-18 • Yap

Oct. 10-17 • Baja

January, 2011 • Easter Island

5-DAY TRIP CANCELED

And to continue the cancellation theme . . .

It seemed like a good idea on paper. But I'm very sorry to say that we're going to have to cancel our planned 5-day trip in August on the *Great Escape* due to a lack of signups. If everyone who said they were interested in going actually went, we'd be fine. But we simply didn't get enough people following through to make this happen.

I'm happy to consider doing this again but don't want to have to cancel again so here's your chance to help educate me on what the market will bear. If this is something you might have been interested in doing but didn't, see if you can let me know why. There may be things we can change/alter for next year that will make it more palatable. Send any comments you have, pro or con, to me directly at kenkurtis@aol.com. Anything you say will be for my eyes only and held in the strictest confidence.



WHY WE DO BRIEFINGS

We want to extend kudos to our group of divers with us at Santa Barbara Island last week. At our first dive site, there was a pretty strong current rolling through. We checked out conditions before anyone got in the water, came back and briefed the group on how to do the dive, reminded them to bail if

UPCOMING BOAT & SHORE DIVES

Wed	July 7	Redondo	Night dive	\$5/10
Sun	25	<i>Cat. Express</i>	Avalon Underwater Park	95/100
Wed.	Aug. 11	Redondo	Night dive	5/10
Sat.	14	Redondo	Redondo Canyon day dive	5/10
Sun.	29	<i>Great Escape</i>	San Clemente (backside)	150/155
Wed.	Sept. 8	Redondo	Night dive	5/10
Sat.	25	<i>Great Escape</i>	Farnsworth/Cat backside	130/135
Wed.	Oct. 6	Redondo	Night dive	5/10

Prices are listed as 14-day advanced purchase/regular. Food/air included all trips. All diving to be done on compressed air only - no nitrox. Fuel surcharge may apply.

uncomfortable, reminded them of the current line should they get behind the boat, and then opened the gates.

It's amazing (and gratifying, let alone not nerve-jangling) what happens when divers actually pay attention to what we say.

A few people took our advice and dropped straight down, made their way forward in the current, then finished their dive on the anchor line, and surfaced (holding on for dear life the whole time). Others decided to use the tag line to pull themselves to the front, some got tired, and bailed on the dive. (Nothing wrong with that. As I like to say, "You never get hurt on a dive you didn't make.") A few surfaced behind the boat but knew to swim to the current line and were then pulled in.

So kudos to all for listening and taking the appropriate actions. That's why we (and other boats/operations as well) do these briefings. We know that sometimes the information can seem repetitive or tedious. But there's usually a method to our madness and our first dive last week certainly drove that point home in spades.

So thanks to all for listening.

SPEAKING OF SANTA BARBARA ISLAND . . .

I got a flyer earlier tonight and my initial reaction was, "Well, it's a lot cheaper than going down to Guadalupe Island." Here is what was released by the National Park Service, with the eye-popping headline of "Santa Barbara Island Warning: Enter Water at Your Own Risk":

"Great white sharks have been observed in this area attacking California sea lions. There have been no shark attacks on humans. There have been three attacks on California sea lions by great white sharks in the past few months including one at the Santa Barbara Island Landing Cove and two offshore of Cat Canyon on the south-east side of the island. The public is duly warned to enter the water at their own risk at Santa Barbara Island due to a potential safety hazard effective June 30, 2010 and until further notice."

On the one hand, cynic that I am, I look at this as a CYA notice from the National Park Service in case anyone gets nipped or worse. (Some NPS friends of mine don't agree, but that's a whole different

rant that we have neither time nor room for right now.)

But it also brings up an interesting point that we were discussing this past weekend while we were at the island: Why DON'T we see Great Whites (and maybe even Orcas) on a more regular basis at Santa Barbara Island? With all the sea lions there, not to mention the number of pups, you would think this would be like an all-you-can-eat pinniped feast and they should be there in the droves. But they're (seemingly) not.

And despite the warning from the Park Service, I've never personally seen a GWS (but would LOVE to see one swim by - he doesn't need to stop, just keep on swimming) but I know of two occasions

where Great Whites were spotted.

Once was on the *Cee Ray* when we were about to anchor in the Rookery and Arnold Lancaster spotted one under the bow and chose a different location. And the other time was years ago on the *Charisma* when what was thought to be a fish boil was spotted about a mile north of SBI and when the boat went to investigate, a headless sea lion torso popped to the surface with a Great White right behind it. The Great White circled the carcass for about an hour while all from the boat watched in amazement. (I've got a print of a photo that Barbara Lyter took which I'll scan later this evening and if you'd like to see it, just send me an email.)

Personally, I think "Enter Water at Your Own Risk" is a bit of overkill

(I debated using that word but it seems to fit). I think the alert is appropriate but I wish it had been worded and phrased a little less sensationalistically.

These are apex predators doing what they naturally do. We are not their target. If you should ever see one in the water, obviously use good judgment and exercise caution. Most likely they'll just be passing by. But consider yourself fortunate if you ever get to personally view this magnificent, and many times misunderstood, creature.

Our next tripto SBI isn't until October 30 so that'll be plenty of time to see if these sightings were anomalies or will become the norm. And if they are, wouldn't THAT be exciting???

PICTURE PAGE - Sharks of the World

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2010)



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**Whitetips
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**Feeding frenzy
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**Horn Shark mouth
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