



# KELP KRAWLERS DIVE CLUB

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## Salty Breath Sea Serpents

by Paul Jeffers

Wolf eels are magnificent animals that will spell-bound anyone if they are fortunate enough to happen upon one of these creatures in the wild. They grow up to lengths of eight feet with diameters comparable to a football. Their jawbones are distinctive giving them definite cheeks and large lips. In the dim light of lower depths mature eels resemble eerie human faces. This tends to send chills down one's spine, especially if your encounter is a surprise.

In scuba diving certification class, we were told that wolf eels are not aggressive animals and would not attack unless provoked. They are territorial and if by chance a diver were to stick his hand in their den, they would experience the strength of a wolf eel's bite. To further cement this lesson into our minds, we heard their bite compared to that of a bull dog's grip. They would not just bite us but hold on with bone crushing pressure. Their diet consists of shell fish and crab. So they are expert skeleton crushers, exo and endo.

It is always a treat to see a wolf eel, especially if you find them swimming. Their graceful wave-like swimming is mesmerizing and their beauty can be admired in its entire length. I have been fortunate to see an eel as large as ten feet long and as small as sixteen inches. After reading they only grow to length of eight feet, I had to reconsider the 25% magnification factor that water has. Divers may tell some big fish stories but when you consider the magnifying effect, it is better understood.

While diving in the tropics, I was following a coral canyon with intricate walls on either side that rose at least twenty feet. Rounding a corner an enormous eel appeared whose head and body, I thought, were as big as a basketball. I only saw about six feet of its body as we both recoiled instinctively. At the time I was a novice and impressionable. I was convinced that this was one of the sea serpents early explorers wrote about and I then proceeded to burn off some of those fat reserves in my haste to get away.

One summer day a few years later in the Pacific Northwest my diving partner, John, took me up to an underwater park called the Key-

stone Jetty. It was a little bit of a drive, but the reputation of the park aroused our adventurous spirit.



Arriving around noon we noticed two divers entering the water on the east side of the small rock jetty. This jetty protruded into the channel about two hundred feet. Posted signs explained this area was an underwater park and spear fishing or harvesting of any kind was prohibited.

We did not take long suiting up and strapping our gear on. The warmth of the day and the insulating properties of our neoprene suits made us very uncomfortable. Our sweat glands responded with whatever fluids were at their disposal.

Entering the sea on the west side of the jetty to avoid the divers seen earlier, we swam out along the rocks. The water was cool and refreshing. The visibility was good, providing us with the ability to see up to twenty feet underwater. The glistening sea was calling us as we switched from our snorkels to our regulators.

Our surroundings immediately changed to a kaleidoscope of color and marine animals. I could sense the comfort zone of this artificial and protected reef as quizzical critters looked at us. We exchanged glances of the curious nature. A wide variety of sea life paraded about taking advantage of the diverse food chain. So prolific was the animal and plant life that not a single bare spot on the rocks could be seen. Large fish glided about making quite a spectacle of themselves. They looked at us as though we should feed them.

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Approaching the end of the jetty the current had picked up substantially. We were both having trouble swimming against it and the thumbs-up sign was given. Clinging to the jetty boulders we found ourselves near the tip of the jetty upon breaking the surface. It was decided that rather than trying to climb over the rocks to the other side, we would use the boulders to help pull ourselves around the tip. Descending to a shallow ten feet we attempted to do just that. Having measurable success the going was slow and strenuous. The current was so strong that it was impossible to swim against. The few times we lost our grip it took a lot of effort to regain the ground we lost. At one point I turned my head sideways and the current tried to take my mask off of my face. John and I both found ourselves cautiously clearing water from our masks while hanging on with the other hand.

Muscling around the point proved to be rewarding as the current subsided immediately. We were feeling proud of our accomplishment especially with all the marine diversity to enjoy. We had at least another thirty minutes of air left in our tanks, especially at these moderate depths.

A great time was being had as our eyes rolled about trying to record the ever changing scene. We were following the line of rocks where they met the sandy bottom. A few yards ahead of me I noticed John's posture stiffen and jerk backward. To my amazement a wolf eel came into view and was swimming out of the rocks toward him. John began flailing his arms behind him in a fluid mop head motion. Losing no interest the eel continued advancing. John floated over backwards and began swimming upside down as the eel came fearfully close. A rock came into view and he scrambled behind it with only his tank showing with his exhaling bubbles pinpointing his position. This scene was quite comical especially when John poked his head up to see if he had lost the agile eel.

I was wondering how much territory this eel was claiming when its attention turned toward me. This eel was no monster and I had seen bigger ones, but none this aggressive. It probably measured five feet in length and had the diameter of a Burmese Python. It gracefully snaked through the water, intent now, on me. Knowing I appeared soft and juicy, I took on a fierce stance that conveyed nerves of steel. Oblivious to the awkward protrusions of my diving gear, I resembled "a fool with the I.Q. of steel", as my partner gleefully informed me later. Undaunted, the eel advanced within a foot of my mask and saucer size eyes. My hands raised up as if this were a hold up. He looked at me grimly and with my heart still in my throat he frowned, turned and swam back toward his den.

Wasting no time and not about to drop our guard we swam toward shore. Gaining the beach we clamored up to John's car bursting with excitement. The two divers who had gone in ahead of us overheard our remarks. They both strode over all dry, dressed, and wearing grins the size of sliced grapefruit.

"So you met Eelane. Isn't she a friendly eel?. We had her eating

right out of our hands with some cockle clams we cracked. She is accustomed to being fed you know. Some fellow was telling us he puts clams in his lips and she'll gently take them and leave his lips behind, ha, ha, ha. You guys were fearing for your body parts, uh?"

The truth slowly sunk into our racing minds. We did confess to thinking we were the meat, and a good belly laugh was had at our expense. We did however agree that feeding an eel from ones mouth was probably asking for trouble.

Knowing a good laugh could be had by everyone in the Park, it did not hurt our feelings to see these two divers depart. I did wish I had thought to ask them how they knew it was a her and not a him. Maybe it is the size of their cheeks.



## Dive Reports

### October Club Dives

*by Scott Boyd*

Mike Fitz called and asked who was diving with us on Friday the 13th? My puzzled reply was, "are we diving? I guess it will just be the two of us then." Imagine my surprise when ten Kelp Krawlers showed up for a night dive at Owens Beach! It seems I had mistakenly copied the club dive from 9/30 to 10/13 on the dive club's online calendar, and much to my surprise, members must be actually reading the calendar! Who would have thought?

We had a very pleasant dive, but no Sixgills showed up to play and it was VERY dark by the time we exited the water. I also had Mike wondering if he was ever going to get to come up to the surface again. You can't say we didn't stay down long enough for the sharks to show up!

The next day, the same group of crazy divers, plus a few extras, met at the Point Defiance boat ramp for a club boat dive to Maury Island Barges and then Sunrise. Two boat loads had a

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nice dive on the barges and then we swung back by the boat launch to pick up a third boat and head over to Sunrise County Park.

We anchored up above the wall at Sunrise and watched the current just ripping past the boats for about an hour. Once I began to notice that the kelp was popping up near shore, we all geared up and splashed in for a night dive on one of the Northwest's premier dive sites. Just as I dropped over the wall, I ran into a white spotted greenling, which I had not seen before. I quickly turned on my camera and had time to turn on only one strobe and snap a quick picture as the fish swam off so I could positively identify the greenling later.

Once all of our divers were in the water, the current abated and we had spectacular visibility dotted by swarms of HID dive lights spread out along the wall. It reminded me of a science fiction movie with an alien invasion and landing zone. Lots of light!

There were at least three octopus dened up, including one very large fellow that was very popular with the divers. There were also at least 7 wolf eels on the site. The sailfin sculpins were out in large numbers, dancing around the bottom with their sinuous swimming movements along with many of our usual rockfish and greenlings.

After a nice 45 minute dive, we headed back up to the anchor line and found that all 3 boats were now huddled up together. It seems that a couple of the boat anchors were dragging while we were diving. Fortunately, the boats were all still there, and we boarded the boat and untangled the anchors and headed back into the bright lights of Tacoma after a wonderful day spent diving on Puget Sound.

The following weekend, pretty much the same group of rather crazy divers launched the boats again from Triton Cove in Hood Canal. The wind was up, but we buzzed down to flagpole point where we anchored the boats so they wouldn't drag in the wind, and then splashed in to dive the Knuckle at Mike's Beach.

We enjoyed the cloud sponges around the base of the knuckle, and I was having a good time photographing them by using an additional, remote strobe positioned to backlight the sponges. It made for an interesting, if unconventional effect.

About half way through the dive, Janet spotted an octopus sitting out in the open, and I went over to take a few pictures. He was quite comical, as he would camouflage himself very well when I approached closely, but as soon as I would start to swim away, he would hunch up, "spy hopping" so he could keep his eyes on me.

We had a great dive, and found both boats exactly where we had left them. Who'd have thought?



### **Sund Rock**

Tuesday, October 24, 2006

*by Steve Griffith*

Today was a great day for diving, so four of us: Steve Griffith, Becky Lundin, Wendy Rude, and Sue Treinen got together for a "One Tanker" at Sund Rock.

Steve & Becky dove Sund Rock North Wall. The water visibility was okay, and there were lots of critters out. We saw Ling cod, Rock fish, crab, lots of small and large anemone, painted greenlings, and tons of star fish. Becky had her camera and got some great shots. This was a "maintenance dive" for both since it had been a while since they'd been diving. All worked out well: Both of them can still suck compressed air out of a steel jug, and maintain some semblance of neutral buoyancy.

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## **DIVE SHOP NEWS:**

### **Capital Divers**

**866-3684**

[www.capitaldivers.com](http://www.capitaldivers.com)

Akumal Cave diving trip November 4 - 15. Nitrox, argon and hyper filtered air fills available.

**Bandito Charters** on Nov 12 and Dec 9.

### **Hood Sport 'n Dive**

**(360) 877-6818**

[www.hoodspordndive.com](http://www.hoodspordndive.com)

The shop has now moved to a new location in Hoodport with convenient boat access. Stop by, say hello and fill up with some nitrox while you wait. Offering discounted access to the **Sund Rock Marine Preserve** for paid members.

### **Underwater Sports**

**493-0322**

[www.underwatersports.com](http://www.underwatersports.com)

The Olympia Shop is now pumping hyper filtered Air. Discounted air cards for Kelp Krawlers: 10 fills for \$25.

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Wendy and Sue dove the South Wall, and reported many of the same sightings. Neither team ran into any Lion's Mane jellyfish, although there were lots of loose tentacles floating around in the water.

It was a great day for a dive! We had the beach to ourselves, and it didn't rain. Who could ask for more?

**Hood Canal Surveys**

John Brown, Janet and Scott Boyd joined Janna Nichols, Gregory Jensen (Crab and Shrimp book author), Nolan and Rhoda on the Down Time for a series of six survey dives on Monday, October 23rd. Dive teams surveyed critters from depths of 100' to 15' to determine how well the different species were surviving the low dissolved oxygen problem in the south end of the canal.

The dive sites surveyed were Arrow Point, Flagpole Point, the new wall at Jorsted Creek, Dewatto, Rosie's Ravine and Pulali Point West. Very few signs of distress were observed, and the dive sites look to be returning to a healthy marine ecosystem once again.

Six dive sites made for a long but rewarding day. Many thanks to Don and Diane Coleman for volunteering their boat and time to check on the health of Hood Canal.



**Oysterfest**

The Kelp Krawlers helped the Aquanuts for another extremely successful Oysterfest. The touch tanks were a huge hit with the public again this year, and there was a very large turnout for the event's 25th Anniversary.

There were lots of informational requests generated about the dive club and I expect we'll see several new members of the dive club due to the exposure at the festival. Many thanks to all of the members that helped with the critter collection and those manning the touch tanks. This year's signage helped a great deal to keep the critters alive and healthy throughout the event.

**October Meeting Notes**

The dive club was treated to an excellent presentation by Jeff Carr, which covered an overview of the many shipwrecks found in our area. Jeff included wrecks found along Puget Sound, in Lake Washington as well as a few off of the coast of Oregon.

Jeff is an excellent source of information for you wreck divers, and I hope we see him frequently at our meetings.

Jeff Williams has not had time to work on the new logo due to the loss of several employees. The club decided to wait until he has time to finish the project rather than hiring someone else.

The **Christmas Party** will be held at the **Steamboat Island Grange on December 16th**. Photo Contest entries were due by midnight on Halloween, and participation was very low. We had entries from only five photographers. Winning entries should be announced at the November dive club meeting, and the top photos will be auctioned off at the Christmas Party as a fund raiser for the dive club.

**Members Present:** Jeff Hamilton, Becky Lundin, Alan and Ingrid Niles, Andy Mohrle, Wayne Campbell, Colleen Symmons and Dave Miller, Stephen B. Morrison, Michael Fitz, John Brown and Amy Kurtenbach, Lloyd Moran, Jeff Carr, Steve Sutton, Paul Jeffers, Scott and Janet Boyd

**Upcoming Trips:**

**Akumal** Cave/Cavern Diving. Nov. 4 - 15th, contact Wayne.

**Sulawesi** trip, Jan. 10-23, contact Bonnie Smith.

**Dominica** trip - Feb. 3 - 10, contact Steve or Carolyn Fornoff.

**Membership**

There are currently 72 members in the dive club. Many new members have joined the dive club recently, so be sure to say hello and introduce yourself at the next meeting. A large number of the new members have sent in applications via the Kelp Krawler web site, which appears to be very helpful to new members.

**Calendar of Events**

- Nov 21st** Club Meeting, 7:00 PM, Dirty Dave's Pizza Parlor. Election of new Dive Club Officers.
- Dec 16th** Christmas Party at the Steamboat Island Grange.
- Jan 1st** New Year's Dive, Sund Rock, 10 AM.