

# KELP KRAWLERS DIVE CLUB

September 2005

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## *Inside this issue:*

August Dive Reports	2
August Meeting Notes	2
September Speaker	2
Sturgeon Poacher	3
Dive Shop News	3
Contact List	4
Calendar of Events	4

## **Cave Diving In The Riviera Maya**

by Scott Boyd

If there is one place in the world that offers the “perfect” ingredients for safe and enjoyable cave diving, it is the Caribbean coast of Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. Located between the resort city of Playa del Carmen and the Mayan village of Tulum, lies a gold mine of underground streams slowly draining into the sea, which represents the type of underwater caves that appeal the most to both the recreational cave diver and the serious cave explorer seeking new passageways.

Tani Iwashita and I just returned from a marvelous two week cave diving adventure in Mexico. Week one was spent in intensive training that taught us the skills we need to not only survive, but thrive in the underwater cave environment. Week two was spent enjoying the stunningly beautiful cave systems with daily dives that honed our skills as cave divers.

Cave diving along the Yucatan coast was discovered during the mid 1980s. It was then that exploration began in the first cenotes (meaning “natural well”). It is now estimated that over **2 million feet** or the equivalent of **380 miles** - have been explored and surveyed involving hundreds of various cenotes amongst **75 plus cave systems**.

The total number of these liquid blue windows to the shallow aquifer below is unknown. A low canopy of dense tropical jungle hides the entrances, and with very few roads or trails established, accessibility is limited and sometimes very difficult. This insures a nearly endless future of finding more cenotes and new cave systems to explore. A cave diver's dream come true!

For the last day of our training, Mike (our Cave Instructor) had been saving something “special” for us. His evil smile whenever he referred to our “graduation dive” had us all a bit worried. When day seven finally rolled around, we loaded up our gear and headed out to Chac Mool to play in the Haloclines once again. Entering through the side entrance, we ran a primary reel through a restriction and joined the gold line from another cenote. We traveled just a short distance, and then jumped straight down to about 45’ of depth to a line hidden in the Halocline. We followed that line into a long, tight restriction that had me won-

dering, “are we really going in there?” After emerging from the far end of the restriction (~80’ long), the fun began. Mike pointed to me and indicated that I was out of air, so I quickly spit out my regulator and swam to Tani to share air. Once sorted out and ready to exit, Mike told us to cut all of our lights (which we basically did on every exit during training). In the dark, we moved into touch contact and began exiting the cave through the long restriction, in the dark. Are we having fun yet?

## *Genote Entrance*



After banging our heads and tanks a few times during the exit, we made it out of the cave safely, in less time than it took to enter, so we “**survived**” once again. It was so much fun, that Mike decided we should do it all again, with our “third” student being out of air. This time we made it out even quicker, and Mike congratulated Tani and I on completing our Cave Training (and surviving every in-water exercise). Our third student was instructed to complete more dives with the instructor before he would be issued a card.

As a treat for our post graduation dives, I was very privileged to be allowed to view one of the most beautiful and highly decorated underwater rooms in Mexico. Entering through a Cenote known as “Car Wash” where taxi drivers once stopped to wash their cars, we traveled past the “chamber of horrors” and Cenote “luke’s hope” to about 850’ of penetration. When Bernie (my cave guide) asked for my jump reel, I was looking around, thinking, “where in the heck are we going to go?” She then dropped through this tiny hole in the floor, into a small room that looked like a dead end, but if you belly crawl to the back of the room, you could just make it under the wall and up into a series of very tight restrictions.

*Continued on Page 2*

*Continued from page 1*

After passing the crystal palace, and penetrating through another 200' of restrictions, the right side of the room suddenly opens up in the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. The room is named the "room of tears" after it was said to bring tears to the eyes of the explorer that found it, due to its incredible beauty. I have to concur. It took my breath away, and I floated in awe for many minutes in the center of the space, just trying to wrap my mind around the incredible beauty that I was seeing.



The Riviera Maya is easy to get to, and relatively inexpensive. Diving the Cenotes there should definitely be on your "must see" dive list. Several local divers visit there at least once a year and I would encourage you to take the time to join them and see for yourself just how splendid Mother Nature can really be. Be forewarned though that when you reach the end of the daylight zone in the Cavern, and see the Cave Warning sign admonishing you not to enter unless cave trained, that you may well be like me, wondering what lies beyond the sign. Then you may soon find yourself back down there, floating a half-mile back into a stunning underwater cave system and at peace with the world.

## Dive Reports

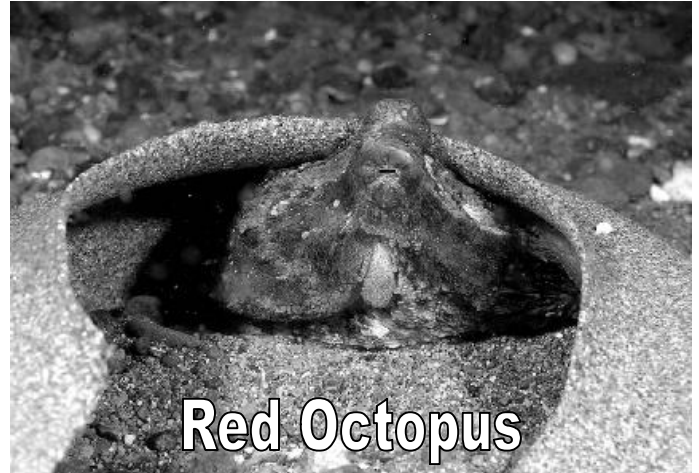
by Scott Boyd

Club Dive at **Owen Beach**, Sunday July 31st. **Fifteen** intrepid divers braved the searing heat and crowds of Owen Beach at Point Defiance park for a Sunday evening dive in search of the elusive Sixgill shark. Visibility was just a little too good, and conditions just a bit too bright for the Sharks to make an appearance, but we had a great dive. The divers gathered in the water in front of the covered picnic area for a quick dive briefing, which included introduction of a diver all of the way from Australia.

Upon descent, we headed down slope to about 95 feet of depth and turned West for the short swim to the barge. Once at the barge, the photographers had a great time, with numerous subjects, I checked on the many residents that I see there every dive, including a couple of Octopus, Sailfin Sculpins, Grunt Sculpins

and a couple of very cute gunnels.

After about 25 minutes at depth, it was time to head back up the slope, and we were rewarded with many fine sites as we slowly decompressed our way back to the surface. These included the Sturgeon Poachers that I frequently see here and a little red octopus that was hiding in some moon snail eggs.



## August Meeting Notes

Jamie opened the meeting with a reminder that Oysterfest is right around the corner on October 1,2, 3rd. Wayne reported about \$333 in the treasury.

**Janna Nichols and Wes Nicholson** gave an awesome and educational presentation on fish and invertebrate identification. They also went over Reef fish surveying and how we can get involved and help by doing Reef surveys on our dives.

Meeting Attendees: **Rodger Gomez, Wayne Campbell, Don and Jenica Noviello, John Brown, Debbie and Duane Hamrick, John Capriano, Janet and Scott Boyd, Becky Lundin, Janna Nichols, Wes Nicholson, Carolyn and Steve Fornoff, Hobe Pannkuk, Jamie Welsh, Todd and Rebecca Hazelett, Steve Griffith, Laura Schleyer, Tani Iwashita, and Bob Richart.**

## September Dive Club Meeting

**Dr. Roland Anderson**, from the Seattle Aquarium, will discuss our favorite, the **Giant Pacific Octopus** and the 2005 Octopus Census Results. September 20th, 7:00 PM at Dirty Dave's.

**Roland** has studied **Octopus** for many years at the Aquarium and is considered one of the foremost experts in the world on their behavior. If anyone can answer your questions about Octopus, then Roland is your man. He's also a very entertaining and informative speaker, so don't miss out!

**Octoberfest** starts in a few weeks, so be prepared to sign up to help the Aquanuts with this fun festival in **Shelton!**

**Sturgeon Poacher***Agonus acipenserinus*  
by Scott Boyd

One of the odder looking fish that Pacific Northwest divers will encounter is the **Sturgeon Poacher** (*Agonus acipenserinus*), which can grow up to 12 inches in length, they have a slender, tapering body that is covered with scales that are actually modified bony plates. Found from Northern California to the Bering Sea in Alaska, in shallow waters to depths of about 200', these fish have very small mouths, that are surrounded by clumps of cirri.



These **cirri** actually contain their **taste buds** which are used to grovel through the sand and silt bottoms it prefers to inhabit in search of a tasty shrimp or other very small invertebrate. Poachers are very slow moving, and although easily startled, will typically only move off a short distance before settling again to the bottom. This makes them a good subject for macro photography.

These fish are fairly common in Puget Sound, and I see them frequently at Fox Island, Owen Beach and Les Davis. Keep your eyes open in the shallows as you are hanging out on your safety stop and you will often be rewarded with the sight of one of our many poacher species.

The sturgeon poacher has a very rigid and inflexible body that causes it to swim with a sculling motion of its pectoral fins, while dragging its body like a rudder. It is rather ungainly to watch, but they are cute in their own way. It is thought that this fish spawns in the Spring, but other than that, very little is known about this remarkable critter.



There is no commercial or sport fishery for this species as there really isn't enough meat on them to make it worth a fisherman's efforts. That, along with the very small mouth these fish have makes them a very unlikely catch, so most of our local fisherman never even know this fish exists in our lush waters.

**DIVE SHOP NEWS:****Capital Divers****866-3684****[www.capitaldivers.com](http://www.capitaldivers.com)**

**Palau** trip on the Palau Aggressor June 25-July 2 2006 (still 2 spots left). **Akumal, Mexico** trip November 6th through 17th. Nitrox, argon and hyper filtered air fills available.

**Bandito Charters** on **Saturday, Sept 24th**, Oct 23rd, Nov 19th and Dec 18th.

**Hood Sport 'n Dive****(360) 877-6818****[www.hoodspordndive.com](http://www.hoodspordndive.com)**

The shop is now pumping nitrox while you wait, trimix, deco gases, and argon. Also, they are offering discounted access to the **Sund Rock Marine Preserve** for paid members of the Kelp Krawlers dive club.

**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.

**Blue Diamond Dive Tours****(360)426-1267****[BlueDiamondDiver@aol.com](mailto:BlueDiamondDiver@aol.com)**

**Bonaire Trip** at the Sand Dollar Beach Resort November 5-13.

**Port Hardy Trip** with Sun Fun Divers. - Sept. 22-26. Three days of diving (9/23-25). We'll leave Olympia on Thursday, Sept. 22 and return Monday, Sept. 26. Contact **Don Chase**.

**Dive Safe and Play Nice!!!!**