

Diving Monterey, California

By Mike Ault 2008

I recently got the chance to dive Point Lobos which is near Monterey, California. Monterey diving is cold water diving with the water temperature rarely above 60 degrees. I believe it is the Californian Current that sweeps down the coast from Alaska and points north that, while providing lots of nutrient rich water, also keeps the water temperature chilly. I only got a few odd looks for packing a drysuit along with my Oracle conference stuff (the Oracle Open World 2008 conference was held in San Francisco the week after my dives.)

My wife, my self, Dan Norris, Bill Wagman, Erik Peterson, Mogens Norgaard and his entourage from Denmark all decided to dive right before the conference so we all (except Bill and Erik who live near by) flew in Friday and stayed in Monterey so we could get up and meet the dive boat at about 8:30am on Saturday. We met Captain Mary Jo Nelson and her husband Glen (Pacific Coast Scuba) and dropped our gear off, that is, except for our exposure gear and fins. We actually met Captain Mary Jo carrying sandwiches and a plate of homemade cookies she had made the night before in the parking lot near the Fisherman's Warf in Monterey as she was provisioning the boat. Let me ask, how many dive boat captains fix fresh chocolate chip cookies for their divers?



Mogens and his entourage and Erik



Dan, Bill, Susan and I

Why, might you ask, did we have to drop our gear off, and yet keep our exposure suits and fins? Why did we not just ride the boat to the Point Lobos dive site? Well, divers are not allowed to arrive by boat in the Point Lobos reserve, only 45 divers are allowed in there per day and you have to enter through the front gate. So we dropped our gear on the boat, drove to Point Lobos and paid the ten dollar per car entry fee, then donned our exposure suits and fins and swam out to the boat when it arrived, an interesting start to a fun day of diving to say the least.

We couldn't have asked for a better day, it started a little overcast but warm, but by the third dive the sun was out and it actually started to get hot. The seas only had 2-3 foot swells and no one got seasick.

We started with a great dive briefing from Glen using side-scan sonar color charts of the bottom showing us exactly what the bottom looked like. After a short transit we anchored at the Bluefish Hole dive site and everyone got in. Unfortunately Susan (my wonderful wife) didn't get a well fitted rental suit and had to call the first dive before she really got started, her lips were blue before she even submerged! The rest of us were ok, except Mogens had to return to the surface with ear clearing problems.

The first dive went down to a maximum of 80 feet with an average of 56 feet and showed a near perfect square profile. Where we anchored there was quite a bit of kelp but once we got below the surface I found it easy to maneuver through as long as you paid attention and were careful. The water was a uniform 56-55 degrees top to bottom, I was sure glad for my drysuit! My only issue on the first dive was that I was using a low volume, non-purging mask and had issues with it flooding, I think my constant clearing of the mask caused my hood to inflate which then unseated the mask, a real vicious circle that left me swallowing a slow trickle of water that came in the lower edge of my mask and up my nose! Who needs a netti pot?



Into the kelp

The bottom was sand with rock outcroppings. The kelp grew from any rock it could anchor to and the rocks were covered with coral and anemones where there wasn't kelp growing.



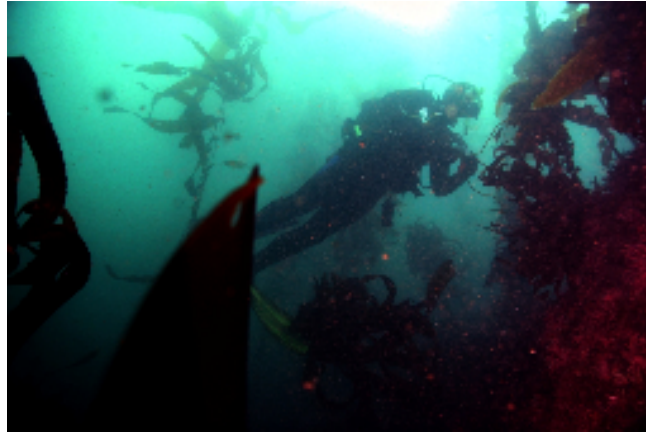
Lot's of kelp and other life

We were really hoping to catch a glimpse of a sea otter or seal but none wanted to come and play. Dan saw a 3-4 foot Leopard Shark but the rest of us had to content ourselves with the usual small fish, Kelp, multi-colored anemones and crabs. The water was thick with Krill (small shrimp) making it difficult to get good wide angle shots, I was only using my 17X85mm lens so please forgive the Krill backscatter in some of the images.



One of the Kelp Residents

During the surface interval we did a little shallow diving in Whaler's Cove going only to a depth of 35 feet with an average of 24 to allow Mogens to try to get his ears to clear properly. Visibility ranged from 10 feet in the midst of the Krill to more than 30 feet in "clear" water. It reminded me of diving in Barracuda Alley in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina only 25 degrees colder!



Kelp in the Shallows

For our final dive (everyone but Dan's, he did two more that afternoon) last dive we moved further out into Whaler's cove and dove down to about 77 feet with an average of 56 feet, almost a parallel to our first dive. One thing I noticed about the dives in general was that there were more of the sunburst anemones and they were of a greater size than I had seen on any previous dive. On all the dives there was also a bit of surge that made picture taking a challenge almost as much as the Krill did. I had hired a DM for my wife as she likes to have one around in unfamiliar dive areas, but since she couldn't dive I let him guide me around the dive sites. My only complaint was that folks don't appreciate how long a photographer needs to compose and take a shot so I always felt a bit rushed.



Bob the DM

Coming back to the boat from the end of the third dive we saw two real colorful anemones so I took them as a last shot.

Even after three dives in 55 degree water I was still comfortable in my Bare NextGen bilaminate and Bare provided undergarment. Some of the other divers (wearing thick pile polartec under suits and crushed neoprene suits) complained they were getting cold after the third dive. I guess I can chalk it up to my Midwest upbringing and cold winters...or maybe it's my extra layer of seal-like insulation.



Technicolor Anemones

All in all even with the mask issues and Krill visibility issues I had a great time and look forward to diving Monterey and Point Lobos again in the future...let's see...two Oracle conferences in the Monterey area next year...sounds like a plan!



Glen, Susan, Captain Mary Jo, Me and in the back Bob on the Beach Hopper II