

Symbiosis: Moorings and Divers



by Janice Raber

Webster's New World Dictionary describes symbiosis as the living together of two different kinds of organisms to their mutual advantage, a term that scuba divers are familiar with since there are several species of fish that cohabitate in that kind of relationship. In the Caribbean there are groupers that will hover in a special, protected area of coral with their mouths wide open and allow tiny cleaner shrimp to crawl in and out of their mouths picking tidbits off their teeth. Often there is another grouper lingering nearby, sort of like waiting at a car wash.

In Greenport, LI, there is a dive site well known to divers as "Secret Beach." Not really a secret at all, it has been a popular site for more than 30 years. The Village of Greenport and the rest of the world identify it as Clarks Beach, an undeveloped bluff with a pathway wide enough for vehicles that leads down to a boulder-strewn beach along Long Island Sound. It is probably the most ideal site for scuba training on the North Shore of Long Island because it reaches a depth of over 20 feet within just a short swim from shore. The enormous boulders above and below the water, debris left from the glacial years of the island's development, provide a habitat for a varied assortment of marine life. The current is manageable. A submerged outflow pipe heading in a northerly direction provides a simple navigation aide for beginning divers. All in all, the conditions offer a grand opportunity for basic open water training to rescue training, underwater photography and marine science.



L to R - Chris Skirbe, Bob Marconi, Jan Raber, Kevin Yachnik, Jeff Sapirstein, Lou Wollner, Barry Lipsky is kneeling, Bob Auteri, Steve Burke, Jeff Hirschman, Linda Brown. Missing from photo is Frank Blasco.

tional training by various scuba shops. Annual beach cleanups, pre-organized as well as unofficial, spur-of-the-moment types have been the norm. In an effort to maintain this relationship and continue to have permission to use the beach site, President Steve Burke and LIDA founding member Bob Auteri met with Mayor Dave Nyce and agreed upon a plan that would benefit both entities, a kind of symbiotic relationship, if you will.

The moorings in Stirling Basin had not been checked for condition for a number of years and last year a boat broke loose during a storm. No one wants that to happen again. Would the LIDA divers be interested in doing an underwater inspection of some moorings? "Can do," agreed President Burke.

So, on a perfect Saturday in May, with air temps in the 70's, water temps in the 50's and a ripple-free water surface in the harbor, a group of divers boarded the Greenport Harbormaster's boat and began checking moorings in 10 to 20 feet of water...a task that is not especially delightful. Bob Auteri gave a briefing on dive conditions and outlined objectives for the dive.

"The divers volunteering today come from all over Long Island and from all walks of life," said Bob Auteri. "We have a boat captain, nurse, lawyer, mechanic, and an electrician among us, to name a few. They have traveled from Northport, Shoreham, Babylon, Bellport, and Hampton Bays."

Barry Lipsky, LIDA member and Coordinator of the Bayport Fire Department Dive Rescue Team was accompanied by four of their divers that are very used to black-water diving. He was delighted to have this opportunity to help LIDA's

effort as well as provide an occasion for them to get in the water for a little unofficial training. "It is important for them to have practice diving in black-water conditions," said Barry.

Frank Blasco from the rescue team was enthusiastic. "I thought it would be a good chance to do a local dive and help out a good cause. I have never dived out here, but it is a beautiful area and I definitely will be back," he added.

Individual divers were dropped off on marked buoys and descended through what appeared to be great vision for about the first six feet to a murky bottom while a bubble watcher remaining on the boat was assigned to keep an eye on each of them until they resurfaced. The diver's observations were recorded by record-keeper

Bob, and then the divers were towed to another buoy. As they descended, before they reached the muck on the bottom, they were able to visualize the condition and whereabouts of the chain or rope connection and perhaps the cement block or mushroom anchor mooring. However, the moment they had to start touching anything, they disturbed the brown stuff and it was instant silt-out, reducing the visibility to zero. The rest of the investigating had to be done by feel.

Just to give you an idea of what a silt-out is like, it is not like turning off a light switch. It is like having a cloud of brown/black particles envelop you in slow motion. It is a darkness you can feel around you as you breathe. It's best to stay still for a few seconds to let your brain adjust

to not seeing and to give your other senses time to take over. From then on you are seeing by touching.

Divers reported digging up to their shoulders as they felt along the chains trying to find the shackles which were sometimes buried underneath the cement block moorings. When each diver surfaced the conversations went something like this:

Diver - "You got chain to the block, big giant concrete block, fully intact." Or - "Chain is wrapped around the block and the block sits on top of it; it does a 360 on the block then disappears underneath. I tried to move it and I

couldn't budge it. It is secure and the shackles are nice and good."

Harbormaster - "How does that chain look down there? Does it feel like it's got plenty of meat to it? That's what I'm really interested in."

The cold water didn't bother anyone, even Jeff Hirschman, who dove in a wetsuit and said,



Joe Angevine, Greenport Harbormaster. Bob Auteri on left.

Scuba divers are desperate to have this property remain public with continued access available to them, but complications with occasional troublesome trespassers have made it necessary for the village to install a chain across the road, blocking access. In fact, a letter-writing campaign initiated by the Long Island Divers Association (LIDA), has been urging Suffolk County to purchase the site from Greenport and make it a county park.

LIDA has always had a good relationship with Greenport Village, having used the site for recreational diving by its members and instruc-



Diver executing backward roll into water.

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Diver about to descend on mooring.

“The water temp is fine, like a bath. You guys in the dry suits are a bunch of sissies. I could stay in all day.”

All in all, 46 moorings were checked and evaluated. Harbormaster Captain Joe Angevine puffed on his cigar while guiding his boat expertly through the maze of boats and moorings in the basin. His seafaring knowledge and weathered face reminded us of Mr. Quint, the captain in the movie “Jaws,” so we were pleased when he appeared to be impressed with the efficiency of the operation saying it was “well-orga-

nized.” There were only a few reports of questionable connections, which added to his satisfaction. Joe has been boating out here since he was eight years old and runs the *Donna Mae*, a charter boat specializing in night striped bass fishing.

After a job well done and a thorough hosing down of their gear, the group lunched in one of Greenport’s trendy restaurants and then headed in different directions, touring the quaint seaside village shops, visiting wineries and picking up homemade pies, fresh vegetables and seasonal flowers at the roadside farm stands along their way home.

Dave Abatelli, Village Administrator, was impressed with the detailed documented report submitted by LIDA and by the professional way we handled the whole operation.

Greenport’s Mayor, Dave Nyce, was thrilled when the divers were able to do this for the village, saying, “The divers come out every year and this seemed like the perfect situation. We look forward to working with you guys again.”

LIDA President Steve Burke looks forward to it too and to the benefit that it affords divers. “This certainly does establish lines of cooperation between the village and LIDA for our mutual benefit,” he said.

Symbiosis – it works!



Diver getting ready to be towed to next mooring.

Sidebar:

Access to Secret Beach can be arranged by contacting LIDA at (631) 327-8924. Appropriate arrangements then will be made with the village for a particular day. LIDA wishes especially to encourage instructors, shops and dive clubs to take advantage of this hard-earned access to an outstanding dive site. Steve also cautions that this limited access is contingent upon keeping it clean and well-managed. For each group, a person will need to be designated as “lead” and be responsible for the group.



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