

***CAYMAN AGGRESSOR
CRUISE***

MAY, 2001

OVERVIEW:

We spent our May, 2001 dive vacation aboard the Cayman Aggressor. This was our first trip aboard an Aggressor boat, and we were not disappointed. The diving was spectacular and the crew, accommodations and food were all outstanding. The only thing that wasn't perfect was the weather – we had overcast to partly sunny skies most of the week, with rain on several days and really sunny days only on Wednesday and Friday.

We flew on Delta from Atlanta directly to Grand Cayman on Saturday morning and took a taxi to the Aggressor. We walked around Georgetown for about an hour and a half until time to board the boat at 2:00. We unpacked our dive gear and our clothes in the afternoon, then met the other guests and crew at the general briefing and dinner on Saturday evening.

Our cruise carried the full complement of 18 divers and 6 crew members. We had a great group of divers and a wonderful crew, and we all enjoyed the week together. The boat's typical daily schedule was breakfast at 7:00; morning briefing at 8:00; diving until 12:15; lunch at 12:30; afternoon briefing at 2:00; diving until 5:45; dinner at 6:00; night diving at 8:00. The crew made it very easy for all of us to follow the Aggressor's motto of "Eat, Sleep & Dive" throughout the week. We dove on 32% Nitrox all week except for the first check-out dive, during which everyone was on air.

All of the divers made it on board Saturday afternoon, so Captain Tom suggested that we attempt the 8-hour crossing to Little Cayman on Saturday night while we had a good window of opportunity. The crossing was pretty rough, ranked as an 8 out of 10 by Tom, and several guests did not fare well throughout the night. Darren and I managed to sleep pretty well, but were awakened several times throughout the night by some big bumps.

We spent Sunday and Monday on Bloody Bay Wall at Little Cayman, then crossed over to Cayman Brac to explore the Russian Destroyer 356 on Tuesday morning. We returned to Little Cayman at lunch on Tuesday and spent the rest of Tuesday and all day Wednesday there. On Wednesday night, we made the crossing back to Grand Cayman (a much smoother ride), where we completed the week. On Thursday, we dove on the northeast side of Grand Cayman in the morning, then visited Stingray City after lunch. We dove the wreck of the Oro Verde on the west end of the island on Thursday afternoon and night. On Friday, we finished the week with two morning dives on the west end.

On Friday afternoon, we cleaned our gear and prepared to leave. Then the crew hosted a farewell party for everyone on Friday evening as we cruised around the bay. On Saturday morning, Kurt took us to the airport and we flew back to Atlanta on Delta's early afternoon flight.

The diving on this trip was very nice, especially on Little Cayman. We really enjoyed the beautiful walls that dropped off into the deep blue. There were nice cuts and swim-throughs at many of the sites, which we thoroughly enjoyed. The sponges and corals on the walls were particularly impressive – some of the largest we have ever seen. The fish life was healthy, but not as abundant as we had expected.

My favorite sites on this trip included Lea Lea's Lookout, Marilyn's Cut and Mixing Bowl on Little Cayman, and Babylon on Grand Cayman. The night dive at Eagle Ray Round-Up was also especially nice. Darren's favorites were the Russian Destroyer and Mixing Bowl.

Parrotfish, damselfish, creole wrasse, groupers and blue chromis were prevalent at most sights; however, we didn't see as many angelfish or squirrelfish as expected. We also saw butterflyfish, trumpetfish, triggerfish, trunkfish, jacks and barracuda on many dives. We found turtles at about half the sites; reef sharks and garden eels at 3-4 sites; two free-swimming green moray eels; and one spotted eagle ray. We also came across two juvenile spotted drums, a white-spotted filefish, and a blue anemone. We saw lots of arrow crabs, brittle stars, and red shrimp at night as well as some lobsters and crabs, but never found an octopus or a squid.

The Cayman Aggressor crew was absolutely first rate – they were all willing to help guests in any way and seemed to thoroughly enjoy being there. Captain Tom did a great job piloting the boat and keeping everyone happy. Chef Johann was an excellent cook who made every meal a treat. Michelle did a super job helping Johann with the food and keeping our cabins neat and clean. Kurt the engineer kept everything in good working order and also produced an excellent trip video. Dive masters Randy and Steve were very knowledgeable about all the sites and made sure everything ran smoothly on the dive deck. Steve was also a wonderful photo expert who offered lots of good advice on lenses and settings for my Nikonos rental camera set-up and never tired of changing film and lenses for me.

The guests on board all got along very well so we had a great week together. Among the guests we got to know were Bill, a 75-year old man from Myrtle Beach who had undergone knee replacement surgery in March; Debbie from Syracuse, who buddied with us on several dives; R.J., Max, Lori and Michael from the L.A. area; Vince and his nephew Joe from New England; and Jeff & Sharon and Dave and Mike from Illinois. We had fun sharing our experiences on this trip as well as hearing out everyone's previous dive experiences and future dive plans.

DAILY REPORTS:

On Sunday morning we woke up moored at Randy's Gazebo on Bloody Bay Wall. The sky was overcast during the first dive, but mostly sunny for the second dive. We saw lots of common reef fish here and two huge lobsters roaming about. We also spotted two multi-colored white-spotted filefish and a free-swimming green moray on the second dive. On both dives, we encountered a medium-sized turtle. Pretty lavender vase sponges were abundant along the wall here.

Our afternoon and night dives were conducted at a site known as Bus Stop – a site in the Jackson's Bay area of Bloody Bay with a mini-wall running parallel to the main wall and a sandy bottom between the two. Here we saw two sharks in the sand flat just under the boat who came in pretty close to us and stayed around for a good while. Also in the sand flat were a stingray, a turtle and a large group of garden eels. The weather turned cloudy again by late afternoon and we made our second afternoon dive in light rain.

The night dive here was all right. We found a few lobsters, lots of brittle stars and numerous arrow crabs hanging out on the purple sea fans.

The dive site for Monday morning was Lea Lea's Lookout. The wall here was spectacular – very colorful and full of large corals and sponges. The barrel sponges along the wall were especially dramatic. Darren deemed this "high-voltage diving" despite the overcast skies and light rain. There were some really nice cuts and a neat swim-through at this site. We encountered lots of fish life along the wall and on top of the reef, including a large porcupinefish and a turtle who was busy eating.

For our afternoon and night dives, we moored at Eagle Ray Round-Up. Unfortunately, the weather was uncooperative and the rain and wind made us quite cold after the first dive, so we didn't go in for a second afternoon dive. We dove along the wall, then spent a good bit of time exploring in the sand shallows and coral heads. We saw garden eels here, as well as French angelfish and other common reef fish.

The night dive here was really neat – one of our favorites of the entire week. We swam around in the shallows for a while, then Darren led us through a deep cut out onto the wall. We found numerous lobsters, arrow crabs, red shrimp, sea urchins, brittle stars and basket stars here.

On Tuesday morning during breakfast we motored over to Cayman Brac to dive the Russian Destroyer #356. The Cayman Islands government bought this boat, which had been stationed in Cuba during the Cold War, and sunk it here about five years ago. The boat was in two pieces, but still in very good condition, and we ventured into some of the larger compartments. We had fun exploring it and seeing the French and queen angelfish, parrotfish, and other reef fish who made this wreck their home. The weather was again rainy and cold, and I didn't opt for the second dive. However Darren went in again with Randy, who led him through all the nooks and crannies of the vessel, and he had a great time.

During lunch, we made our way back to Little Cayman and moored at The Meadows. The sky was still cloudy but the wind had died down so it was much warmer. This wall featured beautiful large sponges and corals. During the first dive, we encountered a very friendly grouper who insisted on being petted. On the second dive, we saw an eagle ray in the sand flats and a reef shark swimming along the wall.

The night dive here was all right. The most remarkable thing was the abundance of red shrimp – their eyes glowed red everywhere.

Wednesday was the best day of weather all week – a warm, sunny day. For the morning dives we moored at Marilyn's Cut on Bloody Bay Wall. There was a really neat swim-through at about 20 feet which led out onto the wall. Gorgeous lavender vase sponges and yellow tube sponges grew all along with wall, and we saw plenty of fish, including raccoon and banded butterflyfish. For the second dive we swam down to The Mixing Bowl, where the Little Cayman Diver was moored. There was a really nice swim-through from the wall into the site, which was characterized by lots of color and life. Schools of grunts were swimming around among the coral. Kurt was waiting here by a stingray with his video camera so Debbie and I swam by and petted the ray for the video.

Our afternoon dives were conducted at Joy's Joy – a spur and groove formation that was not as breath-taking as the typical wall dives. The second dive of the afternoon was pretty neat, though, as we found a very tiny juvenile drum (who may have been eaten by a fish while we were watching) and a slightly larger one nearby. We also found three hermit crabs but none would come out of their shells to let me get a macro shot. There was no night dive, as we crossed back over to Grand Cayman.

On Thursday morning, we dove at Babylon on the northeastern side of Grand Cayman. This was one of my favorite sites – a very pretty wall with a beautiful pinnacle just feet away from the wall. The sponges and black coral growing between the wall and the pinnacle produced spectacular views and wide angle shots. The visibility here was not terrific, but the black coral and the geographic formations made up for it.

After lunch, we did the famous Stingray City experience. About 15 divers from our boat went into the 15-foot deep water and fed the rays pieces of squid which Randy distributed. The dozen or so rays were relentless in bumping into divers and swimming around and on top of everyone in order to get their treats. They were extremely friendly, and their undersides were very smooth and velvety-feeling.

We did our late afternoon and night dives on the wreck of the Oro Verde on the west end. This was a beat-up wreck with limited visibility and not a lot of life, so it was not among our favorite dives. We did see our only spotted eel of the trip poking his head up through the sand, as well as another green moray. We saw a slipper lobster on the night dive.

Friday was our last dive day and we had only two morning dives. The first dive was at a site called Big Tunnels. The skies were sunny and the weather was warm, but the seas were quite choppy here. This was a pretty site with lots of cuts and some neat life. In particular, there were a number of yellow feather stars and the only blue anemone I have ever seen. We also spotted a turtle, several trumpetfish and queen angelfish.

Our last dive was at Devil's Grotto, a site located very near the pier in Georgetown. This was a shallow but nice site with numerous swim-throughs and neat formations among shallow coral fingers. There were lots of reef fish here, though they were generally smaller than the ones encountered further out. One neat sighting was a rather large school of blue tangs moving from coral head to coral head for their morning feeding.

DIVE LOG:

SUNDAY, 5-20-01

RANDY'S GAZEBO (BLOODY BAY WALL)

8:45 a.m. 81°F 31 min. 66 ft.

Abundant sponges and fish; turtle, two huge lobsters, free-swimming green moray; white-spotted filefish.

10:30 a.m. 81°F 39 min. 97 ft.

BUS STOP (BLOODY BAY WALL)

2:15 p.m. 81°F 47 min. 74 ft.

Pretty dive. Two sharks, stingray, garden eels, turtle.

4:30 p.m. 81°F 42 min. 70 ft.

7:45 p.m. 79°F 40 min. 41 ft.

Lobsters, numerous brittle stars and arrow crabs.

MONDAY, 5-21-01

LEA LEA'S LOOKOUT (BLOODY BAY WALL)

8:30 a.m. 79°F 36 min. 91 ft.

Beautiful dive with nice swim-through; turtle grazing, large grouper, lobster, huge barrel sponges.

10:45 a.m. 81°F 34 min. 104 ft.

Lots of fish life including porcupinefish and many common reef fish.

EAGLE RAY ROUND-UP (BLOODY BAY WALL)

2:15 p.m. 80°F 42 min. 77 ft.

Nice wall with coral heads in sandy shallows; large sponges, garden eels, French angelfish, lots of reef fish.

7:45 p.m. 79°F 39 min. 59 ft.

Lobsters, arrow crabs, brittle stars, basket stars, red shrimp.

TUESDAY, 5-22-01

RUSSIAN DESTROYER 356 (CAYMAN BRAC)

8:30 a.m. 75°F 37 min. 83 ft.

Neat wreck; trunkfish, French and queen angelfish, parrotfish, lots of small fish. Interior fun and easy to explore.

THE MEADOWS (BLOODY BAY WALL)

2:15 p.m. 81°F 41 min. 87 ft.

Nice wall dive with lots of fish, including grouper that we petted.

4:45 p.m. 78°F 41 min. 91 ft.

Eagle ray swimming in sandy shallows, reef shark along wall.

7:45 p.m. 79°F 45 min. 79 ft.

Not a lot of life to be seen.

WEDNESDAY, 5-23-01

MARILYN'S CUT (BLOODY BAY WALL)

8:15 a.m. 81°F 45 min. 93 ft.

Very pretty dive with neat swim-through from cut to wall; lots of pretty sponges on wall, many small fish.

MIXING BOWL (BLOODY BAY WALL)

10:30 a.m. 81°F 43 min. 84 ft.

Lots of life and color; schools of grunts; shark along wall.

JOY'S JOY (BLOODY BAY WALL)

2:15 p.m. 81°F 39 min. 88 ft.

Spur and groove site; limited amount of life; green moray in coral head.

4:30 p.m. 81°F 37 min. 84 ft.

Pretty dive; juvenile drums, arrow crabs, hermit crabs, friendly turtle.

THURSDAY, 5-24-01

BABYLON (NORTH SIDE – GRAND CAYMAN)

8:15 a.m. 81°F 36 min. 86 ft.

Beautiful wall and pinnacle; lots of large sponges and corals.

10:30 a.m. 81°F 32 min. 90 ft.

STINGRAY CITY

1:45 a.m. 83°F 20 min. 13 ft.

Fun dive with about twelve hungry, aggressive rays.

ORO VERDE (GRAND CAYMAN – WEST END)

4:15 p.m. 82°F 40 min. 51 ft.

Shallow wrecked wreck; spotted moray, green moray, limited fish.

8:00 p.m. 81°F 38 min. 50 ft.

FRIDAY, 5-25-01

BIG TUNNELS (GRAND CAYMAN – WEST END)

8:15 a.m. 82°F 35 min. 106 ft.

Nice dive under mostly sunny skies but choppy seas; pretty site with lots of cuts and tunnels through reef fingers; blue anemone, queen angelfish, turtle.

DEVIL'S GROTTO (GRAND CAYMAN – WEST END)

10:20 a.m. 82°F 43 min. 42 ft.

Pretty dive with interesting formations in multiple swim-throughs; lots of juvenile/smaller fish including school of feeding blue tangs, parrotfish, rock beauties, damselfish, etc.