

Brothers Wreck Special



28th June to 5th July 2008

with

Mike Ward



Aboard Typhoon,
with

Sergio and Shaun

Tony Backhouse Scuba Travel
www.scuba.co.uk

Sharm in late June is hot and humid, especially when you arrive from chilly Gatwick, and it's a relief to climb aboard Typhoon and into an air-conditioned saloon with a cool welcome drink. Typhoon was berthed next to Whirlwind at the dock of the International Marina, and we were due to stay together on a Brothers Wreck Special throughout the week.

It was an even bigger relief to find out that the wind was much lighter than the pilot of our inbound flight had cheerfully announced. We were due to head south to the Brothers and high winds would have made that too uncomfortable to be practicable. The boats would have been fine, but how many of us would have felt like diving is another thing entirely.

Early the next morning both boats cast off, heading out to the Alternatives for the check dive. Check dives are a necessity, and some regard them as an irritation, but they're a dive in the Red Sea and you never know what you might see. Besides that, the expressions on the faces of Red Sea newcomers when they surface after that first dive are just great.



Entering the water for the check dive

Crossing over to Abu Nuhas was a little bit lumpy (All right, a lot lumpy), and the

second dive for our now mal de mer-depleted company was Chrisoula K.

As we kitted up Anne-Marie was already feeling the same way about her wetsuit as I do about mine - it might be necessary, but it's not a pleasure struggling into damp neoprene four times a day.



Zodiac ride across the face of Abu Nuhas

CK's been showing signs of collapse for some time now, and the access to the rear of the hull is starting to look just a little scary. The decking above is loose, and sways up and down in the current by a good four feet. The actual entry point is further under the plate, and probably out of any real danger of collapse, but you'll need

to make your own mind up the next time you dive her. Good news for me was that the vis in the little machine shop was superb, and I managed some nice available light shots.



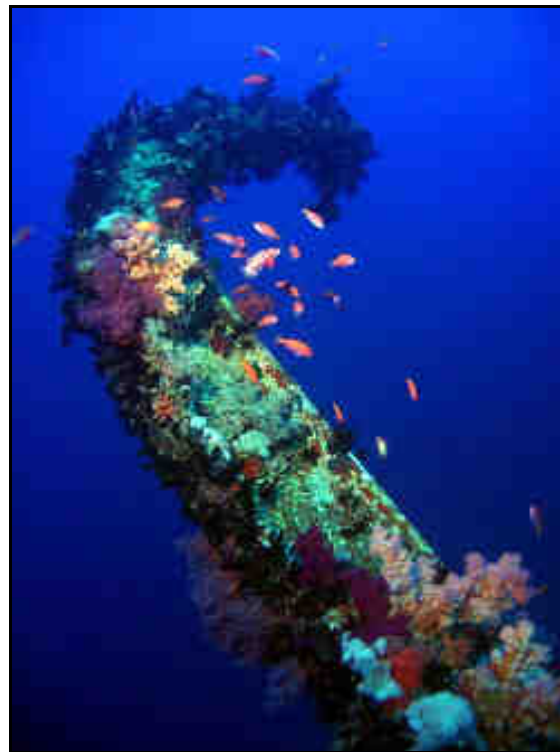
Machine shop on Chrisoula K

(Which reminds me, I used a compact camera this week, I'm in the process of writing a book on digital underwater photography specifically aimed at compact users, and needed the pictures.)

Next up was Carnatic, and she hasn't changed a bit. The grand old lady of Red Sea wrecks was as colourful and fascinating as ever, and should be in good nick for a long time to come. Iron survives salt-water immersion far better than steel, so Carnatic will be there long after

Chrisoula K is nothing but a memory in the minds of our generation of divers.

Then it was time for the big steam, eight hours south to the Brothers, and thank goodness for that northerly wind. It was blowing strongly, but from directly behind and our trip was relatively smooth and comfortable.



Lifeboat davit on Aida

First dive of Day Two was Aida, the original Red Sea lighthouse supply vessel, sunk in the Second World War, raised and put back to work only to strike the rocks whilst delivering supplies in 1957. She was of special interest to one of our guests this week, Ron Failla. His great-grandfather had been her first Chief Engineer. It's great to meet people with a personal connection like this.

Then it was on to Numidia. She truly is an astonishing sight, completely encrusted in corals and full of busy fish on the outside, but an intact freighter inside. At least, two thirds of one, the forward third of the ship is shattered and broken in the shallows



Sunset over Big Brother

Both these dives ended with a drift down the west face of Big Brother, and it's amazing just how much wreckage is scattered along the reef, though there's no telling if it came from Aida, Numidia or some other wreck. There are certainly stories of other wreckings in these waters.

Allegedly, however, the Brothers are about more than wrecks, so our third dive was on



Hammerhead – but not much of a picture, he was too far out in the blue!

the eastern face of Big Brother to see hammerheads and grey reef sharks, and our first two dives of Day Three were on each side of Little Brother to see the colours and the marine life. Apparently some people

travel all the way out to the Brothers just to look at the fish and stuff.....

Anyhow, then it was time to cross back to the Egyptian coast to finish the day on the

wreck of a ferry back near Safaga. Not the Salem Express, but the Al Kahfein, which went down in November 2005 following an onboard fire.

Al Kahfein



She started her career as a Belfast to Liverpool ferry and was sold on and eventually renamed Poseidonia before ending up in Egyptian waters as Al Khafein, though not for long. She was steaming south from Suez to Jeddah with a small crew but no passengers aboard when an explosion in her engine room and the subsequent fire caused her to be evacuated. Careering south, un-manned and out of control, she could have struck anywhere, but chose to sink very conveniently opposite the overnight mooring we usually use on the Brothers itinerary.

Hamada, Typhoon's skipper, put us on the wreck, but was very concerned that people stay outside as she's possibly still unstable. She'll certainly be structurally unsound after the fire, and may not have finally come to rest on the sea-bed, though she seemed solid enough.

She's certainly big, and I'm looking forward to diving her again.

Day Four was Salem Express to start, and her rear door has been opened and

removed by hammering the pins from her hinges to leave her interior gaping open.



Looking out through the stern loading-door of Salem Express

No penetration is the rule, but there seemed no harm in quick look. After all, this wasn't an accommodation area and would most likely have been deserted when she sank.

It probably was, but the clothes trailing from opened suitcases, the scattered shoes and the children's toys mixed among the other goods are more than enough to remind anyone of how raw and recent and huge a tragedy this was.

I didn't linger.



Fish shoaling beside Salem Express

We were on our way back north, so next up was El Miniya, just outside Hurghada, and the first tantalising glimpse of another new wreck a little way off her. Credit goes to Shaun, one of our two dive guides for the week, diving with Ron. More soon.....

Our overnight stop was Gubal, and we got there in time to dive Ulysses. Roger and I toured the wreck then found our way up the reef and spent the last thirty minutes of the dive in four metres of water in the most beautiful aquarium imaginable, barely needing to fin in the still water. If you want to watch fish, that's the way to do it!

Day Five started with Rosalie Moller and ended with Thistlegorm, and had Kingston sandwiched in the middle.

Rosalie Moller is, I humbly submit, the best wreck in the North red Sea, though Sergio, our other dive guide, insists that the Umbria in Sudan is even better.

The after mast has gone over. Not totally, but the four-point cage structure which anchored her to the deck and spread the load has ripped from the welds on the starboard side and the mast now lies very

slightly forward and over at an angle of around 35° to the deck. The velvet fish and flabellina don't seem too worried, but

it's a shame. Otherwise this wreck is much as she ever was; deep, intact and fascinating.



After mast on Rosalie Moller

The crossing back over the channel was thankfully short, but punctuated by some very lively moments. The sort where you fly across the saloon and catch a glimpse out of the windows to see nothing but sky on the one side and sea on the other and wonder exactly what the righting angle of Typhoon is....

When we got to Kingston the water was calm and essentially current free, so Sergio and I dropped in on the south plateau to continue my intermittent search for the aircraft rumoured to be lying there. I'm pretty much convinced it doesn't exist, but you never know. If you're interested it's supposedly a German Dornier in 40m, and we didn't find it this week either.

Thistlegorm seems to be home to just a little more marine life today than she was a year ago. Maybe the diver pressure on her has eased a little, or the new mooring system has had an impact, though there was no sign of it when we tied in.

Bobby and I did the forward section in the afternoon, and on the night dive Roger and I toured her interior.

The following morning Bobby (aka Roberta) asked me to dive with her again, but carefully explained that she didn't much like the idea of wreck-penetration and had no experience of it so couldn't possibly go inside....

Let's just say she's now seen the inside of Thistlegorm and leave it there.



Fan coral, Ras Mohammed

Last dive of the week – and the speed with which the last dive comes around is always astonishing - was Ras Mohammed. It's a reef. Apparently a good reef, though how you tell I have no idea. Kept us amused for an hour, though, and Roger and Naisan

for an extra fifteen minutes. They surfaced inside a gaggle of snorkellers and were a little distracted by the thong-fish.

Back at the International Marina it was post-mortem time, and everyone declared themselves satisfied, happy, fully dived-out and ready to hit the bright lights and fleshpots of Na'ama Bay.

**Thanks for a great week, guys,
and I look forward to seeing you
again sometime,**

Safe diving,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "MIKE WARD". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. Below the name, there is a long, horizontal, sweeping stroke that underlines the signature.

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