

Buddy Line



President's Log Entry

Welcome to our annual Pride issue! If you've visited our booth at SF Pride and are hearing about us for the first time, I hope you like what you see and will join us for the fun, camaraderie, and of course, fantastic diving. The photo below, from our recent trip to Socorro Island, says far more than I ever could about the great trips that NCRD members take together.

At our July meeting, we'll hear lots more about this amazing trip, so I'll hope you'll join us.

At our last meeting, we saw a beautiful video about diving in Wakatobi, Indonesia to decide if we want to dive there—the response was a unanimous “sign me up!” so look for more information in the coming months. Also, Peg Stone gave an inspiring presentation about our upcoming trip to the southern Channel Islands; any-

one who's been is already sold. If you haven't been, be sure to check out Peg's article on our web site.

We're also planning a social event/BBQ in August, so look for more information soon. Have a great summer and Happy Pride!

Doug McGrath, President



This stunning photo, taken by NCRD member, Ralph Wolf, shows a little of our giant manta encounters at Socorro Island. These graceful, elegant creatures interact with divers, coming close and appreciating being touched.

Mantastic!

by Doug McGrath

For as long as I can remember, I've been fascinated by giant mantas. I've always thought that they were one of the most beautiful, graceful, and mysterious creatures on the planet. I have just over 100 dives, but I'd not seen mantas yet...until Socorro Island. The experience was definitely worth the wait!

To be more precise, we visited three islands in the Archipelago de Revillagigedo: Socorro Island, San Benedicto, and Roca Partida. Roca Partida is little more than the remnants of a volcanic core thrusting about the water by a couple hundred feet, but Socorro and San Benedicto Islands have both had volcanic activity within the past few decades.

The islands are about 250 miles southwest of the tip of Baja California, so there's a bit of a boat ride to get there. We were on the beautifully appointed Nautilus Explorer, which is normally our Alaskan boat, but it was wintering in Mexico. Captain Mike takes phenomenal care of his passengers, and we were delighted to be on board again.

We had a full day at sea both directions, but the wait was definitely worth it! For this trip, we had seven NCRD members, two Wallin's divers, a couple from the east, renowned underwater photographer



Just one of many, many close encounters with the breathtaking mantas at Socorro Island. *Photo by David Zippin.*



The NCRD contingent: Larry Chow, Doug McGrath, Karen Doby, Chris Whitney, Paul Duhamel, David Zippin, Ralph Wolf.

Andrew Sallmon, and a group of 10 Brits from Full Circle Expeditions led by Monty Halls, dive author and (self-proclaimed) penniless explorer.

Monty was the on-camera talent for a Discovery Channel documentary that should air this coming October. Between his above—and below-water camera crew and Andy Sallmon, the wealth of photography knowledge on this trip was nothing less than astounding.

Our initial dives were generally enjoyable, but we weren't seeing the big stuff we hoped to. Of course, the sea creatures don't generally acknowledge that we're on a schedule, so we enjoyed the diving and kept hoping for the close-up and personal manta encounters that we'd heard so much about. No fear...

Roca Partida, according to Captain Mike, is not normally a hot zone for mantas; it's the shark spot, but we were due for manta encounters, and we got them in spades. (There were sharks, too.) This island is small enough to circumnavigate in a single dive, and it's a place where the current can be very strong. (We were warned re-

June 2005

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Calendar

- June 26
Pride Weekend
- July 9
Diving at Pt. Lobos
- July 21
General Meeting
Manta Encounters
- August 13
Diving at Pt. Lobos
- August—TBA
Summer Social
- September 10
Diving at Pt. Lobos



The Socorro spiny lobster sports wonderful turquoise markings. *Photo by Karen Doby.*

peatedly about the dangers of “going blue” and ending up swept away from the boat.)

Mantas started joining us on our dives, and because of the extremely good visibility, it was a prime spot for photography. The cover photo was taken in this spot. Once the mantas came to us, they tended to stay until we had to leave. At times, there were two or three at once, and on one dive, we saw as many as five!

At Roca Partida, we also saw many white-tipped reef sharks, a few hammerheads, and one or two Galapagos sharks. There were also a couple of silky sharks that hung out under the boat. The more fearless among the group (not this author) enjoyed the experience of “blue” snorkeling, that is, snorkeling in deep water with no bottom in sight. It was a great opportu-



These crowns of thorns, er, crown of thorns, uhm, crowns of thorn...oh whatever...were spotted from time to time. *Photo by Karen Doby.*

nity to see the silkies, and other pelagic fish such as tuna, jacks, and so on.

On many of our dives, we found lots of little stuff to see—octopus, morays, clarion angels, Moorish idols, hogfish, triggers, and much, much more. We also saw dolphins on occasion.

There is lots more to tell, but I’ll leave that for our July meeting. Don’t miss it—this is definitely a place you’ll want to visit. I’d go back in a heartbeat!



Manta skin is a bit like 80-grit slimy sandpaper. Be sure to stroke them from front to back; even so, raw knuckles are common. *Self-portrait by David Zippin.*



White-tipped reef shark with very friendly lobster (who later crawled over the top of the shark). *Photo by Karen Doby.*



Clarion angelfish are a hallmark of the Sea of Cortez. *Photo by Karen Doby.*



Scorpionfish were a common sight—provided you remember to look before you put your hands down...*Photo by Karen Doby.*

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General Meeting

Thursday, July 21, 7:00

The LGBT Center

San Francisco

At our next general meeting, we'll hear about the amazing manta encounters at Socorro Island.

Location

The San Francisco GLBT Center, 1800 Market Street (@ Octavia)

The Muni Metro lines

J,K,L,M,N, the F streetcar, or Muni Bus lines 6,7,9, 10, 14, 21, 26, 47, 49, 66 and 71 all run within 5 blocks of the Center, many run within 1 block. Also, take BART to SF Civic Center, then transfer to Muni Metro or F lines.

Club Policies

Board meetings are held once a month and are open to any member in good standing. If interested in attending, please contact any of the board members listed above for location. Membership dues are \$35/year, \$55/year for domestic partners at the same address, and \$20/year for newsletter only subscription (available to addresses more than 150 miles from San Francisco Bay Area). Advertising is available. Rates are \$7/month to club members for a business card-size non-changing ad. It is \$10/month for non-club members to advertise. If you are interested in advertising, please contact the editor. Club policy regarding money paid for club sponsored dives: unless otherwise noted, all monies are non-refundable. NCRD does not warrant, recommend or guarantee the products or services contained in advertisements in this newsletter.

Northern California Rainbow Divers, Inc. is a California non-profit mutual benefit corporation.



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