

# Innerspace 2013 recap

—Bubbles, fluro night diving and other memories from Inner Space

Text and photos courtesy of Rosemary E Lunn

**The fourth 'Red Sea Silence' week has recently wrapped up in Safaga, Egypt. I would not be at all surprised if this rebreather event probably came into being, partially because of the wild success of Divetech's Inner Space. Once seen, who can forget that iconic photo of a circle of rebreather divers? I remember just how much that image intrigued and excited me—"I want to be part of that." Though I must admit that I was somewhat astonished to realise it was taken a decade ago. Time has flown; Inner Space is ten years old.**

Every year rebreather divers of note from all over the globe flock to Grand Cayman and Divetech, for a week-long gathering of the 'whose who of rebreather

diving'—manufacturers, training agencies, leading instructor trainers, personalities and divers.

Inner Space, the premier North American rebreather event, is the brainchild of Nancy Easterbrook. A grand dame and much respected industry stalwart who positively pushed the introduction of nitrox into the Cayman Islands when everyone else was uttering "voodoo gas". In more recent years, Easterbrook was the major power behind the sinking of the USS *Kittiwake*, project managing the entire process. It would seem Easterbrook has the Midas Touch. (I suspect her secret is a lot of hard work, appointing and empowering top-notch staff, investing money and resources where they are needed, much prior preparation and planning, coupled with pretty decent diving a few fin kicks away.)

I caught up with Easterbrook, as she checked final details and asked her how Inner Space started.

"I wanted to bring people together to learn what was happening with rebreathers, because I could see the technology was constantly evolving and getting better," said Easterbrook. "We attracted 19 divers in the first year who were keen to learn more and move the industry forward. The aim of Inner Space is to share

information, keep up with changes in the industry, and provide the ideal platform for people to meet like-minded divers and build relationships."

## Like-minded

One like-minded diver who came to this year's Inner Space was Randy Thornton, owner of Dive Addicts in Utah and the power behind TEK Dive USA.2014 ([www.tekdiveusa.com](http://www.tekdiveusa.com)). I asked him why he considered Inner Space such a key event, because this was the fifth year he attended it.

"The technology is still fairly young," said Thornton. "We all are eager to interact and learn more from each other, and it is exciting to rub shoulders with newbies and old pros alike. I imagine rebreather divers are probably less than one percent of the diving population. But we are becoming a bigger piece of the pie all the time, hence the camaraderie in the rebreather community comes about because we are still relatively few in numbers."

Personally, I think diving as a

whole engenders positive camaraderie, and it is of a similar quality that is found within the armed forces and the medical communities. Diving has the power and ability to create friendships that bind as strong as hoops of steel, no matter where either party lives in the world. Perhaps it is because we experience such an extreme range of emotions, truly discover what we are capable of, and certain experiences and dives end up deeply seared into our souls. I vividly remember one such dive from Inner Space 2012.

## Discovery

Part way through the week,

Warren Miller (North American sales manager for Fourth Element) and I quietly padded down the dock at Cobalt Coast to do an afternoon shore dive in the Caribbean Sea. Once submerged, we started gently bimbbling towards the North Wall when fellow Inner Space attendee Jean Anne Booth enthusiastically swam up to us.

"Look," she signaled. "I'm ok," I replied. "No, LOOK!" She gestured wildly at the surrounding area. It took awhile, whilst I wondered what the heck it was, I wasn't seeing. I eventually spotted a squid. Then a pair, then 20, before suddenly realising we

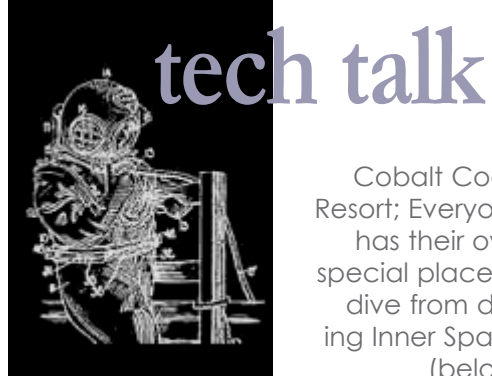
were completely surrounded by a large school of hunting squid. Their translucent bodies glistened and glittered in the afternoon sunshine, reminiscent of an Essex disco.

I was entranced. Along with half a dozen other rebreather divers we just sat, watched and wondered for several minutes. We would never have seen something quite as dramatic as this on open circuit scuba.

It is therefore no surprise that as the divers arrive into resort greetings, chatter and big fish stories ebb and flow. I bump into Booth. "Do you remember that squid dive?" I asked, as I gave







# tech talk

Cobalt Coast Resort; Everyone has their own special place to dive from during Inner Space (below)



## Cobalt Coast Resort

One of the reasons that a number of us swim at dawn during Inner Space is because of the resort setup. It is so easy that it would be rude not to, and in fact 'it is so easy' applies to everything here. All

Inner Space attendees stay onsite at Cobalt Coast. This resort has a mix of one and two bed-roomed en-suite rooms. Additional accommodation in the form of the Garden Cottages can be found a two-minute stroll away down a quiet lane. So if you need to, you can be from bed to breakfast, the dive centre or the private dock in about three minutes.

On land the divers naturally gravitate around two key areas. Firstly, there is the social heart of the resort—the bar and reception area. This part of Cobalt Coast is quite practical and used for many things. It is where you check in and check out. All the meals are served here, a set of cloakrooms are conveniently located a step away, and it is

the place at Cobalt Coast to sit to access the fast free WiFi.

Ari, the owner, sourced some high backed basket chairs that prove popular with many guests. The chairs are a great place to hide to check emails, make Skype calls or catch up with Facebook. During the day, you can eat at the bar, and if you are a solitary soul, you are soon welcomed to join a group, if you wish to be.

## Dive center

The other key area is the Divetech dive centre and the big wide benches. I'd heard about these long benches years before I attended Inner Space from cave explorer and CCR instructor trainer Phil Short. He had remarked this event was one of the most enjoyable weeks of his year. I asked him why. Short simply said "smooth logistics". He would arrive in resort, unpack and put his wallet away. And then get on with teaching and diving because everything is covered in the Inner Space package, bar alcohol.

Everything? Yes, 'everything'. You arrive into resort to find your diving home for the week has been allocated. Every diver has their own special place labelled on one of the benches. When you are ready, you toddle up to the dive centre



two competitively trained swimmers, I feel a more precise statement should be 'Boot Camp Power Snorkeling'. However, once you get your head around it not being a gentle bumble, it is perversely quite pleasurable vigorously finning with the fellowship for a couple of miles at 5.30AM every morning.



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# tech talk

The author underwater with Hollis rebreather; Freshwater hoses are pre-run along the benches, making breather care post-dive much simpler to manage (below)

window to collect your rebreather cylinders. It is pretty cool finding your tanks are labeled with your name and pre-filled with the requested correct mix, as indeed are your pre-rigged stage cylinders. All you need to do is analyse and label your gas, and screw a regulator or two in.

'Everything' also means things like gas fills, boat dives, night dives and all the consumables you need. Sorb, oxygen friendly lubri-

bility and dramatic drop-offs". 30 metre plus gin visibility is pretty much standard, and when that is coupled with the spectacular topography, the experience is exhilarating. Then throw in full tech capability for those that desire it, and the result is top drawer diving.

The effortlessness of being able to safely do interesting sub 100 metre fully supported expedition trimix diving is immensely appealing. It is little wonder that Inner

Space gets booked up so quickly.

### Unique speakers

I've talked about the diving and the logistics. What else makes Inner Space special? Nancy Easterbrook asks certain industry luminaires to do short talks every evening. Mike Young, the new CEO of Kiss Rebreathers, entertained us with his stories of cave diving. I came away with the impression that he is the USA version of Rick Stanton. If it is a nasty

squalid small cave in the back end of beyond, Mike is your man to explore it. And then Dr Douglas Ebersole, an Interventional Cardiology doctor, educated us on cardiac concerns specific to diving. Ebersole is a fluid speaker, and I learn something new from him every time I hear him.

### Diver safety

On a more serious note over the years Inner Space has positively contributed to diver safety. This is



the fourth year Dr Neal W Pollock and his team from Divers Alert Network have conducted extreme dive monitoring. This event is useful from both the divers (subjects) and the researchers point of view. Pollock gets access to at least 12 subjects pulling a plethora of profiles that fall way outside the normal recreational range.

The team looks for signs of decompression stress, (bubbles), by scanning the diver's heart using ultrasonic scanning technology—a transthoracic echocardiogram or TTE for short. They simply place a probe, similar to one used when doing ultrasound on pregnant women, on a specific area on the diver's thorax (chest wall) and the probe picks up the sound of the bubbles. The researcher and the subject are then able to observe a two dimensional scan of the heart. It is fascinating watching your heart and valves move on the monitor.

Each subject is scanned every 20 minutes for two hours post dive. I mentioned earlier that the divers find the research useful, too. There is often much discussion between

the divers and Pollock about what is seen on the screen. As a result, some of the subjects use these invaluable scanning sessions to play with the conservation factors on their computers.

As the week progresses the subjects tweak their conservation or gradient factors and see how it affects their bubbles scores. It is not only the divers who are interested in research Pollock is conducting. Shearwater Research, the manufacturer of the Predator and Petrel computer, has also been following the DAN study at Inner Space. As a result, the Petrel now comes preset with a gradient factor of 30 / 70.

### Afterthoughts

All too soon the week was over. Thousands of litres of gas had been pumped and breathed whilst 1,320 lbs of sorb had dived. Inner Space closed out with a celebratory graduation ceremony on the Friday night. During the week over 800 dives had been done by the 70 attendees, with 10 divers successfully completing and passing a variety of diver / instruc-

tor / instructor trainer rebreather courses.

And what did I leave with apart from a pocketful of memories, a handful of dives and more friends? Something I did not expect at the start of the week—an understanding of why the Hollis Explorer has a valid place in the rebreather community.

I could not get a handle on it before, but having completed a user course on this unit I can now see the Explorer fulfilling the need of 'my first rebreather'. It is a good unit to learn rebreather discipline on, and get to grips with the three C's. Checks, concentration, cleaning. I also already knew it is never daft to carry bailout gas, but that was gently reaffirmed on a dive.

And I finally got to play with a Light and Motion Solar Nightsea torch. My first ever fluro night dive, and one that will be forever seared into my soul for all the right reasons. But that is a tale I will tell you another time.

For more information, visit: [Divetech.com/files/Innerspace.htm](http://Divetech.com/files/Innerspace.htm) ■



cant, etc. You are allowed to use as much sorb as you like. In reality, depending on the diving being done, we all change our sorb at the end of every day. No one abuses the system, nor do people try and push their scrubbers unnecessarily.

### Diving

So what is the diving like? If you only gave me six words to describe Cayman diving, my response would be "stunning vis-

## Phoenix DIVE SHOW

September 21 & 22, 2013  
(Saturday & Sunday)  
[PhoenixDiveShow.com](http://PhoenixDiveShow.com)

## St Louis DIVE SHOW

October 5 & 6, 2013  
(Saturday & Sunday)  
[StlouisDiveShow.com](http://StlouisDiveShow.com)

## Carolina DIVE SHOW

October 11 & 12, 2013  
(Friday & Saturday)  
[CarolinaDiveShow.com](http://CarolinaDiveShow.com)

## Baltimore/D.C. DIVE SHOW

January 25 & 26, 2014  
(Saturday & Sunday)  
[BaltimoreDiveShow.com](http://BaltimoreDiveShow.com)

## TEXAS DIVE SHOW

February 22 & 23, 2014  
(Saturday & Sunday)  
[TexasDiveShow.com](http://TexasDiveShow.com)



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