



A taste of SOUTH AFRICA

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Covering an area of over 1,200,000 sq km, with nearly 3000km of rugged coastline, South Africa boasts some of the worlds most awe inspiring diving. From the Great whites of the Western Cape, to the epic Sardine Run, the pristine coral reefs of Sodwana Bay and the Ragged Tooth Sharks of Aliwol Shoal, many of the sights and experiences must

be seen to be believed. Since the end of apartheid eleven years ago more and more people have started travelling to South Africa, not only to experience the breath taking diving but also the spectacular scenery, vineyards, safaris, architecture, and local people that together make this destination a must for any seasoned traveller.



Republic of South Africa

Over the following pages we'll take you through some of the best dives sites, as well as looking in more detail at some experiences you can enjoy there.
Join us now, as we discover South Africa

EDWIN MARCOW

The Best Dive Sights in SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa



ANDREW WOODBURN



THOMAS P. PESCHAK

The primary three dive locations are Gansbaai, The Sardine Run, and Sodwana Bay - though there are also many interesting and varied shipwrecks dotting this rugged and extensive coastline. Since the 15th century ships from all over the world have come to rest here, the most famous wreck being the HMS Birkenhead.

A Note of Caution Diving in the proximity of Seal Island, off Mossel Bay or any large seal island colony's is not recommended and should be considered hazardous. In June 1990 the first recorded fatal shark attack on a fully kitted diver took place here. 21-year old Monique Price was attacked on the surface and later died of her injuries.



ANDREW WOODBURN

The following guide details the locations and encounters of the best sites to dive in South African waters. Conditions encountered in the Cape are not that dissimilar to diving in the North Atlantic Ocean. For the Cape and Western

Cape a drysuit is strongly recommended. Whether on land or sea South Africa is home to predominately large animals. This guide starts from Cape Town follows the coast and finishes on the Mozambique border.

Semi-rigid inflatable boat (rubber duck) is used through surf launches for divers, Indian Ocean



ANDREW WOODBURN



South Africa



THOMAS P. PESCHAK

Lobtailing

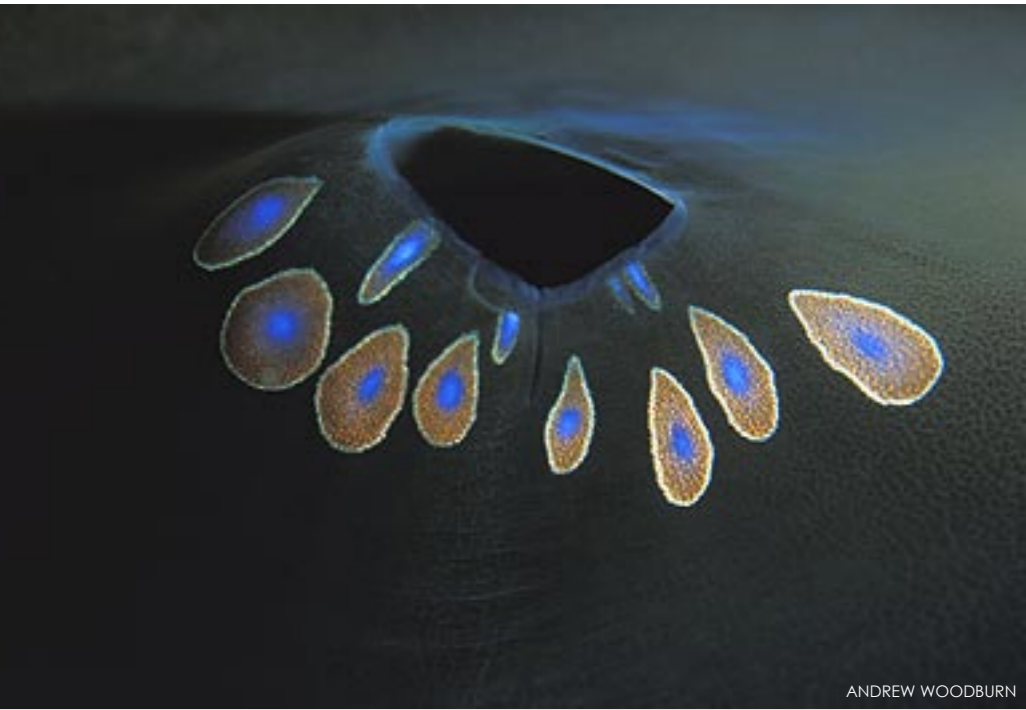
Cape Peninsula & The Western Seaboard

This region is one of the most scenic and beautiful areas of the country. The coastline consists of spectacular mountain and cliff drives that lead down to superb dive sites, with cool water which often have excellent visibility in gin clear - but cold water. The busy picturesque harbour of Hout Bay lies just a short drive from the beach and town of Llandudno, Horse riding on the beaches of Kommetjie, and South Africa's premier sunbathing beaches of Clifton and Camps Bay with excellent restaurants and bars, and people watching are all here.

The Lusitania This wreck is situated 2.5 km off Cape Point. The Lusitania was a twin-prop Portuguese passenger liner ran aground on Bellows Rock around

midnight on April 18, 1911. The 800 crew and passengers on board survived the grounding but eight passengers foundered when a lifeboat capsized. Two days later the 5500 tons liner slid off the rock and sank. It now rests in a position that is quite exposed to the elements and conditions have to be perfect to dive this site safely. There is a rich and varied sealife on the wreck but it remains a fairly deep dive with a maximum depth at this site of 37m making it recommendable only to experienced divers as a strong surge can also be encountered on this location.

Vulcan Rock - a large rock pinnacle rising to few meters below the surface off the Karbonkelberg, a short boat trip south west of Hout Bay. It is covered with hard and soft corals and playful seals are plentiful here. Nudibranchs, deep-water cowries, and crayfish are other good



ANDREW WOODBURN

DANIEL BEECHAM

Divers on their way to Sardine Run

Close-up of mollusc



ANDREW WOODBURN

A diver examines a giant starfish on the sea floor

night of July 29 1977. The Romelia was on tow with another ship destined to be scapped in Taiwan when the storm proved to put too much of a strain on a towing cable which snapped and sent the Romelia to her final resting place off Sunset Rocks, Llandudno. This big wreck lies fairly close to the coast. From the waters edge it is only a 200m swim to the wreck. The surge can, however, also at this site be very strong on the southern side and there is a strong suction through a hole on the Llandudno on the northern side of the wreck so it should only be dived when conditions are perfect. The wreck is partially broken down with the bow section

destroyed but the stern is still relatively intact. As the wreck rests on the rocks the engine room is partially out of the water though it must be entered underwater. Be careful however and don't attempt penetration without proper training and an accompanying buddy. There can also be quite a suction through the wreck from the swell and currents outside. Together with the surrounding areas with its dense kelp forest it makes for an interesting dive with lots of good photo opportunities with colourful invertebrates, crayfish, hottentots and other small fish living in the dense kelp forests.

photo subjects here. Vulcan Rock has a large tunnel running through its base at around 40m. The average depth for this dive site is around 25 meter.

Vulcan rock lies in an area where cold upwellings frequently occur and when it happens the water gets gin clear but icy cold - so wear an appropriate suit. There can be a strong surge if there is a swell running and currents can occur at any depth even if there are none at the surface. Bringing a SMB (see Leigh Cunninghams article elsewhere in this issue of X-Ray Mag) and a drift line is strongly recommended as the surface current can run at up to five knots.

The Romelia - a 20,000 tons Liberian oil tanker which foundered on the rocks on the stormy winter

Tall fronds of a kelp forest



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South Africa



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A moment of tranquility

Coral Gardens This site is one of the less known sites around the Cape but one of the most beautiful and rewarding ones nonetheless in spite of the location being quite popular and crowded with picnicing families. Beneath the surface however is stand out like an virtual underwater garden with the brilliant colours of soft corals standing out in shades of pinks, yellows, reds and oranges and healthy anemones everywhere.

As it is a rocky coast full of big boulders



ANDREW WOODBURN

ABOVE: Nudibranch (*Gastropoda univalves*) on coral reef in the Indian Ocean





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Yellowfin tuna

with the site opening up toward the opens seas straight in the direction of the prevailing swell resulting in heavy surge, this site is best dived on a calm day. The maximum depth is no more than 18m with an average depth of 10m.

Justin's Caves is another recommended coastdive nearby Camps Bay. It can be quite tricky to enter and exit, having to scramble up and down rocks and boulders in full kit but the prolific and brightly coloured underwater life makes this dive highly rewarding and recommendable. Most prominently the majestic caverns - that gives this site its name - and impressive arches and swim-throughs makes it an awesome coastdive for novice and experienced divers alike. To make the most of the dive and spot the critters hiding in the crevices, bring a good dive torch. This place is known for its large crayfish. Also a lot of small bottom dwelling sharks can be seen here. As with other sites in the area this location is affected by the strong currents resulting in a strong surge through some of the tunnels.

There are two entry points, which alter depending on the tide. Surface swim to site is about 150m but a strong

south-easterly can make the surface water pretty rough and in these cases the swim forth and back to shore is best done underwater. In these cases bring a compass, as the underwater geography can be rather disorientating. This is an excellent night dive as well, both for the novice or experienced diver with the abundance of marine life making every new turn around a corner worthwhile.

Geldikis

This rock about 400m out to sea off Sandy cove can make for quite a hard surface swim through chilly waters to get to but the dive makes it all worthwhile. It is a site to visit only in near perfect conditions as the swim can be very tiring in choppy seas, and there can also be quite a surge around the blinder in a big sea. Once there however the reef is the reef is un-spoilt, due to it being a bit bothersome to get to, hosting a diverse range of nudibranchs and crayfish.

There is also a cave with a chimney at 15m, and octopuses can be found hiding in the crevices and overhangs in the reef. Put it all together and this is a naturally beautiful dive. If the swim seems to long there two flat rocks between Geldikis and the coast that

South Africa

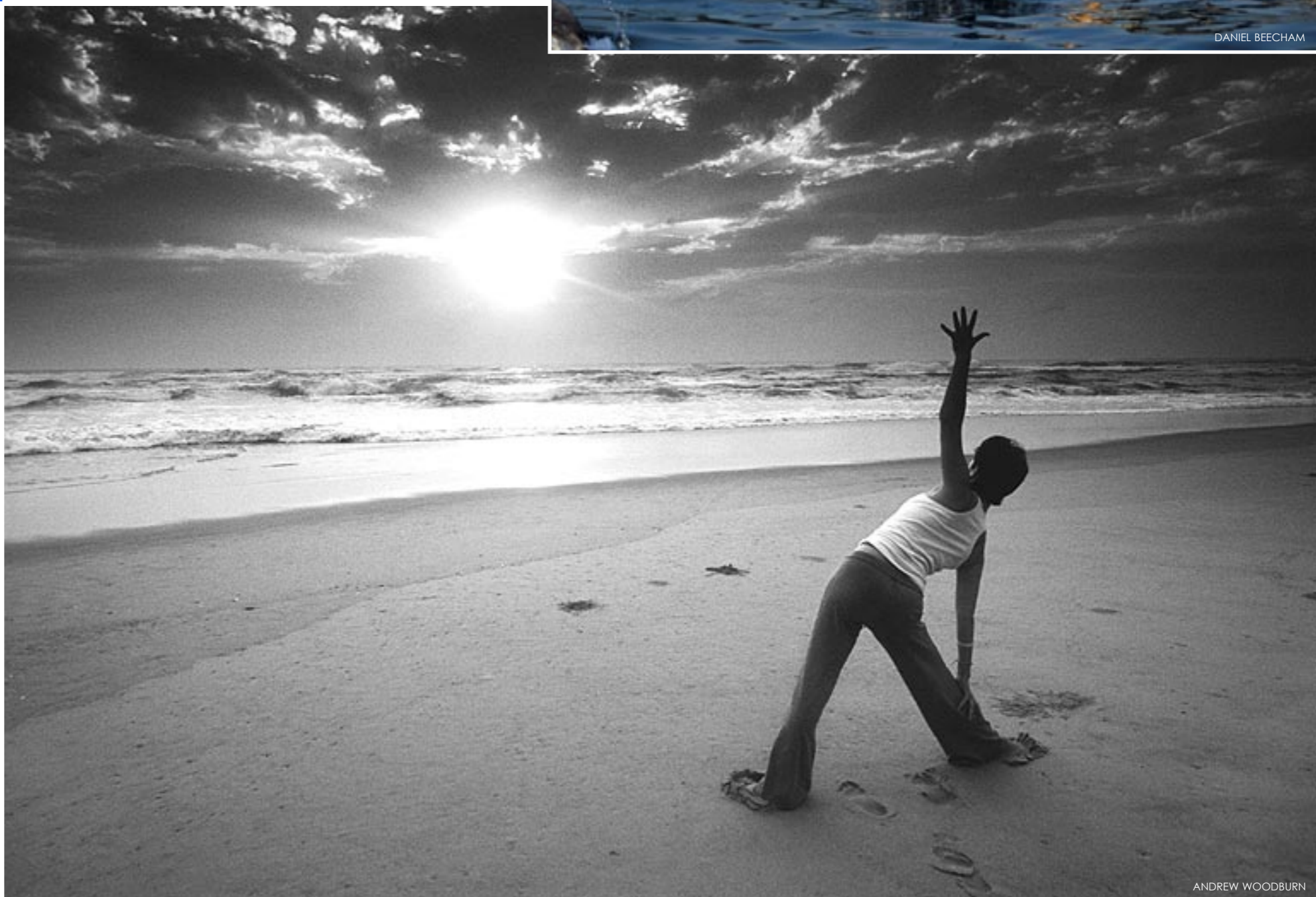
can serve as a resting place.

This area is part of the Cape Town city metropolitan area—close enough for non-diving partners to take full advantage of all that Cape Town has to offer meanwhile you go diving. The water temperature along this side of the bay is always a few degrees warmer than on the western side of the Peninsula. Temperatures can reach as high as 18° C, but also drop to as cool as 12° C. Visibility is usually between five and ten metres, if a south-easterly has been blowing, which is most likely during

Dolphins race alongside a rib full of divers



DANIEL BEECHAM



ANDREW WOODBURN

Meditation on a South African beach



The Western Shore of False Bay



summer, visibility may drop to zero. In winter the visibility can be an incredible 30m.

Boulders Beach & the famous penguins

This beach is one of the prettiest and most sheltered beaches in the Cape. A large resident population of endangered Jackass penguins reside here. A great place to spend the day sun bathing and relaxing as you share the beach and quite often your lunch with these very lovable and inquisitive fellow beach dudes. A good spot for beginner snorkelers, very fortunate divers have seen the penguins "fly underwater".

Whittle Rock

Whittle Rock is an awesome dive site situated in the middle of False Bay. The

rock climbs the water column to within three metres of the surface and covers a large area.

The invertebrate life is very colourful and unspoilt as there is very little diving here. This is most likely due to the increased chance of making contact with a Great White shark – a number of divers have had a Great White Shark effortlessly cruise past them - so maximum caution should be exercised at all times, though to date no shark has yet interfered with a diver. The site is huge and offers a wide variety of different diving from shallow to deep with the Rock formations creating a varied and interesting landscape. Due to the size of the reef there is always somewhere different to dive. As with many of the further dive sites there is a prolific amount of sea life making a favourite

spearfishing location. If you plan on spearfishing, keep in mind that fish should be kept on the boat, not a float line as any speared fish will attract sharks.

Batsata Rock

This site is located on the Cape Point side of Smits and consists of a large blinder that reaches within six metres of the surface. The rocks make an awesome underwater scenery and with the prolific abundance of fish makes a great dive. There is a great chance of seeing some pelagic fish

(yellow tail in particular) as well as many of the other fish common to False Bay. The Rock is also covered with colourful growth common to the area. An excellent dive for multi level dives as it slopes gently from 30m.

The Wrecks of Smitswinkel Bay

About 30 years ago five wrecks were scuttled as artificial reefs in Smitswinkel Bay, where conditions are sheltered and fairly calm. An echo sounder is essential to accurately locate these wrecks.

There are two former navy frigates, the *SAS Transvaal* and *SAS Good Hope*, and the *Rockeater* which was a diamond dredger as well as two fishing trawlers, the *Princess Elizabeth*, and the *Oratava*.

The depth, combined with the upright position of the frigates and the dredger makes these a thrilling and exciting dive. Maximum depth 40m, average depth 35m. Best accessed by boat from Millers Point, Kalk Bay, or Simon's Town.

The Eastern Side of False Bay

Steenbras Deep

The pinnacle is covered by big fans and sponges, with plenty of fish around. As it starts at a depth of 17m it is best found with an echo sounder.

At this unsheltered position the sea can be choppy with a strong surge if a south-westerly wind is blowing but it can be dived in a moderate swell.

This dive is not recommended for novice divers however. Maximum depth 30m.

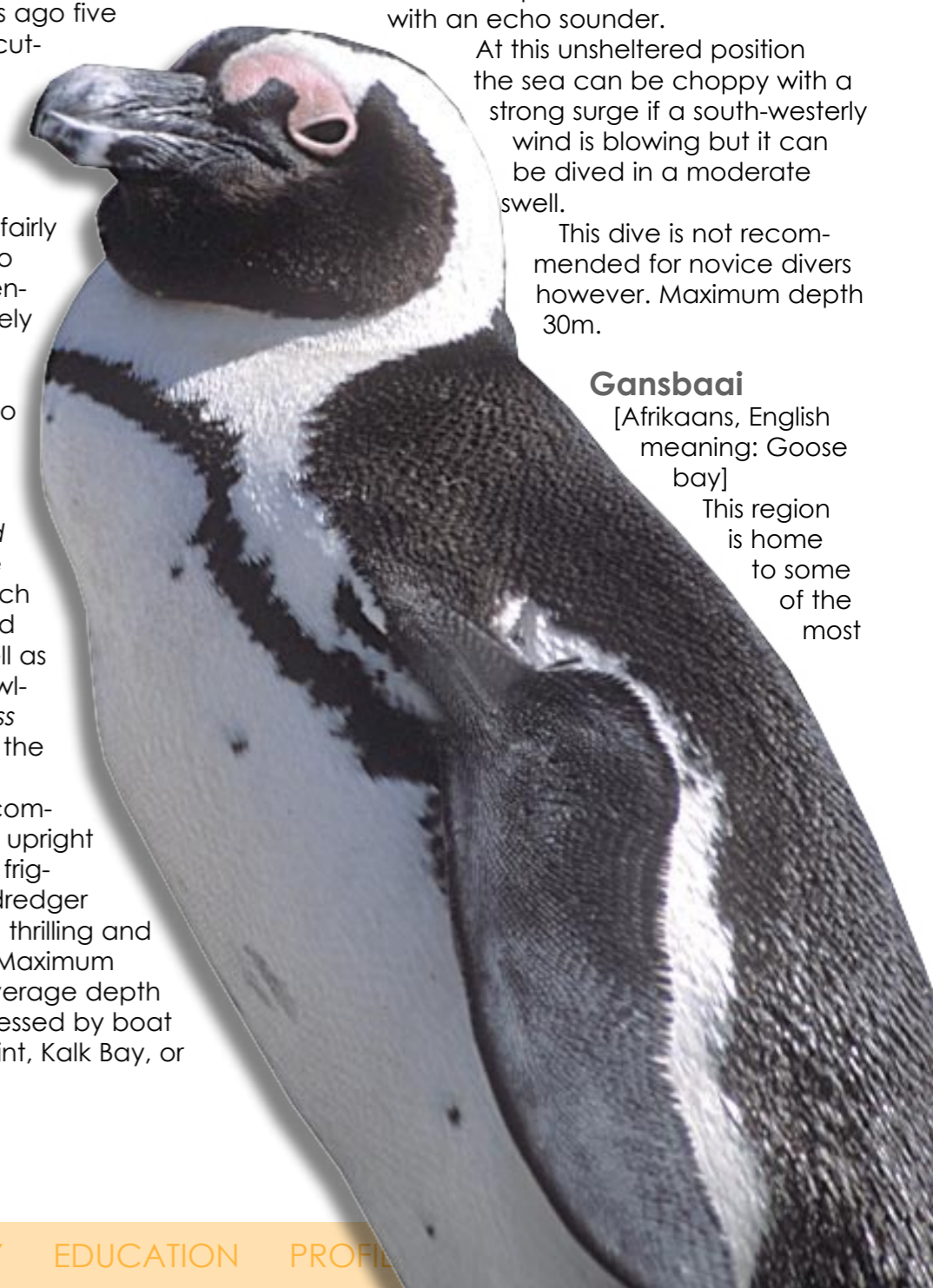
Gansbaai

[Afrikaans, English meaning: Goose bay]

This region is home to some of the most



The view over Cape Town. In the background, we can see Robben Island





South Africa

world were you could cage dive with Great White Sharks nowhere else is it so accessible - with shore-based accommodation and modest boat trip. Dyer Island is just a ride from most base in Gansbaai.

Dyer Island This location is really a couple of islands, Dyer Island and Gysler Rock and the channel that separates these two islands is called shark alley. It is located off the southern Cape coast, a 30-minute drive from the holiday town of Hermanus and a two-hour drive from Cape Town.

The boats leave from Kleinbaai [small bay], just outside of Gansbaai village. The boat ride to the site takes 20-25 minutes.



Caution: Several Great White Sharks inhabit this area. All divers should do a full kit up and double check on the boat. Once a diver has rolled into the water which I recommend is done as quietly and gently as possible, descend immediately to the bottom. Likewise, normal surfacing procedures do not apply here.

Cape Fur Seals



Cape fur seals are playful creatures - and the favourite meal of the Great White sharks

awesome animals encounters one could wish for: A huge apex predator with very sharp teeth right in your face.

Yes, we are talking about Great White sharks, close-up and personal. If you are looking for an experience that will leave you feeling both scared, excited, humbled, and privileged this is it. There aren't really any words that can accurately describe the feeling of being slipped a notch or twos down the food chain. Though there are other locations in the



Seal South Africa Heaven

Text and photos Daniel Beecham

All of my instincts are telling me this is a stupid thing to do. I'm sitting on the side of a small dive boat, in snorkeling gear, camera in hand. Dozens of playful Seal pups are bobbing up and down in front of me, mystified by the strange rubber clad creature about to invade their territory. It's not them that phases me, it's not even the large bulls lounging on the rocks a few feet away that phases me. It's the fact that I'm about to snorkel off of South Africa's Dyer Island, a world renowned hotspot for Great White Sharks that's getting to me.

Shark Capital

Dyer Island is a mecca for shark divers. Lying 5.2 nautical from mainland Gansbaai, near Cape town, it has long been famed for the large numbers of Great Whites which frequent the area year round. Its one of the few places in the world where divers can observe white sharks hunt, interact, and breach. The sharks are attracted by the thousands of Cape Fur Seals (*Artoccephalus puillus*)

which populate the island. Nowadays the seal population is very healthy but has suffered in the past from hunting, with great demand from the far east for the genitals of the bull seal for the aphrodisiac trade. It is thought that over 2.7 million individuals have been killed since the 1900s. Seal numbers around the island today can reach 60,000.

Living Legend

I had travelled to South Africa to come face to face with the Great White Shark from the protection of the cage. I was being guided by André Hartman, a living legend amongst shark enthusiasts. André is a pioneer in his field, working outside the cage, freediving and scuba diving with Great Whites. Many professional film makers and photographers from around the globe choose André as their guide when recording this extraordinary location.

Cape of Storms

The day had started like any normal cage diving day. The boat launched, and we headed toward the island. I was accompanied by a fellow shark enthusiast who had been diving the Island for the past two weeks. The seas were unusually calm for the time of year on the cape of storms. Many professional photographers choose to visit Gansbaai for up to a month at a time and wait for the suitable visibility and sea conditions to get the

Cape Fur Seals hunt and play in the waves around South Africa's Dyer Island

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There are two subspecies of this fur seal - the South African or Cape fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus pusillus*) and the Australian fur seal (*A. pusillus doriferus*).

The Australian fur seal population is believed to be derived from the South African fur seal population.

The South African fur seal is found along the coast of Namibia and the west and south coasts of South Africa. The population size is estimated to be 1.5-2 million, about two thirds of these in Namibia.

Breeding sites tend to be on small rocky inshore islands, but are also found on the mainland in rocky areas and on sandy beaches. The female mates about 6 days after giving birth and then starts going to sea to feed. Initially she spends alternate periods of 3-4 days feeding at sea followed by an average of 2.5 days suckling her pup on land. The female nurses her pup for 8-10 months.

South African fur seals are not known to migrate.

best photographic opportunities. Because of the ideal conditions we were having, André decided we would visit a spot on the island where he would be able to manoeuvre the bough of the boat close to the waters edge so we could photograph the seals sleeping the rocks.

When we were in position we both moved onto the bough of the boat with our feet dangling over the edge so that we could get as close as possible to the seals. At first, despite the noise of the engine the seals remain fast asleep, after a quick wake up call, and some revving of engines, they looked up at us thoroughly unimpressed, check out what's going, and immediately go back to catching a few z's.

After a while we decide to leave them in peace and start climbing back onto the deck of the boat, when to our surprise a burly south african voice shouted out from the wheel house "Hey, do you

guys want to go in?"

Maurizio and I looked at each other and smiled, it didn't seem like the best idea he'd ever had, jumping into shark infested waters, surrounded by what must be shark canapés, without the protection of a cage.

"Yeah ok" I shouted back sarcastically.

"No, i'm serious you'll be fine"". We climbed off the bough of the boat and André began to explain to us that if we wanted to go in on snorkel, we could.

"There's a line that the sharks won't cross, the water is too shallow for them, I'll put the boat parallel to the rocks, you guys can jump in and you can have a play with the seal pups"

"Just where is this line?" I asked.

"Oh you can't see the line, its invisible, but trust me, its there, you'll be perfectly safe"

This is when I began to wander about Andre's definition of 'safe'.

I start getting flashbacks; documentaries about André, in the water, no cage for protection, swimming with sharks. This is the man who pioneered free diving with Great Whites, was that safe?. The only reason the sharks are there is the seals, surely jumping in the middle of them would not be the most sensible idea.

The temptation was too much, this was too good a diving opportunity to turn down.

Traditionally when cage diving only a suit, mask, and weight belt are

worn. No BCD is required as you simply stand on the bottom of the cage, wearing plenty of lead to avoid floating around. Air is provided either by snorkel, or a billie line-a second stage attached to a long hose with the first stage and cylinder on the boat. Because of this Maurizio had decided not to bring the rest of his diving gear along. This presented a problem; one set of fins between two snorkelers. I didn't fancy the prospect of going in on my own, and it would be impractical for him to go in without fins, mild swells can pick up around the rocks so you need a degree of control to protect yourself. We decided to go in with one fin each.

Flashbacks again: programmes about natural selection, survival of the fittest-we were going to look like injured seals flailing around with missing limbs.

Deep Trouble

Sat on the side of the boat, mask: check, camera:check, fin: check. Just as I start slipping into the water André shouts out to me "you guys are insured, right?" Damn South African sense of humour. It was too late, I was already in.

After the initial plunge I feel disoriented, bubbles obscure my vision and hearing, I check that I still have everything with me, weight belt, mask, fins (or fin), camera, and then a quiet calm takes over, and I become more aware of my surroundings as the bubbles clear. The emerald green of the swaying kelp is mesmerising, and from the gin clear water, black shapes start to appear. At first the seals dart away when they get too close to me, alarmed by my presence. Very quickly the inquisitive young pups start coming closer, spiralling around me and staring at their own reflections in the lens of my camera. The really brave ones bite and pull at my fin tips, when I look down to make sure its a seal biting, and nothing more 'toothy', they quickly dart away, trying to look innocent. The number of them is overwhelming, every where I look the slender pinnipeds twirl through the kelp, as the morning sunlight strikes through the water in dramatic shafts.

To get a real seals eye view of the scene I free dive down to around three metres and hold

onto a Kelp holdfast - the thick woody root that bolts the giant plant to the seabed. At first the seals dart away from me, startled by my clumsy diving, but very quickly they are at ease with me again and



Seal Heaven

come close enough to touch, swimming through my legs and underneath my arms.

After a few dives I had used up my first roll of film, so I decided to reload, turning my back to the rocks and looking out into the green abyss, I suddenly remember where I am.

I tentatively swim back to the stern of the boat, trying to work out where the invisible line is, being careful not to cross it, and begin to scale the ladder. I pass up my camera and fin without lifting my head from the water, constantly looking around. This is when I feel most vulnerable, my legs hang down like snack sized morsels, and when I'm ready I dart up the ladder without hesitating.

Over the next hour or so the seas remain calm, and we dive at our leisure, either simply floating on the surface and watching the seals spiral around us, or by diving down to the sea floor and holding onto a frond of kelp. The seals are constantly amazed by our presence and never tire of us.

The time soon comes for us to move on. The sharks are waiting for us, and we wouldn't want to disappoint them. ■

The Southern Cape Coast

South Africa

Realm of Great White Sharks

Close Encounter

Alone, in mid water... but for three large Great White sharks. The largest one measuring in at five metres, they began to investigate me in ever decreasing circles. As the largest White shark approached me, closing the distance between us, I was in awe of the sheer size and girth of this incredibly large fish. I fired off a few shots and waited for the inevitable.

This was not how it was meant to be! I was here to shoot an advertisement for A.P Valves with Amos Nachoum posing as my model and Andre Hartman to work and control the sharks.

As the shark closed down on me, I could see right into her mouth—rows upon rows of shiny enamel. The tension built, and I could feel the adrenaline pumping through my veins.

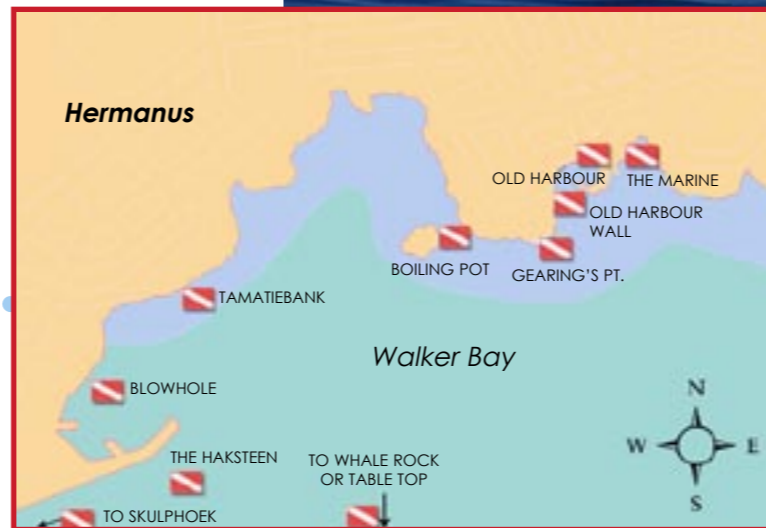
I kept talking to myself, "Do not swim away or back off from this shark or you will turn on its predatory behaviour."

I flexed my elbows outward and pushed my camera as far as I could in front of my body to make myself look as large as possible. She came within inches of my camera, and to my relief, she

banked away.

I watched her as she swam away, and I thought, now is the time to dive to the sea floor—the safest place to be—and join Amos Nachoum. Andre would be with us soon—he was on the boat fixing dive equipment—and I would be okay.

To my horror, this large five-metre shark, which seemed about the size of a single story bus, turned around, almost on a sixpence, and was swimming directly towards me at head height and at great speed. As she drew closer, she gaped several times. This gaping was a direct threat to me. Either she saw me as a potential predator, a threat to herself or her food source... or I was lunch!



My mind raced. I was scared and excited. This was the most intense experience I had ever had. My heart pumped so hard I thought my chest was going to explode. I could feel the blood coursing through my veins like a fast flowing river. I kept talking to myself, "Do not swim away. Stand your ground."

Defining moment

A cliché it is, but my life flashed before my eyes. I saw my family, ex-fiancé and ex-girl-friends in my mind's eye. For a moment, I was

Cage Type & Design

Lightweight and cylindrical, this 12mm steel frame will provide comfort and security – though sharks do often mouth the cage and have a good look at the divers within it this is investigatory behaviour borne out of curiosity. It is not in the nature of the sharks to attack the cage or the divers within.



DANIEL BEECHAM

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DANIEL BEECHAM

SHARK LINGO: *a player*
— name for a Great White Shark, which, once accustomed to the boat, will interact and stay with you for what will seem like a lifetime

I landed on Amos head and shoulders. We made ourselves comfortable, and moments later, Andre joined us.

Getting the shot

From this new vantage point, we framed and shot as much film as we could because we were now stuck on the sea



DANIEL BEECHAM

Great White Shark Seasons

The shark viewing seasons can be divided up into three seasons:

- High Season: May to August (winter)
- Intermediate Season: April, September and mid November
- Low Season: mid November to end of March

During the high season it is almost a certainty seeing a Great White Shark on any day at sea. It is winter, however, so weather can be a factor and storms can prevent boats going out. The intermediate season probably provides the best compromise between sighting sharks and not being hampered by bad weather. The chances of spotting a Great White around this time is still a respectable 60%. Low season which falls in the peak summer holidays in December the rate of success will fall below 50%. This is due to the prevailing summer south easterly wind, which stimulates the pelagic fish to school, and subsequently the sharks will hunt the game fish.

floor with three large Great Whites patrolling the ocean around us. Every so often, the five-metre shark would “dive bomb” our position, and we would bury ourselves into the sea floor with hands and camera housing over our heads. When the shark would pass over us, she was so large she would black out the sun and the water in her wake would drag and pull on us.

Twice, one of the two smaller Great White sharks came from behind and had to be “scared off”. By now, I had run out film. I was running very low on air and the situation was getting out of control. Andre signalled that he was going to terminate this dive and jumped up and pulled the tail of the large five-metre alpha female. She appeared to almost panic and shot off into the blue closely followed by the two beta males.

We ascended to the surface in a triangle of three with our backs to one another. Once on board, I was told I could not speak for about an hour.

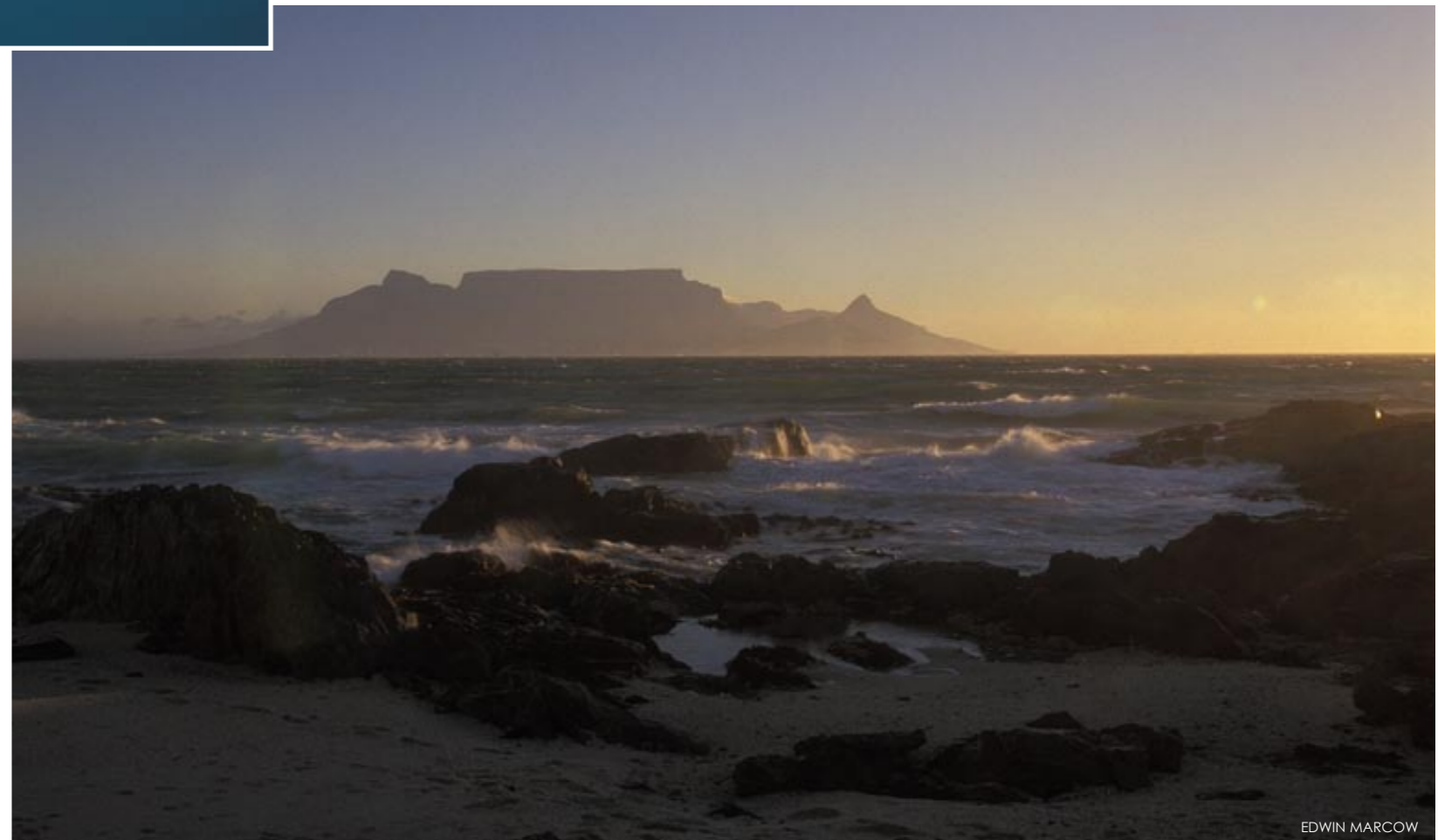
South Africa

Reflection

This was the most humbling experience I have ever had the privilege to enjoy. Although I have dived with White sharks before in the open ocean with no cage, this was an incredible, overwhelming, up-close and personal experience.

Furthermore, this incredible dive, which took place in July 2002, marked the moment when I become the fifth person in the world to photograph a Great White Shark in South African waters from the sea floor. One image was used for the A.P Valves advertisement and another image from this dive went on to place second in the professional division of the Sport Diver/PADI 2003 photography competition.

Above and beyond the successful results of the shoot, the dive with the Great White Sharks gave me the privilege and opportunity to turn dreams into reality. It was a great honour and an humbling encounter that changed my life and outlook. ■



EDWIN MARCOW





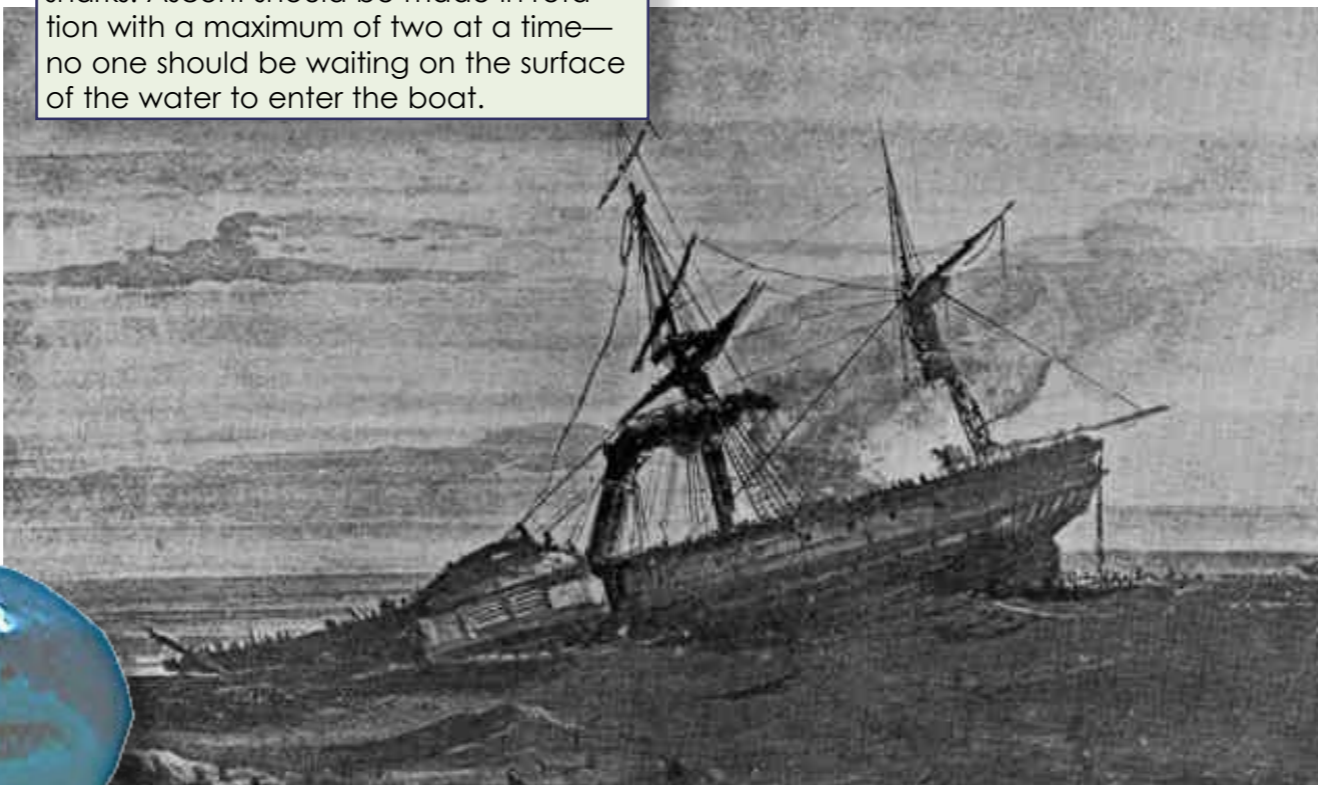
ANDREW WOODBURN

Shrimp (*Periclemenes emperor*) on a sea cucumber, Sodwana Bay, Natal, South Africa

the bow, the engine room, and the stern. This site is rarely dived by sport divers but for those that do –this is a very rewarding experience. Legend has it that £300'000 in gold and silver rests within her bows. Money being shipped by the army to pay its troops in the colonial wars. There have been many attempts to salvage her, mostly recently with much controversy in 1985, though with much disappointment. It is strictly prohibited to remove anything from this shipwreck.

The beautiful long stretch of coastline

Caution Diving the HMS Birkenhead is only recommended for experienced divers. Great White sharks are common in the area and a strong undercurrent and big swells as well as the depth (maximum depth 28m) and often poor visibility makes this a very challenging dive. Full kit up and check on the boat prior to entry. Entry should be as quietly as possible and descend to the bottom immediately due to the possible presence of Great White sharks. Ascent should be made in rotation with a maximum of two at a time—no one should be waiting on the surface of the water to enter the boat.



HMS Birkenhead went down in 1852 with the loss of 638. The drawing is made by one of the surviving officers



that runs from Mossel Bay to Tsitsikamma National Park between the Southern and Eastern Cape provinces is affectionately called the Garden Route. In the middle we find Plettenberg Bay, or *Plett*, a hot spot for Cape Townians to holiday with beautiful country and long deserted golden beaches. The Portuguese called her Bahia Formosa, meaning beautiful bay. This is where the warm tropical waters of the North blends with the cooler waters of the cape providing with a mixed underwater flora and fauna that is not seen elsewhere in the world. While it at a first glance may

South Africa

The Garden Route



DANIEL BEECHAM



ANDREW WOODBURN

A porcelain crab hides in the fronds of a sea anemone

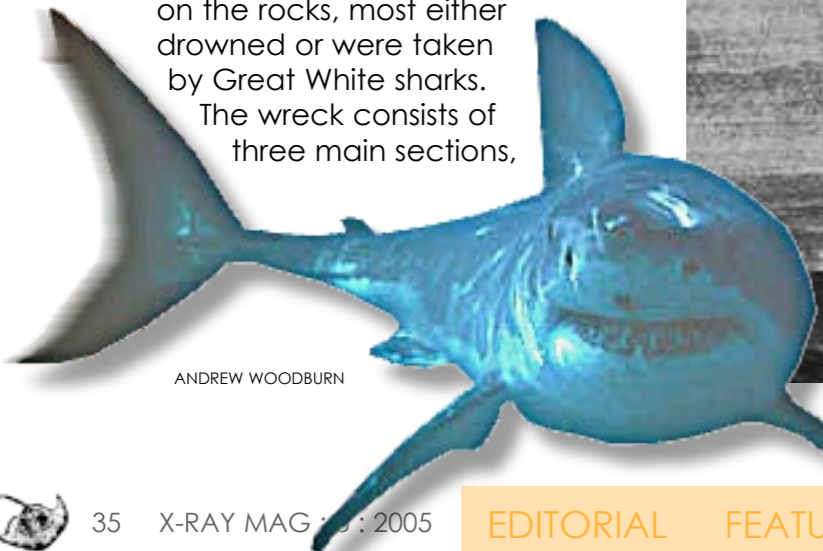
► continued on page 35

The HMS Birkenhead

This infamous wreck lies on the western side of Birkenhead Rock 2.5km off Danger Point. HMS Birkenhead, a British troop carrier sank on the 26th of February 1852 after hitting the rocks at Danger Point, She sank with the souls of 638. It was on this fateful night that the tradition was born of "women and children first".

Of those that survived the initial impact on the rocks, most either drowned or were taken by Great White sharks.

The wreck consists of three main sections,



ANDREW WOODBURN

seem to lack the vibrant colours of a tropical reef the underwater life is very prolific as upwelling of deep sea water takes place in this area. The best time to dive this area is September through October.

Groot Bank

Known as the this reef starts 30-40m off shore. This is strictly a boat dive because a shore entry - exit would

be a very long arduous, walk with kit.

This site is known for having some amazing sealife make a somewhat awkward access worthwhile. The reef starts only 30 meter of the shore but access is difficult and a long walk with heavy gear, so in practice this is a boat dive. Also known as the Sodwana of the east coast by the locals this site boasts fantastic pin-



Premier Photographic & Safari Reserves

Though there are many excellent and informative travel books and guides detailing the vast array of South Africa's safaris and reserves, few, if any, cover what every enthusiastic photographer amateur or professional needs to know. Here is a few tips.

As photographers we would, for example, like to know which safaris and reserves offer the best photographic opportunities, has the best natural landscape and, of course, flora and fauna. If we have set goals to accomplish it is important to know which animals are best sighted at which reserve not to mention at what time of day, month, and season so we know what time of year one should travel. Lastly and most notably what species are you most likely to be successful photographing.

Let's start with a clarification and a *cautionary note*: In many safari parks or reserves animal subjects are *habituated* to cars and even people. This may seem like less than the real thing, but they are still very much *wild* animals. Who knows whether they will attack if they feel threatened, or in the case of big predators, whether they will interpret your actions as that of a prey? Always stay close to your vehicle (if you get out on foot) and always follow the guidelines of the camp you are staying at. People can be, and have been, killed at safari parks and reserves in South Africa.



Addo Elephant Park

Elephants are an fantastic sight and here they can be photographed year round. It is quite easy to find the breeding herds, but especially in hot weather, as the elephant will make regular visits to the watering holes. This is excellent for action photography. Addo also has a population of red hartebeest, ostrich meerkats, and buffalos and black rhinos – though the buffalo and rhino's are seldom seen close to any tourist road.

Cape Peninsula National Park

The entire Peninsula National Park is excellent for capturing dramatic coastal scenes and fynobas flora, but the opportunities for game and bird photography is limited. Do not visit when a south-easterly wind is blowing.

Boulders Beach

First mentioned in the travelogue article "sharing the beach with the other beach dudes" who may well pinch your lunch, sit on your towel, and if you do get to close with a camera and lens even a nip. We are, of course, talking about the jackass penguins and this is a fantastic location to get excellent images of these stubby fellas hobbling about clumsily on land – and, for the lucky ones, capturing them flying through the water. Our tip for a great shot is to try and shoot at sunrise or sunset with a deep red or orange sky backdrop.

Kistenbosch Botanical Garden & Helderberg Nature Reserve

((Table Mountain & Somerset West) Very good places to photograph Cape sugarcrows feeding on proteas. Time: In the spring and early summer. ►

nacles from 9-25m, large amphitheatres and caves and tunnels which all make for very exciting dive where you can expect to see many varieties of gamefish—steenbras, mussel-cracker, romans and the beautiful parrotfish just to name a few. Ragged tooth sharks are also quite common and when they occur a highlight to any dive.

The Wild Coast

Aptly named after the big rolling ocean swells that hits this coastline right on, and the unpredictable climatic conditions that are prevalent here. It is renowned for its rugged scenery, good spearfishing and abundant sea life but is not a popular area for scuba diving. There are few shore entries and those that exist are difficult to navigate. Yet for those with equipped with an adventurous spirit there are still many virgin dive sites in this region yet to be discovered and mapped. With many rivers flowing into the ocean it should be avoided altogether during the summer where there is much rainfall.

Travel in South Africa is as much about capturing glimpses of daily life and meeting the local people as it is about diving



EDWIN MARCOW

Meet a rhinoceros on one of the many wildlife safaris offered in South Africa

Eastern Cape

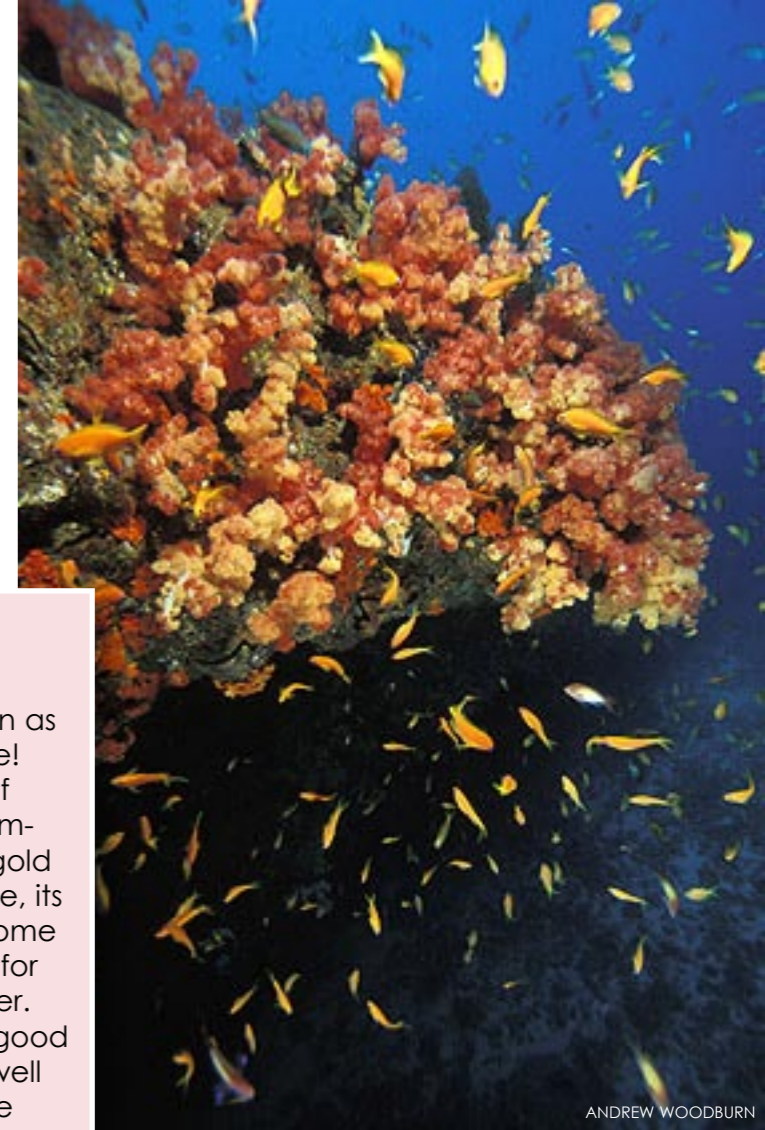
Shark's Gulley

An excellent little location on Fountain Rock off Port Alfred for seeing ragged-tooth sharks. As many as 30 have been seen on one dive here. There are also beautiful reef formations here and the nearby site called Towers has colourful pinnacles rising straight up from the bright white sand. Maximum depth 15m - average depth 10m

PLACES OF INTEREST

Jeffreys Bay

Also known as J'Bay – is known as the home to the perfect wave! With its unique combination of beautiful beaches, endless summers, abundant shells, white gold (calamari) and relaxed lifestyle, its no wonder this town has become world renowned as a Mecca for local and international traveller. Good surfing conditions and good diving conditions do not mix well – but as a place of interest the nearby St Francis Bay has spectacular surfing when the conditions are favourable. If you do dive – abalone and succulent oysters are abundant here, and can be picked off the rocks



ANDREW WOODBURN

Vibrant coral gardens are home to many species of brightly colored tropical fish



EDWIN MARCOW



Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Formerly known as the *Kalahari Gemsbok National Park*, this park is a favourite amongst photographers. It should be noted, however, that this area is an arid region with low game densities populations. But its brooding storms, awesome sunsets – coupled with crisp light – and the desert like landscape makes this an excellent location for the discerning photographer.

The best time to photograph predators here is November to March, the hottest months. Game herds – gemsbok, springbok, and wildebeest – usually peak from March to May following good rains. Black-backed jackal, cape and bat-eared foxes, and meerkats can be photographed from the road. Just remember that whichever subjects you pursue and want to get in the bag; putting in the necessary time is paramount.

There are three rest camps at Kgaladi: Twee Rivieren, Mata Mata and Nossob.



EDWIN MARCOW

The two most productive for photography are Nossob and Mata Mata but all are worthy of a visit. Within the camps take the time and opportunity to photograph the tame ground squirrel, yellow mongeese and small bird species that frequent the rest camps. Also look out for flocks of sandgrouse that visit the waterholes at Dalkeith {Mata Mata} and Cubique {Nossob}.

Kruger National Park

Arguably the most famous safari park of them all, although you may be surprised

to learn that many keen and professional photographers tend to stay away from Kruger.

This is due to the large crowds that are drawn here with a traffic load that can turn into a literal gridlock of 30-40 cars and 4 x 4's all vying for the best position to view a pack of lions. If you are lucky you may get a quick glimpse.

But that is not the complete picture. Good news is there are still excellent photographic opportunities in Kruger, you just need to know when to visit the park. Avoid June or July or any school holiday periods.

You may also look at it this way: Animal life at Kruger has now become so habituated to cars, 4 x 4's and people so if you can put up with the traffic and people jostling for position and being there with a different mind set, the opportunities are there for the taking. Animal subjects come in close and thus intimate close up photography is possible here.

The smaller bush camps and surrounding roads offer excellent opportunities very early in the morning or late afternoon.

Premier bush camps at Kruger include Mbyamiti, Talamati, and Bateleur. These three camps are good for 'the big five', as well as general game and other predators. Lower Sabie, Crocodile Bridge, Skukuza, Satara, and Shingwedzi are also all very productive bush camps. For cats choose Satara. Lower Sabie and Crocodile Bridge can be also have good photographic opportunities. ►



The South Coast



Map of Aliwal Shoal, South Coast, South Africa



EDWIN MARCOW

After Sodwana Bay the South Coast is the best-known and most popular dive destination in the country with Aliwal Shoal, Landers Reef and Protea Banks being the three main dive sites together with their adjoining reefs. At Aliwal shoal otherwise migratory spotted ragged-tooth sharks are in residence.

The South Coast is a very well developed tourist area and for non-divers an absolute pleasure to holiday in the sun and comfort it has to offer. Long golden beaches, golf, tennis, horse riding, shopping malls and restaurants there is something for everyone here. Diving here is most dependable in the winter months from, May to September.

The Ragged-tooth sharks, (affectionately called *raggies* in South Africa) belonging to the are one of the most easily identifiable sharks in the ocean. There are two species in the family. Bigeye and Bumpytail. With their heavy bodies with a short pointed snout, and with highly visible and distinctive protruding 'ragged' teeth and small eyes they can hardly be mistaken for any other species.

Other characteristics include a light brown in colour with distinct blotches, which fade with age. Being slow moving, sluggish and docile they are somewhat the exception in the shark world. They can also pump water over their gills, and thus sleep and rest in caves and gullies. Although not aggressive some individuals whose personal comfort zone has been encroached by divers these have been literally been chased out of the ocean. The actions of divers can easily disturb these shy and nervous sharks, so please approach all raggies with respect and do not try to interact with them in any way – observe only.

South Africa



ANDREW WOODBURN

Diver and ray

Raggy Cave and Shark Alley

This dive site is located on the east side of Aliwal Shoal and best accessed by boat from Umkomaas River. The site can also be so caution should be exercised. Probably best known for being the winter home to a group raggies which can be found in the caves resting. Please do not be fooled by their docile and sleepy look. Many divers have been chased out of the water for pushing their luck too far. Do not enter the cave only observe from the sides or good vantage point.

South Sands

Also located on the east side of Aliwal Shoal, this is a a good place to observe a large number of rays, skates, sand sharks and guitarfish It is also a good place to start a drift dive, in a northerly current. Along the outer edge there are some seldomly dived ledges at 18m-22m which only makes exploring more rewarding.



Want to photograph elephants?

The number one location at Kruger is The Kanniedood Dam, situated next to Shigwedzi camp. This spot is one of the most productive and prolific hot-spots to photograph elephants within Kruger. Worth visiting all year round, though both predators and game are most concentrated in the dry seasons June to October. Bird photography opportunities are good here too. With a 200mm lens you can photograph the habituated glossy starlings, various horn-bill species and colourful barbets. Also keep a lookout for dwarf and banded mongeese and reptiles. Agama lizards are abundant here and offer rewarding opportunities.

Pilanesburg

The park is a great conservation success story. Pilanesburg now holds a vibrant healthy population of game habituated to cars and people. 'Big Five' sightings are frequent, but the big draw here is the rare opportunity to photograph black and white rhinoceros. The reserve is very busy over school holidays and even weekends, so if you have the option visit mid-week and miss the crowds. Good to visit all year round,

and being malaria free makes this an excellent park to visit.

Zululand Reserves

Mkuze of the Zululand reserves is a premier photographic location. In the dry season from June to October, excellent game hides allow access to water-hole photography. White rhinoceros, nyalas, zebras, wilderbeest, and baboons are all here. Pelicans and hippos can be photographed at Nsumo Pan - also at Mkuze- but you will need a long lens and a tripod would come in handy.

Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park

The number one location within South Africa when it comes to white rhinoceros photography. Here you will also find an abundant elephant population as well as general game. In the summer months when the grass grows tall and makes productive photography difficult, try the Seme area in south Hluhluwe. Here the grass is cropped short, which gives excellent views of white rhinoceros, along with plenty of other game.

Ithala

Although lions are absent here, black and white rhino's are frequently seen here. General game is abundant here too and can be spotted all year round. Avoid visits in February to April when the grass is at its longest. ■



EDWIN MARCOW



ANDREW WOODBURN

The North Coast

A densely populated, attractive subtropical stretch of coastline north of Durban and a very popular spot for holiday-makers. Summer rainfall is high, winters are mild and pleasant, and the vegetation is lush, green and tropical. To my eye vast parts of this part of South Africa also resemble the green hills of England with a familiar look and feel to it.

The North-Coast is a very well developed tourist region with much to do for divers and non-divers alike. Highly recommended is a visit to the Natal Sharks Board at Umhlanga [pronounced oomshlanga] Rocks.

Diving

The best time to dive is May through July when the flow from the rivers are still low. The swells can be big, and the ocean is not always all that clean further out to sea. Launching the boats through the surf and out to sea is always exhilarating and physically arduous. Hence, it can only be recommended for fit and experienced divers.

Tiger Cove

Abundant with lots of caves and overhangs, named after a large colony of tiger cowries which regrettably fell prey to souvenir hunter dives. Located midway along the western edge of Aliwal shoal it is also a good place to start a drift dive along the inner edge. Maximum depth is about 14m.

Cathedral

An awesome site with a spectacular hole in the reef and home to many large stingrays and moray eels. The visiting spotted Ragged tooth sharks often rests in this site but are very easily disturbed here - even by the bubbles from your second stage bouncing off the archway at the entrance. The site should be dive very cautiously in a surge. Maximum depth 28m - average depth 27m

Margate

This is a very popular seaside resort which offers some of the best diving on the South African coast with large shoals of game fish congregating around Protea Banks followed by big groups of sharks

Arena

Situated on the Protea banks about 5 kms offshore and far into the Mozambique current Aren can boast a visibility of up to 40m, and never less than

8m. The visibility is best from November to May but diving is good all year with most of the sharks seen in the winter months. and always an excellent chance of encounters with game fish, Ragged-tooth sharks, Hammerheads, Zambezi, Copper, and Bronze Whaler, Threshers, and even the odd Great White Shark. Depending on the strength of the current you may be able to explore the reef, or a fast drift dive while you 'fly' past the various game fish and sharks.



DANIEL BEECHAM



What do we know about the elusive Raggies

Much confusion

The ragged-tooth shark genus *Odontaspis* was, until recently, one messy pile of similar-looking snaggle-toothed sharks that differed only in minor details. In various locations all over the world, the shark was assumed to be a different species and given its own scientific name. In other cases, like with the American sand tiger shark the species was thought to be the same.

Chaos reigned until in 1981 the shark researcher Leonard Compagno examined museum specimens from all over the world, corrected misidentifications and sorted out synonyms leaving only two species of *Odontaspis*:

The Bumpytail Ragged-Tooth Shark (*O. ferox*) and the Bigeye Ragged-Tooth Shark (*O. noronhai*), the latter being

extremely rare with only 15 known specimens worldwide.

Distribution

The Bumpytail Ragged-Tooth Shark is widely distributed, but records of its occurrences are so spotty it is all but impossible to predict where one will next appear. It is typically a deep-water species that is most active at night. As a result, it is rarely seen alive and very little is known of its behavior in the wild. They are thought to be deep-water inhabitants of warm temperate and tropical seas; on or near the bottom on continental or insular shelves and upper slopes where they are observed by divers on coral and rocky reefs near drop offs but also occurs in open ocean. Known

depth range is down to 420 m.

They feed on small teleosts (A large taxonomic group containing most bony fishes, ed) and other sharks and ray, squids, shrimps and other crustaceans

Reproduction

Length at birth is estimated to be about one meter. Females will grow to a maximum size of 3.7m and 323kg with the largest recorded male being 2.75m long.

They are almost certainly *ovoviviparous* (eggs which remain in the mother's body until they are ready to hatch. When the young emerge, they are born live)

Embryonic nutrition probably features oophagy (egg-eating) and possibly embryophagy (womb mate-eating). No data exists on number of pups (2 - 4 are a guesstimate), pupping season, or nursery grounds.

Males reach sexual maturity at a length of about 9 ft (2.75 m), females at about 12 ft (3.6 m); no data on age at maturity or longevity for either sex.

Age & Growth Males reach sexual maturity at a length of about 9 ft (2.75 m), females at about 12 ft (3.6 m); no data on

DURBAN

This regional capital is a city with much to offer from an aquarium, a snake park, bird garden, colourful rickshaws that ride up and down the streets to a permanent amusement park situated on the beach front. The Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Park offers the most spectacular game viewing on unique walking safaris with good accommodation.

The T Barge

This wreck is located 3km off the Virginia Beach and has a maximum depth of 27m with an average depth of 20m. It can be accessed by the boat launch from Grannies Pool, Umhlanga Rocks. The T barge is an artificial reef sunk to provide habitat for various marine life including butterflyfish, emperor angelfish, batfish. Divers can see rays and skates as well as trevally, daga salmon and giant kingfish.

The Trawler or Fontao

This largely intact Mozambique trawler was sunk in 1990 to create an artificial reef. It is located 2km out to sea south of Umhlanga lighthouse. It can also be accessed by boat from Grannies pool. The dive takes you through shoals of batfish to a depth

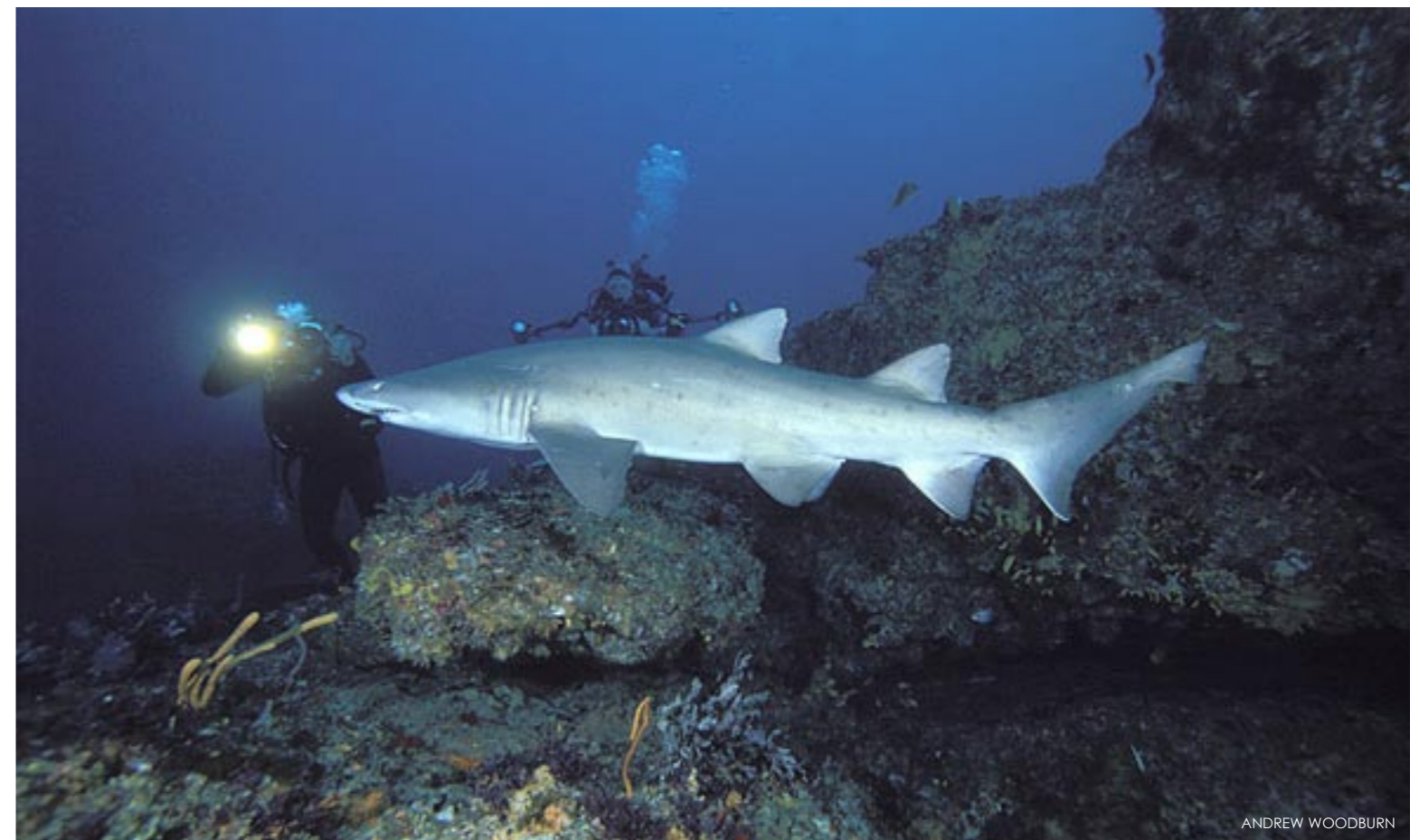
of 27m with an average depth of 18m. The wreck attracts pelagics that feed on the fish living on it. On night dives, you may be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the pineapple fish and its its flashing luminescent cells along its jaws. It is a small, plump, yellow-patterned fish that is active at night and hides in the crevices of the wreck during the day.

KWAZULU – NATAL

Pleasant all year temperatures, luxuriant green hills covered in sugar cane and banana plantations which roll down to golden-coloured beaches. This sub-tropical coastline encompasses the regions of Maputaland, The North Coast, Durban, and the South Coast, which we have just covered. In this area I feel we have left the best for last – Sodwana Bay.

Sodwana Bay

Sodwana, which means "little one on its own" in Zulu, is a paradise, of incredible beauty. Though Sodwana's coral does not form a continuous reef, but distinct reefs separated by the ocean the total reef is about 1.7km long and 900m wide. Orientation is roughly north-south, strong currents and surges



ANDREW WOODBURN





ANDREW WOODBURN

Goby rests on coral branch

are rare, and thus excellent for night dives. Depths vary from as shallow as 12m to a maximum of 36m. The surf launches like elsewhere on this coast is exciting and great fun – everyone helps push the boat out to sea. Whale Sharks, pods of dolphins do visit here making this if you are lucky enough – a very rewarding experience.

POTENTIAL HAZARDS

Malaria is present here; please follow malaria guidelines found in the travelogue article on South Africa. Because you are near the ocean do not be fooled there is no malaria present here, it can be virulent in this part of South Africa.

Sea Snakes

Elegant, beautiful, and graceful, the markings are usually black and yellow, patterned in stripes or spots – with a flatted tail, which they use like a rudder or oar to propel them through the water. Sea snakes are true

South Africa

snakes and do need to return to the surface to breath, Extremely venomous, but are not considered a threat due to the fangs, which are positioned backwards. They cannot inflict a harmful bite on a human. If you are fortunate enough to see one, enjoy the experience – please do not follow any sea snake it may become frightened and hide in a cave or crevice which can cause it to drown.

Seven-Mile Reef

Structured with mushroom shaped pinnacles and drop-offs, this reef boast a lot of character and a great diversity of marine life including rays and turtels, shoals of colorful goldies and various reef fish that hover above its corals. Located about 11km north of Jesser Point, the reef lies 800m offshore near the beacon that marks the end of the St Lucia reserve. The dives here average 18m with a maximum depth of 24m.

Five-Mile Reef

A delicate reef system, Five-Mile is heavily protected by both the Natal Parks Board and the charter boat operators. With its large flat reef and outstanding variety of fine corals, it makes one feel like one is diving in an aquarium. With a maximum depth of 21m, the reef is located 1km from shore 8km north of Jesser Point.

Potholed & Sponge Reef

This reef is actually a large flat section of Two Mile Reef. Located on the eastern side of Two Mile, it lies in the deepest section of the reef, so coral cover is sparse. However, there are large red gorgonian sea fans and huge sponges along the potholed reef structure to admire. Drifting along this reef on a dive is like hovering over a lunar landscape due to its terrain and greater depths. Divers average 27 m with a maximum depth of 42m.

Gullies, Caves & Overhangs

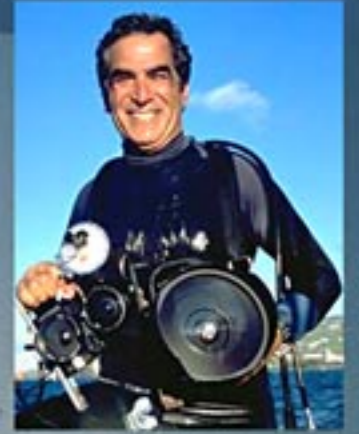
Located on Two Mile Reef, this shallow dive is made up of sandy gullies, overhangs that face the shore, pinnacles and coral arches.



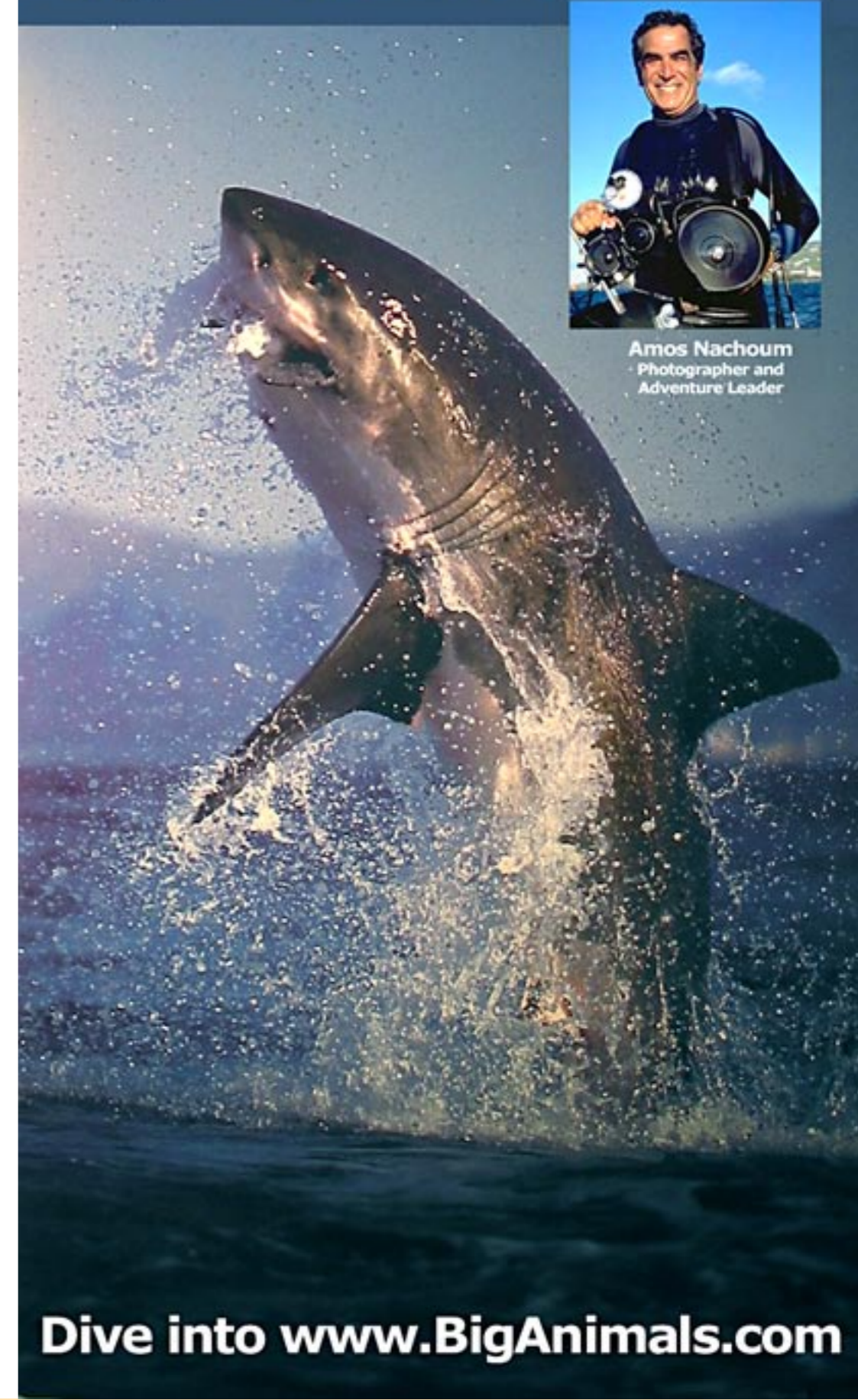
DANIEL BEECHAM

Dolphins travel with friends and family

Amos Nachoum's BigAnimals Adventure Travel



Amos Nachoum
Photographer and
Adventure Leader



Dive into www.BigAnimals.com

► continued on page 41

Sardine Run

Why?

The *Sardine Run* has been described as one of the greatest marine spectacles on earth. Every year an unimaginably vast shoal of sardines makes its way up along the east coast of South Africa. Millions of them. And hot on their trail an incredible array of predators like sharks, dolphins, seals, gannets not to speak of underwater photographers all gathering for this short-lived feeding frenzy and one of Mother Nature's most spectacular sights.

From the last week of May through early July millions of sardines, make this 1,000km journey through treacherous ocean currents along the KwaZulu Natal on the East Coast. All of which is natural and, as far as anyone knows, has been happening forever.

Why do the sardines travel north? Marine science does not have a clear answer and Sardine Run remains a unique and unexplained phenomenon, however of growing interest to tourists and fishermen alike.

Sardines, or Pilchards as they are also known, are commonly found in enormous shoals in various areas of the world including, of course, South Africa where the main spawning grounds are on the Agulhas banks off the Southern Cape coast. Here the adults gather for a prolonged breeding season through the spring and early summer. Their eggs are simply released into the water, fertilized and left to drift off in the open ocean. A benign ocean current carries most of



South Africa

the developing larvae westwards and northwards into the productive waters along the South African West Coast, that is the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently that large bulk of South African Pilchard Stock is found in the cooler water of the Atlantic Ocean off to the west of the Cape.

However, each winter, for reasons still largely unknown, a small segment of this population (yet still millions of individuals) move eastward up the Wild Coast and the Indian Ocean. The eastern bound shoals of these small fish pursue migrate about 1,600 km northeast from the spawning ground at the Agulhas bank in a northwards direction, coming close to shore in the South Coast area during autumn and winter, until the current reaches the Durban area. By Durban, the current turns east, heads out deep into the Indian Ocean's high seas and disappears and the sardine along with it.

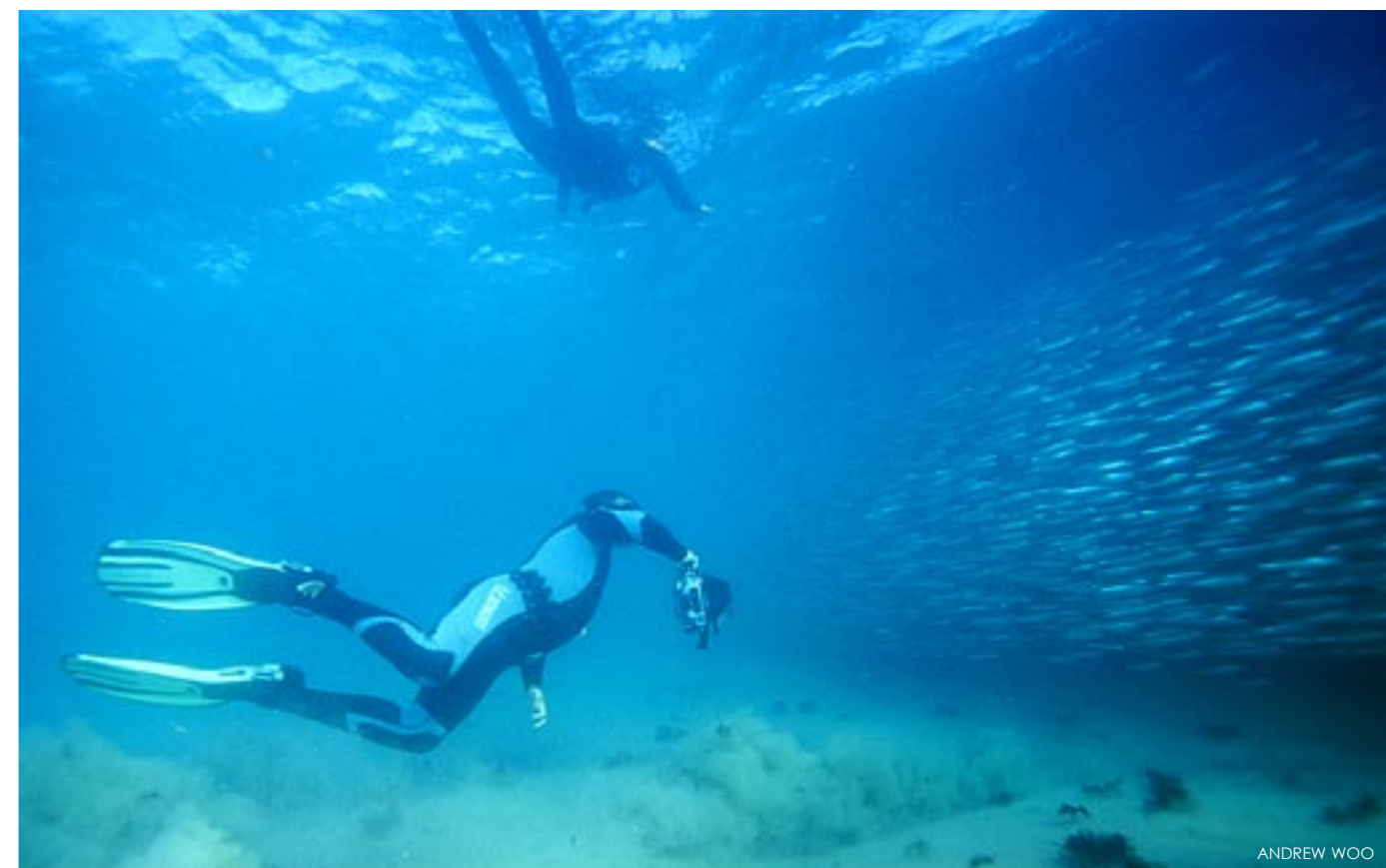
Where do they go afterwards? Do they return south and if that is the case when do they do it? Because of the cold currents along

coastline and their appetite for plankton, these fish converge close to the shoreline and to the surface, making ideal targets for hungry predators an awesome sight for scuba divers alike. The sardines shoal closely together minimising their chances of being taken by predators. But because the shoals become so concentrated into a narrow inshore band in the cool water, schools of marauding predators quickly locate the shoals and the feeding frenzy begins.

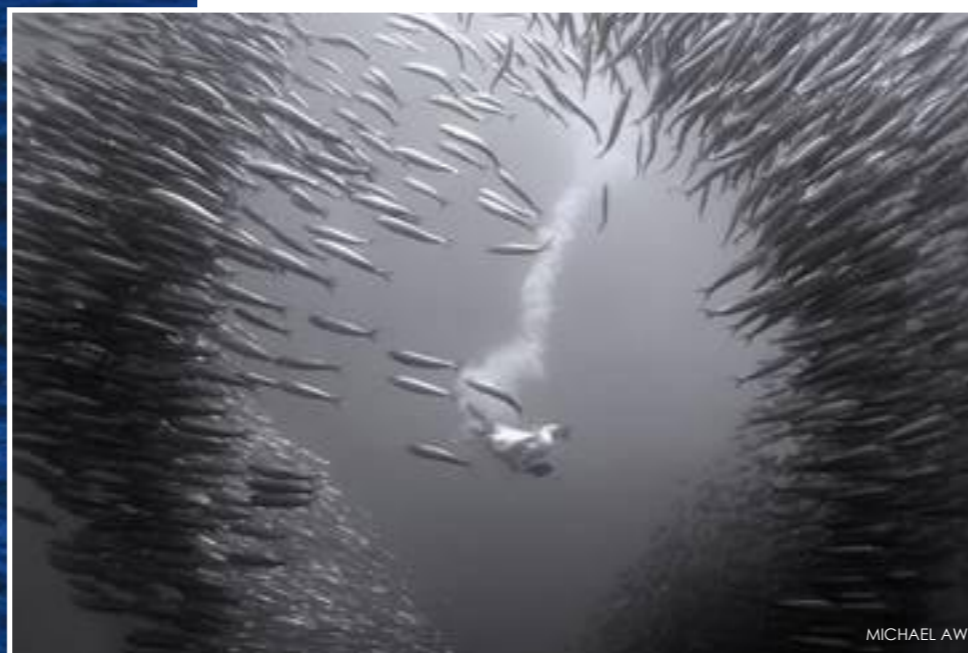
Tens of thousands of birds plunge from the sky like dive bombers, feeding on the fish which are driven to surface of large game fish, numerous species of sharks and dolphins that serve



AMOS NACHOUM



ANDREW WOO



MICHAEL AW

Sardine Run image wins Gold at 2005 Antibes Festival The image of a Cape Gannet catching a sardine at 60mph captured by Michael Aw has won the gold award for Black & White print at the recent world underwater film festival at Antibes. See report elsewhere in this issue

DANIEL BEECHAM

themselves from beneath and herd the fish into small baitballs and towards the surface. Every one seems to be gorging themselves on this unlimited selfserve buffet. An astounding variety of sharks from Bronze Whalers, Zambezies, Hammerheads, Coppers and Great Whites can be seen by the hundreds. Bottlenose and Common dolphins employ their unique hunting strategy where they, like sheepdogs, herd the sardines into a tight ball close to the surface. The dolphins then pounce on them,

gorging themselves on the tiny fish. Not be excluded are other marine mammals like Humpback whales, Minke's whales and Cape fur seals. And lately, this mixed party is often also joined by herds of divers, snorkellers, bird and nature watchers not to mention the plain tourists – some in the water, some not, some with some without cameras. ■





ANDREW WOODBURN

Shrimp and diver mirror each other in the deep
 Divers will find large potato bass up to 1.5m that get up front and personal with you especially if they smell a handout. Sea turtles and tiny cleaner wrasse are seen here as well as a wide range of coral and invertebrates due to the good light penetrating the shallow waters. However, there can be surge where maximum depth does not reach beyond 15m.



Anton's Reef

Another fine dive site on Two-Mile Reef is Anton's Reef which houses a plethora of



South Africa

ANDREW WOODBURN

South Africa boasts miles and miles of spectacular coast line

tropical fish and dense shoals of snappers, goatfish and big-eyes. Divers will find scorpionfish, large potato bass, marbled rays, small moray eels and triggerfish. Coral gardens are thick and diverse forming walls, overhangs, vistas and swim-throughs. It is one of the region's most spectacular and popular areas of Two-Mile Reef with much

to offer underwater photographers. Depths range from 15m to 18m.

Chain reef

A long ship's anchor gives this dive site its name where it lies draped over coral colonies spread out over the sea floor. A wide variety of small tropical fish and clown fish

can be seen as well as Leaf fish that live among the corals and anemones. Depths range from 15m to 18m.

Reference and recommended reading: The Dive Sites of South Africa by Anton Koomhof, published by New Holland, 1995, ISBN 1853685631. ■

Some creatures like this sand diver employ astounding camouflage



ANDREW WOODBURN

WINE



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Andrew Woodburn reports:

The elusive tiger shark was rarer on my hit list compared to white sharks, bulls, hammerhead, sand tigers or oceanic white tips. I had listened with envy to fellow divers who would tell me of 4m plus tigers swimming within a group of divers just the day after I had been at the very same spot. So, when a team started working and presenting tiger sharks as an open water option, in warm clear water, there wasn't even a moment's hesitation for me to try and create an opportunity to experience this phenomenon.

I live in Johannesburg, South Africa, about as far as one can get (6hr drive) from the sea. I have been taking underwater photographs for many years now and have developed a speciality based on big ocean animals. With this in mind, South Africa has provided an unbelievable spectrum of big animals and nature spectaculars. These happenings have formed the basis of features such as the BBC's *Blue Planet* with sardine run and white shark footage. I'm sure, by now, that any world-wide dive traveller and Discovery Channel viewer would put the country on the map for Great white shark viewing.

In addition to its awesome eco-dive tourism, South Africa has been producing world class shark viewing out of cages based on sand tiger sharks (Raggies at Sodwana bay and Aliwal shoal), mako and blue sharks (off Cape point) and bull sharks (at Protea banks).

As regards to tiger sharks, however, most of the global tiger shark interactive options involve more safety divers fending off sharks with long poles or divers huddling in reef holes for protection.

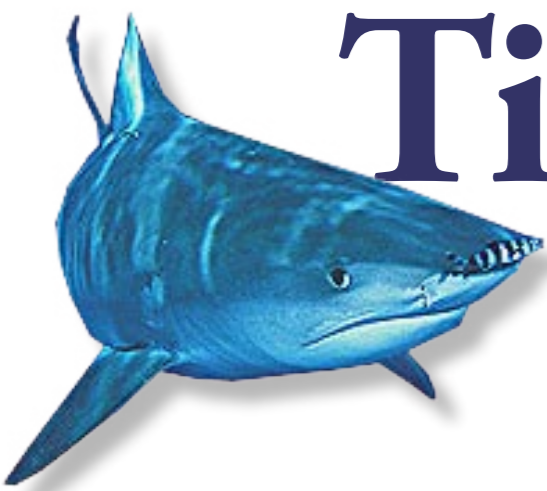
So, when Mark Addison and I were sitting on a boat doing sardine run work, and he started talking of his vision to build a unique programme where all users of the ocean

Toying with Tiger Sharks!

South African style



Text and Photos by
Andrew Woodburn
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Toying with Tiger Sharks

Fact File: Tiger shark, *Galeocerdo cuvier*

The Tiger Shark is considered one of the most dangerous sharks. This is partly due to their occurrence in shallow waters and their indiscriminate feeding habits. They have been nicknamed the dust bins of the sea due to their voracious appetite and reputation for eating anything in their path including seals, turtles, jellyfish, seabirds, fish, sea snakes, crabs, other sharks and rubbish. These sharks inhabit warm seas worldwide and live near the surface and at moderate depths. They are often seen near the shoreline.

Tiger sharks have stripes running across a dark back, with a paler belly. The snout is short and rounded and the teeth are sharply serrated. Juveniles have spotted dorsal fins. The largest recorded was 7.4m, but on average, females are 3.75m and males are 3m.

Tiger sharks have good eyesight but rely on their acute sense of smell to detect prey. Tiger sharks are solitary except when breeding. The female gives birth to between 10 and 80 pups, which are completely independent at birth. They can reach speeds of 20 mph and can travel up to 50 miles a day. Source: BBC Science

could benefit—sharks, divers, scientists, surfers and bathers—I was in complete support. Bathers and surfers... how could this work? Don't sharks attack these ocean users?

The tiger shark programme has been an all inclusive programme with Mark Addison providing key access to tiger sharks while scientists attach sonic transmitters to them and monitor their movements. Receivers on both ocean reefs, shark nets and buoys at surfing spots identify sharks movements and the potential behaviour changes that might occur due to active shark eco-tourism.

Over the next few seasons, Mark became more famous and his programme built a database of interactions and experiences with primarily female sharks. This data was actually nothing new, as Mark had been interacting with tigers as a free diver and spear fisherman on the Kwa-Zulu Natal south coast for many years.

Over time, Mark had noticed that it was very infrequent that there was any aggressive behaviour. Rather, there was curiosity displayed by the sharks. Following these experiences, he began the programme supported by dedicated individuals such as his father Brent and brother Wayne.

One season we decided to go out to sea for the day, a memorable 10th of January. That day, we were lucky enough to catch a 22kg tuna, which provided a wonderful sushi dish for us that evening. We also spent one hour and 40 minutes freezing at 14m in a cave waiting motionless for tigers. At which point, Mark then



Shark wrangler free diving with one of his subjects

caught a glimpse of a small juvenile tiger shark in his peripheral vision. He decided that it may require about three weeks of regular visits to put the shark at ease. This was how it all started... with loads of effort and patience.

Establishing practice

Seasons later, there was an established methodology which provided the most interactive and close-up encounters with big tiger sharks. Diving trips began at 9 am with launches through the South African surf on RIB boats loaded with divers and lunch. The divers waited until

one or two tigers approach the boats anchored at specific locations. A shark wrangler would then enter the water to assess the shark's behaviour and water conditions.

This is an exciting role to play. Using freediving techniques only, the wrangler will make contact with the animals and then invite the other divers into the water. Divers were told to stay to one side of the floating buoy and allow the tiger sharks to maintain their cruise patterns. With this process underway, anywhere from one to five or more sharks would be in attendance while divers

remained in a tight group between 5m and 10m deep.

Interactive... and no cages

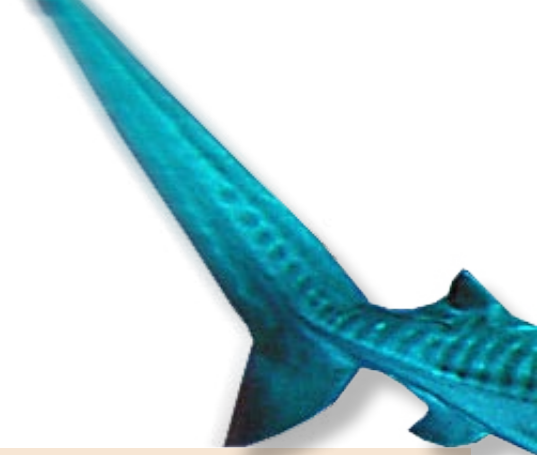
Diving with these tiger sharks is the most interactive and close-up encounters I have ever had with multiple big sharks. These animals can approach you from above, below or behind, or they will circle you. This is real adventure diving, no cages, no cold water, but rather, a slow intimate interaction where each stripe and mark on the sharks can be seen and examined. They seem to find us as interesting as we find them and maintain a rigorous pecking order to manage social interaction between themselves.

As the dive progresses, the sharks become





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Diver and tigers examine each other close up and personal, close enough to touch.

more relaxed, and as divers also realise and adapt to this unique process, they also tend to drift apart a little. The sharks can then swim amongst the group of divers. This adds to the excitement as there can be multiple interactions at one time.

The fish behaviour that carries on around you also involves pilot fish and remoras all playing the game. Interestingly, while tigers are about, there isn't a single other type of shark around that may be seen. It is as if the pecking order starts with the tigers, and then it might descend to bulls, black tips and others.

The images of streamlined, large, powerful sharks slowly and calmly swimming through streaming sunlight, as silhouettes, and presenting stripy details, muscular energy and dark eyed curiosity, is an experience that will remain with me forever.

70 minute encounter

I dived for 70 minutes with these majestic wonders of nature, and within that

time, surfaced to change film five times. Each foray to the surface alone, was an interesting session. I thought tigers would follow me up to capitalise on my lack of support and separation from the herd, but never once did I have a perilous experience. The wrangler, himself, remained on the surface at the buoy watching over things and indicated when divers were in the wrong position.

As sharks approach him to investigate, he merely placed his hands on their snouts and pushed them through his legs or off to one side. He almost made them seem like puppy dogs... even hitching a ride on the odd occasion. Towards the end of the dive, as divers surfaced and fewer remained, the sharks seemed to lose interest, although one or two remained to have a last look.

Total elation

The post-dive elation and sense of wonder among the group of divers is unbelievable. People were jabbering away uncontrollably after what, for most, was a truly once in a lifetime experience.

The interaction with the sharks is just unbelievable and converts any anti-sharker into a shark conservationist instantly. In contrast with the gruesome pictures

of shark finning I have seen, these live creatures are priceless. Tiger sharks are listed as vulnerable by the IUCN Red List. They are hunted for sport and for their meat, fins and liver oil.

Learning more

The value of the sharks has become interlinked to surfers and scientists in that funding from the surf clubs has bought more sonic trackers to follow where these sharks go and to understand what danger they may pose at what times of year and day. As much as this ground breaking

work may be inspiring, it is still saddening that we don't fully understand where these beauties go in the off season and what dangers they face. Constant long lining and uncontrolled shark finning offshore may mean more than one of these regulars might not be returning the following season.

When I look back on that one dive, I still see visual replays that send

shivers of inspiration down my spine, so much so that I have repeatedly tried to recreate the conditions and attendance but without success. For most dive travellers, the chance of experiencing this event is increased by spending longer than I had (2 days) at the ocean edge. Enjoy classic diving on wrecks and open ocean reef with unique ocean creatures such as the weedy scorpionfish (rhinophius frondosa), manta rays, bottlenose dolphin, sand tigers (ragged tooth shark) and incredible features such as cathedral of Aliwal shoal to add to your international divers logbook. Add more fun to your tiger shark safari with the Big Five (lion, leopard, buffalo, elephant and rhino) on a traditional land safari. It shouldn't be passed up. Some of the world's best safari lodges are only a few hours drive away. ■

Photographing tiger sharks:

Andrew Woodburn Shoots both digital (Nikon D70) and Film Nikon F100 in SEA&Sea housings with interchangeable strobe rigs from YS90 to YS350 strobes on variable arm setups. Shoot tigers with a min 20mm lens and be careful not to light any floating particles in the water. Insulate the strobes as these sharks will be curious about the charge stored in the capacitors and want to either chew them or come very close to inspect them.

Andrew Woodburn is a freelance adventure photographer who lives in South Africa.

He has been diving over 17 years and has been lucky enough to photograph whales and sharks to minute sand divers and the oceans abstracts. He has also been published in Men's health, Shape magazine, Travel Africa, Divestyle Magazine and Marie Claire as well as winning numerous U/W photo awards.

Andrew believes that the more people see what is under the ocean the more they will value those things and hence stand up to defend them when the time comes.

Check out Andrews new website:
www.woodburnphoto.co.za



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fact file

South Africa



Text by Edwin Marcow

When To Visit Summer is from November to January. The western Cape is hot and dry. The rest of the country is hot, humid and wet. Diving in the Cape is best at this time of year, although the water is cold. The Garden Route and KwaZulu-Natal South Coast is also an excellent destination this time of year. The best time to do cage diving in Gansbaai is in the winter months. Autumn is from February to April. The weather is warm and balmy, becoming decidedly cool by April. Diving over the whole country is variable. Winter is from May to July. It is cool and dry in KwaZulu-Natal. The diving in this region is excellent and very exciting with the presence of migratory ragged-tooth sharks. It is cold and rainy in the Western Cape and bitterly cold and dry in the interior. Spring is August to October and is a good time to visit the Western Cape to see the spectacular flowers and late September-October for game viewing. Please note that local tourism is high over the school holidays, especially on Easter and Christmas holidays, the whole of December and a good part of January. Traffic conditions in Cape Town at the height of the December season can rival any North American or European city. Two hours to get from one side of the city to another is not how I like to spend my well-earned rest and holiday time. The KwaZulu-Natal coast is very popular during the winter July Holidays.

Currency South African Rand
Exchange rate: 10 Rand = US\$1.50 / €1.27

Languages English, Afrikaans and numerous indigenous languages of the

Zulu's, Xhosa, Tswana, Venda, Ndebele. South Africa has 11 official languages.

Airlines All major airlines travel to South Africa, British Airways and South African Airlines have several direct flights to Cape Town per week from London.

Health Malaria alert in Kruger National Park, northern parts of KwaZulu Natal [St Lucia, Umfolozi, Hluhluwe, Kosi Bay] and to the northern arrears of Namibia [Caprivi, Kaudom Kavango]. Visitors are advised that these arrears fall within the malaria zone. Precautionary measures should be taken when entering these regions. Most malaria cases occur in the wet season peaking from February to May. Medication recommended is a daily combination of Paludrine and weekly Chloroquine [commercial names Daramal, Nivaquine, Plasmoquine, or a weekly dose of Larium. Also strongly advised is to apply Tabard repellent and the use of mosquito coils, vaporising mats and mosquito nets. No malaria is found in other parts of South Africa or Namibia.

Sun Protection — Be aware and careful of the strength of the sun. Some of the highest UV readings have been recorded in South Africa.

Culture South Africa is a whole World wrapped up in one country. European first world life, western culture, a modern health care system, a well maintained network of roads, a functioning economy, all combined with awe inspiring nature and traditional African culture. Enjoy French, Malay, Indian cuisine or Braai vleis [barbequed food] in some of the most sophisticated



restaurants you could find anywhere in the world.

Terrain A variety of scenic landscapes from burnt-out deserts and arid savannahs to idyllic green hills and fertile valleys to dramatic mountain alpine snow peaks. Two thousand kilometres of coastline hem the country from the rough, harsh and melancholic in the west to the mild and Mediterranean on the east coast to the tropically warmth of the northeast.

Places to see Cape Town is considered one of the most beautiful cities in the world attracting millions of visitors each year from all over the planet. Surrounded by breathtaking landscapes, beautiful mountain ranges, stunning wide golden beaches and unique flora and fauna.

Table Mountain can be accessed by cable car. At its peak, you have remarkable views of Cape Town from the beaches of Camps Bay and Sea Point to the city centre. Other attractions include visiting the Castle of Good Hope and several historical buildings from the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

Shopping at the V+A Waterfront — you can shop in style from European designer labels to art galleries.

Green Market Square — browse through the flea markets and arts and crafts stalls in the heart of the city centre.

Not to be missed is Hout Bay — eat fresh Crayfish in the many seafood restaurants.



Hout Bay is also a good place to dive from. There are a number of very good dive sites that are accessed from Hout Bay by Zodiac. The water is very cold and, at times, visibility can be almost zero. But on a good



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two to three days in Cape Town, preferably at the end of a trip, to relax, enjoy and unwind prior to heading back home.

The Western Cape reaches out to Plettenberg Bay in the east. This consists of the famous Garden Route, a diverse journey of breath taking scenery.

Enjoy stop-offs at quaint little towns such as Knysna. Walk through a rain-forest or just go for a ride on an historic steam train whose path hugs the coastline.

Plettenberg Bay, a mecca for South Africans in the December holidays, has accommodations that range from luxurious hotels to comfortable guest houses. It is home to stunning, long golden beaches, Robberg Sanctuary and large pods of dolphins that swim and surf in the warm Indian Ocean. The best time to photograph the dolphin pods is in winter. The same applies to Great White Sharks in Gansbaai.

A multiple of options in Plettenberg Bay include visiting the Cango stalactite caves, the ostrich farms of Oudtshoorn or the Addo Elephant National Park near Port Elizabeth.

Neighbouring Countries

Swaziland — You will find spectacular

LEFT: Fish eye
RIGHT: Diver meets tiger shark

hiking in Malalotja Nature Reserve less than a day's drive from Sodwana Bay, a good value for the money, and big game safaris are offered at Mkhaya Wildlife Refuge. One day white water rafting trips in the summer can be experienced in the Great Usutu River.

Lesotho — A country within a country, Lesotho is completely surrounded by South Africa. Miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails can be enjoyed in the mountainous terrain. These treks are often organised in the small resorts or villages. Good trout fishing, hangliding and paragliding.

Mozambique — After 20 years of civil war, this country is finally opening up to the rest of the world. Johannesburg International Airport is the usual access port followed by a substantial drive inland to a resort and the dive operation that is run by Marine Dynamics. Diving here is in conditions similar to the southern Red Sea. Big Manta and Whalesharks.

Before traveling to any region of Southern Africa, be sure to check with your physician about inoculations for various tropical diseases and prevention of Malaria. ■



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South Africa

day, the diving [particularly the ship wrecks] is rewarding. A dry suit is highly recommended.

Popular destinations include the winelands of Stellenbosch, Paarl and Franschoek. Speir, only 30 minutes from central Cape Town, is a beautiful hotel and winery estate with restaurants and fine wines. It is home to Cheetah Outreach, an organisation with which I have had a long relationship. Here, you can meet ambassador cheetahs as part of a conservation program to protect these magnificent animals.

It is strongly advised to try and spend

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