

WET NOTES

The quarterly newsletter of GUE in the UK

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Thresher sharks have been hunted extensively in the Philippines. The thresher shark project needs volunteers to work on its conservation project

Photo: Simon Oliver

From the editor

Rich Walker

Welcome to the July 2009 edition of WetNotes, the quarterly newsletter of Global Underwater Explorers in the UK.

First of all, I want to thank all of the contributors to this issue. We really do have lots of material, and I'm very grateful to all those that have contributed. We have three main articles, covering cave diving, recreational holiday diving and one from the Thresher Shark Research and Conservation Project. These guys are doing an amazing project in the Philippines and want to recruit GUE trained divers as they've had such a good experience with their skill level in the past. I hope that some of you will consider helping them out, as its very worthwhile, and will be a lot of fun as well. I'm looking forward to increasing the collaboration between GUE and the TSRCP and am hoping to go out there to visit later in the year. I'll be sure to bring a report back if it comes off!

WetNotes still needs regular contributions from around the UK, so if you've done some interesting dives this summer, let me know and I'll help you turn it into a short piece for the next issue.

Rich

News: GUE Conference Trip 2009

UK Divers Plan Florida Trip

A few of the UK divers are planning to get together and visit the GUE conference (13th-15th Nov), meet some old friends, make some new and above all, to do some awesome diving. There's always been a god turn-out to this event from the UK, and I hope that this year will be no different. To make it a bit easier, we are going to try to pool resources on accommodation, car hire and flights, which should make it a bit more economic, and a whole lot more fun.

If you want to come along, just get in touch with me, and I'll send you the details. rich@wreckandcave.co.uk.

Returning from a dive
in Fontaine de Truffe

Photo: Joe Hesketh



Cave Diving

A Return to the Lot

By Joe Hesketh

Back in September 2006, I travelled to the Lot region of south-west France with my good friend Jamie Obern. We had both completed GUE Cave 1 earlier that year in Mexico and were keen to gain more experience diving in some different caves. Although we could only spare a long weekend away, it was easily enough to leave me wanting to return.

Since then, I'd been on several cave diving trips to Mexico and Florida but, for one reason or another, never managed to make it back to the Lot. However, in May of this year, the opportunity arose to join Bob Cooper and Andy Carroll's annual early-season trip. They've been coming to this part of France for a few years, sometimes with others, though this year the numbers had expanded to eight divers. As well as Bob and Andy, we had Andy Woodside, Steve Palmer, Jay Dharma, Rich Walker, Matt Gentile and me. Coincidentally, John Kendall, David Martin and (for the first weekend) Rachael Macdonald were also diving in the area, which swelled our numbers further on certain days.

Even if you never set foot (or fin) in a cave, this region of France is worth a visit, a fact not unnoticed by the many tourists it attracts during the summer. The majority of the dive sites here are around the Lot, the Célé and the Dordogne rivers, each of which can be found nestled in a spectacular valley, reached via winding hillside roads passing through charming little rural vil-

lages. However, we'd really come for the diving and it didn't disappoint. We dived quite a few of the popular caves during the week—including Source de Landenouse, Fontaine St Georges and Fontaine du Truffe—however, I'll just give an overview of two of the stand-out dives for me, those in Trou Madame and Émergence du Res-sel.

Trou Madame is not a cave that I'd dived before. This is not really surprising—had I even managed to find the right dirt track on my previous trip, it is likely that I would have been put off by the logistics just to get to the cave entrance itself. I'd heard about this of course, however after following Bob through the trees, negotiating a little rock climbing over-hanging the stream, up a steep bank, then down over large rocks into the cave, I found that the reports had not been exaggerated!

The set-up was about as different to my last cave dive prior to this trip—at Florida's Ginnie Springs—as one could imagine. No neat car parks, kit benches, shower blocks or wooden steps into the water here. I gather that sometimes the stream up to the cave runs dry so you can just walk up the river bed, however, all through the previous night, we had had torrential and quite spectacular rain—hailstones like marbles and rivulets of water gushing through the streets—so the levels and the flow in the stream were both high.

Stages ready for diving

Photo: Joe Hesketh



I was diving with Rich Walker and, despite the hike up to the cave, we had planned a double-stage scooter dive. Bob and Andy C had a similar plan but were after the end of the line (some 2.5 km in through eight sumps) and so each had an extra stage again. As Matt and Andy W were also diving a stage, between us we had a fair amount of gear to move up to the cave entrance.

Some three hours later, we had assembled all the gear and placed it in the entrance pool. Fortunately, because of the rains, this area was flooded. Normally, the water doesn't start until some way in, requiring a further low crawl with the gear before the dive can start.

Whilst gearing up in the entrance pool, my primary light went off. Andy Carroll referred, somewhat ahem... unkindly, to my E/O cords (which are occasionally problematic). I unplugged them and tried a couple of tricks I know to clean the contacts. Once re-struck, the light stayed on for a good while thereafter, so we started the dive.

We were first in. After tying into the main-line and exchanging signals, we hit the trigger and proceeded into the cave. Visibility wasn't excellent and so it wasn't the easiest of scooter rides, due also in part to the constant buoyancy changes from the cave profile which varied from around -6 metres to -2 metres. Trou Madame is a very pretty cave, but with fairly dark walls and the less than perfect conditions, I didn't really get a chance to soak it all up travelling at speed.

The plan was to scooter as far as we could, then leave the scooters where the cave drops to -17 metres at the bottom of a slope and then continue swimming. Not having dived the cave

before and with the water level so high, it was difficult to tell where the cave normally sumped, as it all looked to be submerged.

Some 25 minutes into the dive and Andy's prophetic words ran through my head again as my primary light went out. After turning on a back-up, we stopped and tried to fix the light. After three hours of strenuous portage, and with less than 50 bar used from just one stage, neither of us were keen to end the dive there. However, the light wouldn't play ball and so, regrettably, we had no sensible choice but to turn back. The other teams completed their dives as planned, though despite 3 hours and 20 minutes in the cave, the end of the line still eluded Bob and Andy for another year. Some efficient teamwork meant that we had all of the gear back down the hill and packed away in fairly short order, though it was still a very long day for one 45 minute dive!

The other memorable dive for me that week was the last of the trip, in Émergence du Ressel. It was a chance to benefit from combining the last few years' worth of training and experience since first diving the Ressel as a Cave 1 diver, some years before. Namely, GUE Cave 2, Tech 2 and a week-long cave DPV workshop with GUE instructor Danny Riordan.

Diving again with Rich, we planned for a multi-stage scooter dive in la zone profonde (the deep section of the cave, though it sounds better in French!). I suggested two bottom stages. Rich tentatively suggested, "maybe three...", but I thought two would be plenty for my first dive in this section of the cave. We planned to travel through the galerie supérieure, which is the shallower of the two routes in the deep section, so

being unlikely to pass beyond -60 metres we took 18/45 trimix in our double-18s and stages and just used 50% and oxygen for deco, plus I towed a reserve scooter.

Ressel was less busy than it had been earlier in the week (the region, and especially this cave, are popular with divers from all over Europe), but we still amassed a fair amount of kit down by the river bank. Bob and Andy C were planning a similar dive to us and Matt and Andy W were also going to scooter to the top of the shaft and then swim, so, between us all, we carried 7 scooters and 22 stages from the road, down the steep bank and into the water, a task made easier by everyone helping out.

For our dive, we planned on breathing back gas through the shallow section. Normally, we don't touch back gas when scooting in caves, however the staging area for the 50% bottles can be reached in only 10 minutes or so on the trigger and, at an average depth of about -12 metres, this doesn't really make any impression on double 18s. Dropping the O2 tanks just inside the mouth of the cave, we scooted via the shorter (but slightly deeper) section, before dropping the 50% at its MOD and switching to the first of our stage cylinders.

Proceeding to the edge of the shaft, I was now in new territory (for me, at least). Whilst the first section of the cave is relatively shallow, it now plunges down, first fairly steeply to -30 metres and then, quite breathtakingly, vertically down a huge wide shaft to -45 metres. From there the cave gradually slopes downwards (eventually reaching -80 metres or so further in). Now, in the deep section, the cave took on a whole new personality. Whilst the shallow part is very angular—huge rectangular blocks litter the floor

which, though carved by nature over the eons, almost look man-made—the deep section changes almost immediately, opening out into a huge wide passage with softer features and more intricate patterns of erosion, somewhat reminiscent, I thought, of some of the less decorated caves in Mexico.

I was leading in and, benefitting from the excellent visibility, had the pleasure of seeing this huge expansive cave open up in front of me as we swooped round each of several 90 degree bends. Soon we were past -50 metres and at that depth the drop pressure (half plus 20 bar) on an 80 cubic foot cylinder is quickly reached (in only 10 minutes or so). I signal a nice flat rock and we drop the first stage cylinder and switch to our second before proceeding. Rounding the next bend, we see Bob and Andy C on their way back out. They are hovering above the line switching back to their other tank which, like us, they had staged on the way in. I stop briefly and shoot them a glance, and we speed past into the darkness.

After some distance, we came across the first deep T-junction. I'd discussed the cave layout with Bob that morning and it all seemed to match his description. I paused to shine my light up to the left to check that there really were two passages (the line can be somewhat confusingly laid in some French caves), and then signaled the right-hand passage to Rich before stopping to mark our exit.

When swimming in a cave (especially in good vis) you usually have plenty of time to reach into your pocket to retrieve your markers before reaching an unfamiliar T. However, when scooting, you're often at the junction itself before you have had time to dig around in your



Joe checks his gas before diving

Photo: Jo Dharma

pocket. Although this only wastes a couple of minutes, these really count when you're at -55 metres with only 80 bar of usable gas in a stage to play around with, and I silently cursed myself for not having 'cheated' a little and having had a cookie ready somewhere more accessible.

From what I could remember of the cave survey, my next visual marker would be another pit, this time going vertically upwards some 5 metres. This duly reached, now the cave closed in a little before progressing to yet another pit, this time plunging down to the previous depth. At the bottom of this, I realised that, in my eagerness, I had left Rich a little way behind as his light did not penetrate past the lip of the pit above. Holding my breath briefly, I could hear

the motor on his scooter and, turning around and starting back up the pit, his light soon loomed into view once more.

Checking my gas pressure, I was more or less close to turn, so decided to call the dive there, which, from the survey, is 930 metres from the entrance. With Rich now out in front, I could relax a little and enjoy the cave once more as we retraced our steps back the way we had come.

Surfacing, we gently floated back down the Célé to the river bank where, stripped of all the clutter of scooters and stage bottles, we basked in the bright sunshine and chatted with Matt and Andy W, whose smiles beamed just as brightly. I guess they'd had a good dive too!

News: First UK GUE Facility Announced

Underwater Explorers obtain highest GUE facility status

For many years, the staff of [Underwater Explorers](#) in Portland, Dorset, have been at the centre of GUE diving activities in the Weymouth and Portland areas. They hold a wide range of equipment for sale, offer rentals, and are happy to give advice on local dive sites when needed. In recognition of this, they have recently been awarded the status of GUE Dive Centre, the highest available.

Via the Millennium Divers club, they run regular trips for the GUE trained (or interested!) diver. These are a perfect way for you to meet other GUE divers, and get some great diving done. Levels from GUEF through to Tech 2 are accommodated.

Nina, Ben and the team will also be announcing projects, regular GUE training, holiday trips and social events.

To read more about what being a GUE facility entails, take a look at the GUE website here: [GUE Facilities](#)





The only GUE diver in the village?

Photo: James Sanderson

Holiday Diving

The only GUE diver on the boat?

By James Sanderson

As the time of year draws upon us to start looking forward to and planing this summers dive holidays many of you will be doing so with a new GUE Fundamentals certification. As you will now know even at GUE-F level we have made a major change in the way we plan and approach recreational dives. There is no reason why all of those skills should not easily translate to warmer waters and great holiday dives and this article aims to give you some considerations with regards to equipment and dive planning when on holiday.

What gear to travel with?

One of the great benefits of a backplate and wing system is the flexibility it can give you when switching from a twinset to single tank configuration. As a minimum I always travel with a backplate/harness and single wing.

Although the cost of an STA and single wing may initially seem high, this cost is easily recovered through just a few BCD rentals from your holiday dive operator and the extra comfort and enjoyment of your holiday dives in you own rig.

In addition I bring my long hose regulator set up. If you can contact the dive center you will be with ask if they have DIN valves (or valves with a removable insert) . Some might not so an A clamp 1st stage will be your best option rather than a DIN converter as this would add an additional and unnecessary O ring.

If you are going to use a rental BCD from you dive operator rather than bring a BP and wing I would recommend a 1.5m primary hose as routes nicely under the arm without needing a hip pocket or torch canister to secure it.

In addition to my wing I always bring the trusty Jet fins, mask and one backup light. I have also recently opted for a right hip pocket for a 1m DSMB, spool and wetnotes. A hip pocket isn't quite big enough for a spare mask as well so consider the importance of that in your dive plan.

If you plan some night or wreck dives and have the luggage allowance a primary torch is always great to have, even with both a canister and a right hip pocket the equipment balances just fine.

Check with your airline about additional hand baggage for 'camera equipment' in addition to your regular carry on allowance. A metal tool case from a hardware store is perfect for torches, regs and O₂ analyzer.

Getting a non GUE trained buddy.

If you a have not had the chance to get on one of the GUE friendly liveaboards (and I would recommend them!) and are diving on a mixed boat you will probably end up with a non GUE buddy.

In my experience this generally is not a problem provided you are happy with their general

level of training and experience. You can always ask to buddy the guide, instructor or an available member of staff.

The EDGE of the GUEEDGE pre-dive plan can still be applied to a mixed pair, all you have to do is spend a few moments during the dive plan to review a few things with your buddy and explain why.

E: Tell them in a OOG situation you will give them the regulator you want them to use, show them how you deploy it. This has never caused any problem in my experience.

D: In the pre-dive plan with your new buddy just discuss and agree planned max depth, multi-level depths etc. I tell my buddy that I like 'a nice slow ascent rate' and if it's a dive in the 20-30m range I like to add a deep 'pause' for a minute or so at about 50% of the max depth.

I don't use a dive computer and use a bottom timer and software-generated tables from Deco Planner (laminated and kept my wet notes) Remember, some far-flung places will not have enriched air available so if you generate a table for 32% you can use some rules of thumb to work with air.

Many divers and dive computers will demand a 6m stop regardless of the dive profile, so as a matter of courtesy to my buddy I will do the stop, and enjoy the mid-water buoyancy control practice!

G; Most divers will know that they have to finish the dive with a certain pressure in their tank. As GUE-trained divers we will have much clearer understanding of just how much and

why. With a buddy with an unknown SAC a conservative min gas may be preferable.

E: In this area of planning I suggest thinking about reef and wreck environments. Reefs are regularly damaged by recreational divers, and a reminder here to not touch anything is worthwhile. Wrecks with the potential for swim-throughs should be taken cautiously, as ever.

Ultimately you have the skills to safely enjoy recreational dives in a variety of environments with a level of awareness and confidence that many 'experienced' divers will not be able to match. Whether it's a balanced rig to be as comfortable as possible or trim and buoyancy control to get the best from your photography or good finning techniques to ensure that the environment is not disturbed with a little planning your holiday diving will simply never be better.

As in all cases please speak to a GUE instructor if you are unsure about any aspect of multi-day repetitive diving and have fun!



James gets ready for a reef dive in Utlia, Honduras.

Photo: James Sanderson

Conservation in the Philippines

Thresher Shark Research and Conservation Project

By Simon Oliver

Thresher sharks are among the more demanded shark species for global fisheries. They are prized for their high quality meat which is used fresh, frozen, smoked and dried-salted. Their fins are prized for shark-fin soup, their livers for vitamin extraction and their hides are used in the production of leather goods. It has been estimated that up to 80% of global thresher shark populations have been lost over the past 15 years.

In the Philippines, it is not uncommon for Thresher meat to fetch £1.90/kg and £19/kg

tives to protect them in Philippine waters.

TSRCG is a not-for-profit research group made up of 5 academic staff from biology departments across the UK. Its field station, which is community based (hosted by Divelink on Malapascua Island, Philippines), attracts volunteer research assistants from around the world.

In March 2008, the TSRCG assessed that the rate at which thresher sharks are fished out of Philippine waters was beyond the sustainability thresholds. If unified conservation efforts are not applied, thresher sharks are likely to be eradicated from many of their chosen habitats.

TSRCP's experience with the skill and commitment levels seen in GUE divers has been remarkable, and TSRCG would now like to recruit more volunteers with GUE training for its future field expeditions. TSRCG and GUE share similar conservation, outreach and dive practice goals, so this is an ideal and exciting development for both organisations, and for the divers who choose to get involved.

This is a unique opportunity for GUE divers with an interest in studying and diving with sharks to gain hands on experience in shark survey methodology, behaviour, biology, ecology and conservation. Volunteer research assistants will be based on Malapascua Island and shuttled to Monad Shoal aboard a dedicated research vessel. Operations will run five days a week volunteers will get involved in survey, photography, underwater video observation, tagging (pending funding) and photographic ID databasing. Full scientific training is given, and full academic support will be available at all times.

For more information, visit to the [TSRCG](http://www.tsrcg.org) website.



GUE divers have the opportunity to get involved in a scientific conservation project

Photo: Simon Oliver

for fins. This trade is common in fish markets across The Philippines. Thresher sharks are known to be directly targeted for the Asian shark fin trade in Batangas Bay, Sogon, and Bohol, and are suspected to be hunted in many other regions.

Since 2004, The Thresher Shark Research and Conservation Group (TSRCG) has studied thresher sharks and informed conservation initia-



Thresher shark in Filipino fish market

Photo: Simon Oliver

Global perspective: Malta Deep Wrecks

By Rich Walker

The Spring 2009 issue of Quest, the quarterly GUE journal, was really full of some great articles this quarter. If you're not already receiving it, I can thoroughly recommend it. Cave exploration in Portugal, Bonaire, the Turner connection from the WKPP, and diving on Baltic wrecks were all included. However, one that captured my imagination was Dmitri Gorski's article on the deep wrecks in Malta.

Malta has traditionally been a haunt of UK divers. It's easy to get there, inexpensive to stay and dive, and has year round warm weather. In fact, several members of GUE from the UK have been diving over there this summer, so I was interested to see if their experience matched up with Dimitri's.

Dimitri gives a great overview of the history of three of the wrecks, *Le Polynisien*, *HMS Stubborn* and *Schnellboot S-31*. The wrecks are all easily accessible from Valetta, the Maltese capital, and are in the 55-70m range.

Le Polynisien was a 152m long French cruise liner, commandeered during WW1 as a troop transport. She was torpedoed in 1918 by UC-22 and now lies on her keel with the stern gun still pointing defiantly to the sky.

HMS Stubborn was a British submarine, and saw lots of the war, being heavily damaged in Norway, moving to Asia where she sank several Japanese ships. She was sunk as a sonar target off Malta as such is completely intact.

Schnellboot S-31 was a German motor torpedo boat. They were very fast, lightly armoured, craft that relied on speed to attack the Allied shipping and were very successful at chasing around the Mediterranean. They carried torpedoes and mines, and it was one of her own mines that sank her. She was laying a minefield outside Valetta harbour and one of her mines came free from its mooring and S-31 scored an own goal. She now lies in around 70m, just outside Valetta harbour. Artifacts litter the seabed, and is a short but very worthwhile dive.

In short, Malta has some great diving to offer the technical wreck diver. Wrecks of historical interest within easy reach of the shore, in warm clear water. Now that sound appealing!

GUE members can read Dmitri's full article in the latest issue of Quest, available for download at www.gue.com.



HMS Stubborn

Photo: Björn Ahl

Upcoming GUE Courses

UK Courses from UK instructors

GUEF	Aug 08, 2009 Stoney Cove, Leics.	CHG
GUEF	Aug 12, 2009. Vobster, Somerset.	JK
Tech 1	Aug 26, 2009 UE, Dorset.	RDW
Tech 1	Aug 27, 2009. NDAC. Chepstow.	JK
Tech 1	Sep 02, 2009 UE. Dorset.	RDW
GUEF	Sept 8, 2009 Capernwray.	JK/RDW
DPV1	Sept 14, 2009. UE. Dorset.	RDW
GUEF	Sept 17, 2009. Vobster, Somerset.	JK
GUEF	Sept 29, 2009. UE. Dorset.	JK
GUEF	Oct 01, 2009. Vobster, Somerset.	CHG

Full details of all GUE courses can be found at www.gue.com.

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GUE-UK online

The GUE website is up and running, and we now have around 300 people subscribed to the WetNotes newsletter. The website now has an archive area where you can download all of the past issues of Wetnotes. The website also has pages and updates from the various dive groups around the country. If you have any news then please get in touch, and I'll post it up.

Get online and get involved at:
www.gue-uk.com