

# Socorro Islands, Mexico

January 27-February 7, 2014

## Anacortes Diving Adventure Team



Kelley, Bob, Kathy, Russ, Hal, Dale, Peggy, Tracy, Mary

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Route: Seattle—San Jose Del Cabo Carrier: Alaska Airlines

### Departure Day

We meet up at the airport for our flight and Kathy informs us that Scott won't be able to join us as he has come down with a terrible head cold. We are bummed about him not being able to come, but very thankful that he has made the right choice in case he gets worse and he doesn't infect the entire boat. Get well Scott, we will miss you! Our flight departed at 11:30 am and we have a direct flight to San Jose which was uneventful and we arrived right on time. They have an all new terminal, very easy to navigate through and we were the only plane to arrive at that time so immigration took about 10 minutes. Grab your luggage and then off to customs where you have the typical push the button for red or green light. They asked a few questions about cigarettes, alcohol and then saw Bob's Pelican case and he told them camera equipment and that gets you an automatic red light and you have to have all your luggage x-rayed. No big deal, they didn't even open any bags. Once you are out of customs you run the gauntlet of timeshare and condo salesman, which you don't even want to stop or talk to otherwise they will reel you in. Just exit straight outside and here is where our transportation is waiting for us with our name on a sign. We used CTS (cabo transportation services), and they had a nice new large van/bus that easily fit our luggage and 9 people. It was about a 40 minute ride to Cabo San Lucas and we made a beer stop along the way. Our driver then drove us to our hotel, which we stayed at Siesta Suites. It is a small 4 story hotel and the rooms are clean and ours even had a small kitchen. It is now about 6:30pm and we need to forage for some dinner. We ask directions to Panchos which is just on the next block to the left. It was great Mexican food and killer Margaritas. After that we walked along the harbor and Bob pointed out where the boat was located and how far of a walk from our hotel it was. We then decided to walk back towards the hotel and have one more drink at Happy Endings. The bar is pretty empty as it is only about 9:00pm and things just haven't picked up for the party crowd yet. The Margarita was good, the beer was cold and then Bob made the call that we needed to head back to the hotel before I got carried away and busted out my best party mode. Thank you Bob for making me go home!

### Day 1

So a funny thing happened in the middle of the night. Bob gets up, takes a shower and gets dressed and ready to depart for the boat. He is yelling at me to get out of bed and get going, but I am really tired and I cannot get up. All of a sudden he yells something is wrong with his watch and he says "My watch is wrong, it says it's midnight" Guess what? It was only midnight! What in the hell is he doing! I can't believe it, he is so excited to go that he



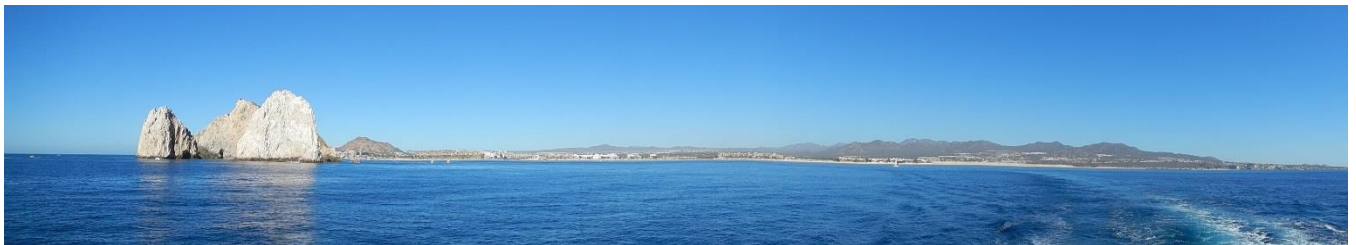
didn't even look at his watch before he jumped in the shower. I am extremely happy that I can go back to sleep now. In the "real" morning we have a good laugh over his shenanigans last night. We get ready to go and we walked down the block to the right this time and grabbed a coffee at the Cabo Coffee Company. They had good coffee and some baked goods in the case. We also passed Mama's Café which was open for business if you were looking to do breakfast before getting on the boat (Nautilus Explorer). I had asked the hotel to arrange for a cab in the morning to take all our luggage down to the dock as it is just far enough that you don't want to carry all your luggage along the waterfront. The taxi was actually early and he had brought a large van





that fit all the luggage and most of the group. Only 2 people had to walk down to the boat. It only cost us \$11 US for the taxi and it was well worth it. The crew is already there and we unloaded the van and the crew took it from there, all we needed to do was show our passport at the dock gate and then they let you down to the boat. Once on board we sign all the forms, meet all the other divers on board (we split the boat with Silent World Dive Center). Our captain for this cruise is Al Spilde, who we have known for a very long time as he used to own the Sea Venturer which was a live aboard boat up in Canada many years ago. He is excellent and we are very happy that he is the captain. After a briefing and fire drill with muster station practice the boat departed promptly at

9:15am and then breakfast is served. On the way out of the harbor there is a breaching Humpback which we take as a good luck sign for what we hope to be a fantastic trip. We have about a 2 foot swell as we prepare for our 24 hour crossing out to the islands. Not too far along the way we have more Whales which is fantastic. At



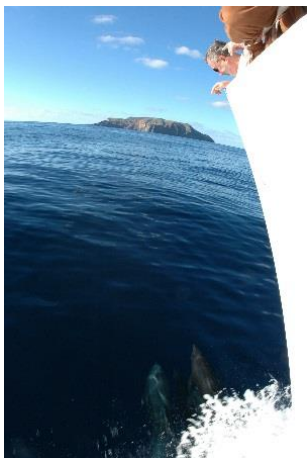
11:00am we have another briefing about the diving and then we have all day to get our cameras and dive gear organized. Today was pretty much eat, dive briefing, eat, another briefing, eat, brief, cocktail hour, dinner, bed. The seas remained relatively calm considering we are out in open ocean, I think at one point we might have had a 5 ft swell at the most. This is considered really calm for out here and I am truly grateful for that.

## Day 2

Didn't sleep all that great last night, moving boat, engine noise, new bed, blah, blah, blah. Oh well, that's how it goes on the first night for me. Captain Al told us to be up by 7:00am if we want to watch the Dolphins escort us



into the islands. Sure enough, right on time we have up to 3-4 Dolphins riding the bow. It is a beautiful day as the sun is coming up, just a few clouds in the sky and everyone is so excited to see what the first dive is going to bring us.



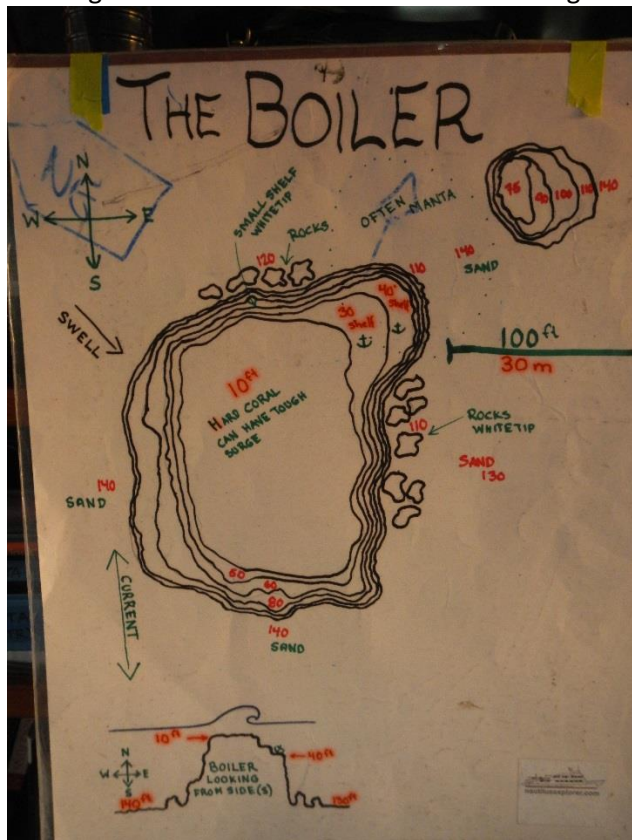
Breakfast will be served before our first dive which is scheduled for 9:30am, normally we would have light breakfast then dive and come back for second breakfast and so the day begins. We will spend the day at San Benedicto Island to see what sort of "action" is in store for us. The first dive had quite a bit of current and everyone had to work out their weighting and new equipment. For the most part everyone did fine, most people just went thru their air fast. Several people saw a Manta, and one hammerhead. There were plenty of large Green Morays out swimming and a couple of Octo's hunting. Dive 2 was about the same except there was no



current so it was much more pleasant. One Manta made a brief appearance and we did see a Silver Tip swim by. Third dive was a bit shallower and the last group out said they had about 20 Hammerheads make a brief appearance. After the dive we enjoy the hot tub on the upper deck as we watch the sun slowly set. Time for a shower, a little happy hour and then some dinner. Chalk up day one and even though some of the group saw some great things it was strike one for me. The thing I always say is that even though I might not have seen all the cool stuff, being underwater is better than anything else I can think of. And there will always be another day of diving.

### Day 3

We have moved just around the corner of San Benedicto to the dive site "The Boiler" here two currents converge and make the water look like is boiling at the surface. This is usually a great sight for Dolphins and we



already have them circling the back of the boat. Today's schedule is light breakfast, dive, 2<sup>nd</sup> breakfast, dive and then lunch. Seas are still fairly calm and just a few light clouds in the sky. Yeah Mantas!! Finally saw one! Great schooling fish and then up to 3 Mantas came in, not very close so hopefully the second dive we will have a closer encounter. We have breaching Humpbacks off in the distant and the Dolphins are still circling the boat. A few more Manta's on the second dive and then we barely did an hour surface interval and jumped in for a 3<sup>rd</sup> dive. This time we had 3 Mantas to start and then we were down to 1 Manta that just kept coming back again and again. The swell has picked up quite a bit and the vis has really dropped down to about 40 ft. Upon surfacing we have another boat join us on the site called the Seascope and now they have closed the dive deck until 3:30pm so we can play nice and share the dive site. So it must be time for some lunch as we are all starving if you can believe that. A little sun on the top deck and then back to diving at 3:30pm. Everyone jumps in for the last dive of the day as the cut off time is 5:00pm to be back on the boat. When we jump in we have no action so we circumnavigate the pinnacle 1 ½ times before the Mantas finally show up. It's at the opposite side of where they





have been all day and this is our best interaction yet. We have 2 very large ones that keep circling over and over again and we all have our spirit fingers up and ready for action. Everyone has an incredible encounter with the Manta's as they just stall over the top of us and love to have our bubbles on their bellies. Time is running out as most of us are really low on air and we have to get going. We hate to leave and it is so tempting to stay but we have a bit of a swim to get back to the boat. We reach the boat and everyone is on the hang line doing their safety stop with huge smiles on their faces. It was an incredible day and we can't wait to see what tomorrow is going to bring us.

#### Day 4

The boat departed around 3:30am from San Benedicto for Socorro Island. The rumor has it that Socorro is closed for military maneuvers, but apparently we have special permission to be there anyway. It's almost 7:00am and



we are still motoring closer, our dive time is scheduled for 7:15am so we'll see what's going to happen. Our first dive is Cabo Pierce. As we are anchoring there is a Mother and calf Humpback in the bay as well as dolphins on the surface. We jump in and there is a little bit of current as we head for the cleaning station. We can hear the Humpbacks sounding the entire dive, it is absolutely amazing to listen to. Hal & Russ had a slight view of the Whales silhouette. We did have one large Manta swim by at the surface but didn't hang around to come into the cleaning station. Several Octos are out and cruising the reef and we spotted several Giant Hawkfish. I believe we are camped out here for the day.



Second *dive* was awesome! Had 1 big Manta come around over and over at the cleaning station, then a second one appeared but was a bit shy. We are sitting in 90-100ft of water so time is going to be short. We start heading back to the anchor line and it is a long swim when all of a sudden a pod of dolphins silently show up. Wow, this is amazing! I have never seen wild Dolphins underwater before, absolutely incredible! We are sooo out of air and time, got to get our butts up the line. We are all high five'n each other on the line, this is the best

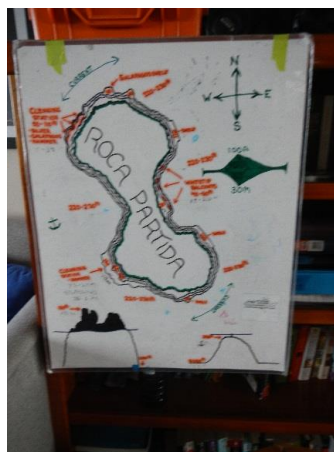
so far. Can't hardly wait for the next dive. The third dive was a little uneventful, had a couple of Manta fly bys but nothing decided to hang out. The current is a slightly stronger so it was a bit of a swim back to the boat. The wind has picked up and the sun has gone behind the clouds. After we were back on the boat the Mantas were on the surface and the Dolphins made another appearance. Bob, Russ & Mary jumped back in to snorkel with the Mantas and Dolphins. We even saw a Manta do a full breach close to where Mary was snorkeling. Last dive of the day, the current is stronger at the cleaning station so we high tailed it back closer to the anchor line. Upon



descending the Black Manta was circling at the base of the anchor line, he did a few circles and then off he went. Lots of Octos out roaming around as well as very large Peacock Flounders. Another Manta came cruising by half way through the dive, but didn't stick around. At the very end of the dive we were sitting at the anchor line when all of a sudden a pod of Dolphins came swimming by us! How lucky are we! There were probably about a dozen of them as they did a slow swim by and off they went. That was a great way to finish the last dive of the day. Time for a cold cerveza in the hot tub and a nice

hot shower before dinner. We will be moving to Roca Partida tonight, I think we will depart around 9:00pm and it takes 12 hours to get there. Yuck, I hate motoring at night, but it is a necessary evil to get to the next dive destination.

## Day 5



We arrived at Roca Partida at about 6:30am and the other boat Seascope is already here, bumper, we have to share. Basically the boats talk to each other and alternate dive times so we are not all diving at once. Roca Partida is a rock out in the middle of nowhere where the animals stop and get cleaned along their migration route. The visibility is really good this morning



and as soon as we jump in there are White tips swimming everywhere. On every ledge is a pile of White tips stacked up like cord wood, which is pretty funny. We spot a couple of Galapagos Sharks swimming below us and one of them is huge. Bob points out a couple of Tuna racing by and out in the blue was a nice school of Big Eyed Jacks and Steel Pompano. It was a good warm up dive to see what is here and now we can concentrate on what we want to shoot on the next dive. We decided to go deep on the second dive and that's where we found all the Galapagos Sharks circling the bottom. There were a few really big ones swimming around by us, but way down deep you can see a lot of them.



As we were standing on the top deck in between the dives we are surrounded by Humpback Whales. All of a sudden I am looking at the rock and an Orca fins comes out of the water. What in the world? I yell "Orca Whale" and we have divers surfacing just off the rock as well. This is an extremely rare sight and it looks like it is a single male. We jump into the dinghy's and head out to where the whales have been breaching and see if the Orca is stalking them. We get close, but the Whales dive deep and we didn't see the Orca again. Dive three we have some giant Lobsters out on the wall and the schooling fish are really nice on the point. One lone Tuna did swim by but nothing epic. The Super Bowl starts at 4:30pm and we have the satellite radio on so we can hear the game. Go Seahawks! Last dive we decide to hang out on the one corner and after about 40 minutes nothing is



really going on, so we drift to the back side and start to come up to shallower depths and then 2 Galapagos Sharks come out of the blue to check us out which at this late hour I feel like bait. Then the small fish start schooling up and there are 5 Huge Bluefin Tuna hunting, which is amazing to watch. The sun is setting and another incredible day has come to an end. The rest of the group is on the sundeck listening to the Seahawk game and by the time we get back the score is 22 to 0 and it is only the second quarter. End of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter and the Seahawks are killing the Broncos and it's time for dinner. What an incredible day, we have had endless Whales breaching all around the boat, an Orca Whale came by and the Seahawks win the Super Bowl!! Can't wait for tomorrow.

## Day 6

A bit of a roly night on the hook, but the sun is coming up and it looks like it will be a nice day. First dive is 7:45am which was really good as we saw a huge school of Hammerheads only they were very deep. I would estimate them to be 150+ft, which was a bit too deep for us. Had some Galapagos Sharks and a Silver Tip swim



below us as well. The Whales are all around us again as we watch them breach and splash about. Today we are going to try and do some snorkeling with them if we find a couple that are just milling about. The second dive we had more Tuna hunting, and Galapagos Sharks. We went on the third dive and one group went out Whale snorkeling. Our dive was pretty uneventful, but the snorkelers actually got in with the Whales and Russ, Kathy and Peggy have some nice Whale shots. What an incredible experience for them. The second group of snorkelers went out but we were not as lucky as the Orca Whales appeared and Captain Al said no swimming with 4 Orcas hunting. This was a real bummer since we did come close to the Humpbacks. We opt for the hot tub and cold cervezas to drown our sorrows. The weather is changing and the wind is blowing harder, waves are



getting bigger. Cocktail hour and another delicious dinner rounds out our day. Captain Al has just made the announcement that we will be moving tonight as the wind is picking up and 2 other boats are headed this way.

## Day 7

Captain Al pulled the anchor while we were still eating dinner at about 8:00pm to make the lumpy ride back to San Benedicto. We arrive at 6:30am and 2 other boats are anchored in the canyon so we motor over to the Boiler and back her right in for diving. First dive is 7:30am and we have our fingers crossed for more Manta action here. It is not as rough here, so it was a good thing we decided to move last night when we did. The Boiler was on fire this morning! We had a big pod of Dolphins and up to 5 Mantas swirling around the south end. A



large school of Tuna also came flying by. Absolutely incredible way to start the morning. Another boat is anchoring up close to us now so it looks like we are going to have to share the dive site for the rest of the day. Hopefully no one else decides to move over here otherwise it will be very crowded. The second dive was just as good, plenty of Dolphins but they didn't want to come close and we had 3 Mantas that just kept circling over and over again. It's pretty choppy out here and the surge is getting stronger and we have had more current on these 2 dives, but it has given us better animal encounters. A quick lunch and then we are back in the water



again for our 3<sup>rd</sup> dive. Mantas, Mantas, Mantas! What can we say, just another enjoyable dive with more Mantas. The 4<sup>th</sup> dive we jump earlier to avoid the crowd of the other boat jumping on top of us and we had only 1 Manta left but he kept circling over and over. We did swim to the other end and had a couple of big Galapagos Sharks come swimming by along with lots of little Octopus and Morays out and about hunting on the rock. Another great day diving the boiler! We pull in behind the island for some nice calm water for the night. Not sure what's in store for us tomorrow, but I'm sure it's something great.

## Day 8

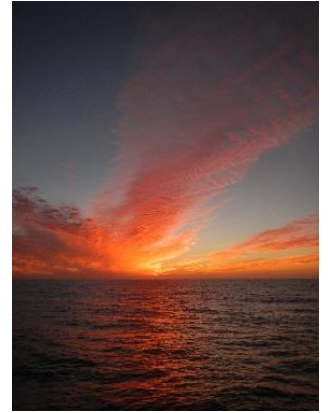
Back to the Boiler this morning for 2 dives and then we will be moving around to the other side of the island to dive some different sites. Today is our last day of diving so we are expecting magical things underwater. Dolphins, Dolphins, Dolphins! Great way to start out the day with a pod of Dolphins playing around all of us and only 1 Manta this morning. Mary hit her 900<sup>th</sup> dive this morning and what a way to celebrate it with a nice pod of Dolphins. Second dive was Manta Padooza! We had counted up to 10 Mantas all swirling around the rock. Everywhere you looked there was a Manta coming or going. Mary, Kathy, Tracy & Peggy all saw a Tiger Shark swimming down below them. Incredible last 2 dives on the Boiler! Third dive was more Mantas,







at least 3 were circling over and over loving our bubbles on their bellies. Kathy pointed out a little cubby hole full of Lobster and more Octopus were out hunting on the reef. We have decided to move for the last dive over to the canyon where it is a little more protected from the wind. Not too many divers left diving, many people are having ear issues due to the surge. On the last dive



we did the Canyon, this is Tracy's 500<sup>th</sup> dive, congratulation Tracy! We saw one little Silver tip being harassed by a bunch of Jacks, which chased it up to the surface and back down. A few people saw a couple of Hammerheads to finish off our last dive of the trip. Back to the boat for gear tear down and a few cold beers in the hot tub while watching our last



sunset off of San Benedicto Island. We will enjoy our last dinner here and then we will take off at 9:00pm for the long trek home.

#### Day 9

Today it is all about drying and packing your gear and just relaxing. It is a bit choppy and I think this will continue for most of the day. We will not arrive back into Cabo until about 11:30pm tonight if all goes as planned. As the day continues, more people are starting to feel the effects of seasickness as it is pretty lumpy. Late afternoon everyone seems to rally as we enjoy the last rays of sunshine out on the hot tub deck enjoying cold beers and some very yummy guacamole and chips. Let the party continue until dinner as we enjoy another wonderful meal. Not too many late night partiers on this trip as the salon is pretty empty by 9:00pm. We finally arrive at the dock around 10:30pm and the engines are finally silent as we tie up to the dock.

#### Day 10

Up early for breakfast at 8:00am and last minute packing. They kick us off the boat at 9:00am and they have arranged for a transportation service to take our bags back to Siesta Suites until we fly out this afternoon at 5:40pm. Funny, but they charged us \$6 per person instead of just \$11 for the entire van, obviously the difference between taking a taxi and having their service transport us. Siesta suites was great as they let us store our luggage there so we could wander around town until our transport back to the airport. Several of us walked to the public beach which was about a 10 minute walk from the hotel. This is a local beach, very clean and beautiful white sand. Bring your own towel or chair as there are no services here and no vendors to bother you either. On the way back we stopped for lunch at Solomons Landing, which is right on the waterfront. It wasn't a cheap place to eat but the food was really good. Others ate at a place called Mi Casa, which they also said the food and margaritas were great. Our transportation van showed up and our driver Carlos assures us he is going to be able to fit all of us and all our luggage in this extended van. We were all skeptical but he actually fit all that damn luggage and us in there. With the new toll road it is about a 40 minute ride to the airport.



Terminal 2 is the new terminal and it is really nice and huge. We stepped right up to the counter dropped off our bags and security was a breeze. Lots of services in the terminal, places to eat, duty free shopping and yes, even a Starbucks. Flight home was a direct flight and we arrived safe and sound.

Thanks everyone for joining us, we had a fantastic trip and we look forward to traveling with you again in the near future!



Bob & Kelley