

## **"Myths and Legends"**

Gary Gentile was one of the original of the east coast of America's wreck divers. At a time when most of the "authorities" were against the exploration of the numerous wrecks lying off the coast in the frigid Atlantic waters. Not just against, but actively trying to prevent the growing numbers of wreck divers exploring the wrecks. The cold water, strong currents and geographic positions of the wrecks required new techniques to be developed.

Wrecks such as the Andrea Doria and Monitor were effectively placed off of bounds by the "armchair warriors" of the diving world. The small intrepid groups led by pioneers such as Gentile were told. "The wrecks cannot be dived safely" "They are too deep to be dived safely". The divers reply "But we are already diving them safely" fell on deaf ears. It seemed again that progress was to be held back. Gentile's now famous saying "Don't cut off the wings of the Albatross because the penguin can't fly" seemed to say much about the people trying to prevent the diving.

Gentile's work and the work of so many off the other great East coast wreck explorers carried on. The wrecks were found, explored and surveyed. Much has been learned. Apart from the information brought back about the wrecks themselves, new techniques were developed. Techniques, which would guide future wreck divers.?

## **Dive Planning**

Technical diving has many challenges Deep, Wreck, and Cave; all have something in common. All place you with a "Ceiling" above your head. Meaning direct ascent is either impossible, such as in the overhead environment or would place you with an unacceptable risk, as in decompression diving. When carrying out dives such as these, dive planning is imperative.

But how do you go about planning a safe "technical" dive? Well believe it or not pretty much the same as a regular recreational dive. Sure there are some anomalies, but the basic concepts hold strong.

Dive planning can be broken down into five sections. Most would say four sections, but so important is risk analysis that I have counted it as a separate section, making five.

1. Information gathering
2. Group planning
3. Self-preparation
4. In-water updates
5. Risk analysis

## **Information gathering?**

Establish dive objectives: This sounds so straight forward, that it need not be included, but far from it. Having clear definable objectives is important. Technical diving takes place normally in a team. Teams can range from two team members upwards. Each team member must be clear as to what the overall objective is and what his role is.

Dive site information: Each dive site is different. Cold water, warm water strong current, no-current, bad visibility the list can go on. But one thing is for sure. Without a firm grounding on the site, and its conditions it would be nigh impossible to plan a safe dive.

Equipment needs: The right tool for the right job as the saying goes. A truer saying would be hard to find when planning for a dive starts. Each dive will bring different needs. The basic equipment rig should vary little, except in a few extreme cases. But each individual dive may require equipment specific to meet its objectives safely. A couple of the more obvious examples of this would be.

- In the overhead environment the need for three lights and multiple cutting tools.
- In areas of strong current where static ascent/descent can not be used, two reels and balloons are required.

Although the equipment demands will vary depending on the dive itself, the need to analyze what is required is a very high priority.

A important note though, when deciding on the equipment requirements. Redundancy is essential, but avoid over redundancy. By this I mean all essential equipment, should be backed up with a working backup. But if its not required the best place for it is back in the dive-shop. Don't carry anything you don't need it will just get in the way.

Information on the dive team: To work cohesively a dive team must be compatible, and appropriately trained. By compatibility I don't mean just that they should get on, although this is important. A dive team can be likened to any other sport team. They need to work together. Many different skills can be brought together to accomplish a common goal.

In selecting a team several considerations should be looked at. Are the individual members suitably trained, such as mixed gas or overhead, if that skill is required. The least experienced team member should also be considered. The dive should never be planned around the abilities of the most experienced member and are the team members fit enough for the planned dive. Mental and physical fitness are important in insuring the safety of the team and the plans success.

### **Group Planning**

Covers many of the hard facts of the plan, and most importantly can it be done safely. Some of the topics looked at are.

1. Gas management procedures
2. Decide on best mix
3. Track oxygen risk
4. What limits are to be placed on the dive
5. How many team members are needed?
6. The equipment requirements

### **Self preparation**

This is where the individual divers must look at their personal readiness for the dive. An honest and mature evaluation is required. It is important to understand that the team could well depend on your abilities to complete your role.

1. Are you both physically and mentally fit for the dive
2. Is the dive within your comfort zone
3. Is your training and experience level up to the dive
4. Do you really want to do the dive

Please do not allow yourself to be pushed into diving when you feel you are not ready. On the reverse of that it should go without saying that you should never try to push another diver into doing dives they don't want to.

### **In-water updates**

Things can change, no matter how well you have planned the dive. The team should, must remain flexible. The environment can change equipment problems can occur. Numerous things can lead to the need for the dive plan to be adjusted during the dive. Some are listed below

1. Unexpected changes in water conditions, current, visibility. Also surface conditions should be considered, remember the boat needs to be able to find you.
2. Loss of or change in the status of equipment.
3. Injury to, or a team member wishing to turn the dive.

The final part of dive planning will be in my next article. Risk assessment although part of Dive Planning, it merits its own individual space. We will cover the "what if 's of technical diving next time.

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