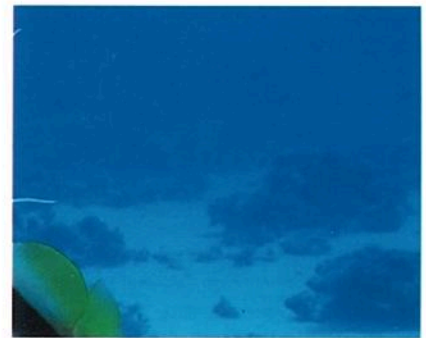


ON THE EDGE

By Colleen Thompson (CIV – USA)



H

Ho-hum and yawn. Boring. You would think that after ten (yes, TEN) consecutive years of the same trip, to the same place, to see the same stuff, I'd just not want to go again. You would think it was enough. You would think I'd say, quite simply, "No, thank you." You would think it was a cut-and-dried (idiom meaning a situation which is clear and easy to understand) example of "been there, done that, have the t-shirt to prove it." Again, yawn.

Well, you would think that, and... You would be wrong! Way wrong! For the past ten years I've traveled to Hurghada, Egypt for a dive trip with other members of the SHAPE Sub Aqua Club (SSAC) and this year, the tenth year in a row, I was first in line to sign up. Am I crazy? Am I going for a world record? Am I a lutton for punishment? Yes, no, and maybe. Let me explain.

Hurghada, Egypt, which has now become an annual trip for SSAC, takes place in late November / early December. What's not to like about leaving Belgium when it is quickly settling into its winter hibernation of long, dark days and cold, dreary nights?! We're talking 28 degrees vs. 12 degrees! Sun vs. clouds! And, if that wasn't enough to convince me to take the trip yet again, then scuba diving in the Red Sea's pristine waters vs. Belgium's murky waters certainly was!

Actually, when I think about it, this is quite possibly my favorite scuba diving trip! In previous *SHAPE Community Life* articles I've written about other scuba diving trips and their highpoints: Thailand aboard a Chinese Junk, Turkey aboard a Gulet, the Maldives with its Hammerhead Sharks and Manta Rays, Mozambique with its Whale Sharks, Indonesia for its rare critters and Philippines with its Nudibranches and Thresher Sharks. Since I've experienced these unique and often breathtaking aquatic experiences how can ho-hum, boring, same old same old Hurghada, Egypt and the Red Sea be my favorite? Here's why. Let me explain.

The one unique thing about the SSAC Hurghada trip is newbies. That's right. Look it up. Newbie. Newcomer. Novice. Noob. Whatever you want to refer to them as,

they are the wide-eyed fledglings standing on the edge of the boat, quivering with a combination of excitement and fear as they take their first stride-entry of their first open water dive into the deep blue of the Red Sea; occasionally they may splash and come up coughing with a bit of salt water, but the thrill of the soon-to-be discovered unknown is just below their fins, and they press on – downward. It wasn't so long ago that that was me. I vividly remember being a newbie. And that is what keeps me coming back; the experience of being a part of bringing these newbies to the brink of the amazing world of scuba diving and then, lovingly and tenderly, shoving them off the boat. Let me further explain.

“Been there, done that, have the t-shirt to prove it.”

Scuba divers trained through SSAC have been taught in a classroom, at the SHAPE pool, and at a Belgian quarry or lake. During classroom sessions they have learned about the effects of nitrogen on the body and have been shown bright and exciting photos of previous SSAC trips (the proverbial carrot at the end of the stick). In the SHAPE pool they have practiced skills such as tired-

diver-pull and sharing air. Then, in often brisk and always murky Belgian waters, they have completed skills and dives to obtain their NAUI Basic Open Water certification. As an active volunteer with SSAC, I've watched these newly trained divers progress from hesitantly clearing their masks in the pool to successfully completing emergency swimming ascents in full kit in caliginous water. I've witnessed them struggling into 7mm wetsuits, donning 20 + kilos of kit, and bravely submerging themselves into the gray, unknown. These are the determined, excited, and a bit tentative divers now standing on the boat platform in Hurghada, looking into the abyss of the Red Sea, inflating their BCs, holding their gauges, their finger on their forehead and mask, leg forward, pushing off, and then turning to the boat master to give the "OK" signal. And this is why I return time and time again to Hurghada and the Red Sea.

And there it is – why this is quite possibly my favorite scuba diving trip. The biggest thrill of scuba diving is always the camaraderie of the SSAC club, the pure exhilaration of sharing my diving



SHAPE SUB AQUA CLUB (SSAC) Members Dive Into The Red Sea, Hurghada, Egypt

experiences with fun, like-minded divers from all nationalities, abilities, and ages. Aside from the personal satisfaction of seeing so many novices bloom into great divers, this year's trip provided many others with great experiences and memories. Here is a short-list summary:

This year's trip was the biggest yet! The number of attendees has increased with each passing year, from 15 divers in 2008 to 70 people this year. (55 divers and 15 family members). Of those 55 divers, 10 completed their NAUI Advanced certification and 9 completed their NAUI Nitrox certification.

This year's trip had the most diverse nationality representation from 14 countries; Canada, US, Romania, Poland, Italy, Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, UK, Belgium, Portugal, Bulgaria, Norway, and Austria. This year's trip had the widest age spread yet; from 73 years old to 12 years old. This year's trip included options to take day trips to Luxor and Karnac to see Egyptian temples and tombs, and to Cairo to see the pyramids and The Egyptian museum. There was even the option for evening Hammam spas and a special dive on the wreck of the Salem Express.



SSAC has over 100 members and offers scuba courses at reduced cost to the SHAPE community. For more information, visit www.shapesubaqua.com or send an email to shapesubaqua@yahoo.com.

