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The AquaWoman Strike Again!

Northeast Dive Site Profiles | 2009 09 - September

By Michael Salvatorezza & Christopher P. Weaver



Wreck diving in the Northeast is often associated with deep, dark, cold, arduous dives that (gasp!) only a seasoned diver with years of experience could safely execute ... and that diver is most often envisioned to be a man. Wrong!

Although the diving conditions in the northeast can at times be extremely challenging, the notion of an exclusively masculine club of macho shipwreck divers was shattered in 1980 when an intrepid band of woman made their first dive to the wreck of the USS San Diego and dubbed themselves the AquaWoman.

This monumental dive was said to be essentially a dare brought on by Captain Steve Belinda of the R/V Wahoo, who challenged Edith Hoffman, now charter member of the Woman Divers Hall of Fame and then Vice President of the Long Island Divers Association, to find other women capable of participating in "real" wreck diving. Hoffman knew that there were many other woman divers just like her and with the gauntlet thrown, it didn't take long to fill all

available dive spots. Women from six states, including commercial divers, homemakers, and even a Radio City Rockette accepted the challenge and made the dive that day. This dive would become the debut of an annual event that has continued to this day. Every year since then, AquaWoman dives have taken place on some of the island's premier dive boats and they have visited some of the area's most famous and most challenging wrecks.

And 2009 is no different. On Aug. 1, 24 experienced woman divers, a virtual "who's who" of female sport divers, boarded the charter boat Lockness and set out for another adventure to the wreck of the USS San Diego. This was a return to the roots of the AquaWoman of sorts as this was the site of the very first AquaWoman dive 29 years ago. Unfortunately, as sometimes happens on the unpredictable Atlantic Ocean, weather conditions were less than favorable for a trip to the east. A last minute decision was made to divert to the wreck of the Lizzie D, a local favorite. The Lizzie D was an 84-foot tug that disappeared in October 1922. It wasn't until the wreck was rediscovered in 1977 and her cargo of bourbon and whiskey were discovered that it became known the Lizzie was a rumrunner. She has since been visited by many hundreds of divers, many of whom have been luck enough to bring home a treasured artifact or two. For the really fortunate few, intact bottles of whiskey have been found



The Lockness is a 48-foot dive boat based at Freeport, NY. She is only minutes from Jones Inlet and offers a wide variety of regular and chartered dive trips throughout the diving season. The Lockness can comfortably accommodate 22 divers and features a state-of-the-art navigational system, an open-air sun deck, a climate-controlled first level providing central air conditioning in summer and full heating in winter, and a high-level stereo system throughout. This is a perfect dive boat for the AquaWoman event; indeed, there have been several AquaWoman expeditions over the years on this vessel.



Aug. 1 dawned breezy and warm, and the prevailing winds were suitable for the trip eight miles south of Jones inlet to the Lizzie D. Once the boat crew had secured the anchor and down-line, it was time to make a splash as only the AquaWoman can. One by one, the buddy teams entered the water.

Descending into the cool waters of the Atlantic, the divers found the visibility to be about 10 feet, a bit less than usual due to the recent breezy conditions. The dives to the Lizzie D were fabulous, with most of the ladies opting to do two dives. But AquaWoman dives are much more than just the dives. A sense of

camaraderie, fun, mischievousness and a genuine joyous celebration of life is evident on the boat, both to and from the wreck site.

2009's AquaWoman dive was a resounding success and a continuance of a tradition that stretches back to 1980. In 2010, the AquaWoman, in conjunction with LIDA, will once again venture out to one of Long Island's most famous wrecks aboard one of its premier dive charter boats. It will be the 30-year anniversary of the first AquaWoman dive.

Through the years, the AquaWoman dives have included some of the most renowned

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woman divers, and have shown to all that scuba diving, and wreck diving in particular, is not the exclusive domain of men.

If you are a woman diver and you haven't joined this fabulous group in the past, what are you waiting for? Take the AquaWoman challenge! They hope to see you next year wherever their adventure takes them.

For information about the AquaWowman dives, contact Linda Gotti, coordinator, at pinkandh2o@yahoo.com or link to www.aquawoman.org.

Michael Salvarezza and Christopher P. Weaver have documented a world of adventure topside and underwater through their Long Island, N.Y.-based business Eco-Photo Explorers. They are popular lecturers and their work has been published in leading diving and general interest magazines. Learn more at www.ecophotoexplorers.com.

2009 AquaWoman Roster

Linda Gotti

Jaime Frost

Janice Raber

Sally Wahrmann

Martha Katz

Nancy Trejo

Elaine Turley

Anna Benitez

Janitez Espejo

Freddie Hughes

Andrea Nydegger

Cindy Hardenfelder

Esther Askins

Joan Hassler

Maureen Langevin

Caroline Swift

Tamara Wainer

Allison Kucker

Jennifer McCarthy

Victoria Heubish

Theresa Sheil

Alma Cardenas

Women crew (2)

Rachel Goodale

Natalie Whiteman

Lockness Dive Charter

Captain John

516-298-2633

lockness39@aol.com

www.locknessdiveboat.net



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We Know Diving Cold ...

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