

Shark Bait Dive Club



E-Newsletter July 2006

The Shark Bait Dive Club has completed their first trip as a club and what a way to start. The club headed to Bonne Terre, Missouri to dive the Bonne Terre Mine. After a grueling 13+ hour drive, we finally made it to the town of Bonne Terre. It's a very small town, about the size of Leadville, if not smaller.

Once we arrived in town, we attempted to locate our hotel, the 1909 Depot, but AAA's directions didn't get us there, so instead we followed the signs to the mine. It's a good thing we did, because that was where we were supposed to check in.

When we turned into the mine, we were very shocked at what we saw. The area surrounding the mine was set up like an old mining town. There were old pieces of mining equipment all around that were labeled with what their purpose was for the mine. One building was the dive shop, there were restrooms, lockers for divers, a café that is no longer open, and a general store where one can get souvenirs, drinks, snacks, etc...



We walked in to the General Store and were greeted by super friendly Donna. She immediately knew who we were and got right on getting us checked in to our rooms. Once all the paperwork was complete, she took us to the Depot which was about 3 blocks from the mine.

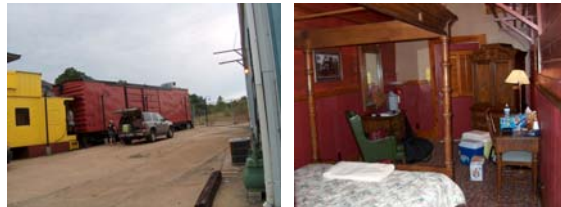
We arrived at the 1909 Depot and boy were we pleasantly surprised. The building is a national historic building and the owners did an outstanding job in renovating it. Right in front of the depot are two train cars. These two cars are also rooms.



We were first shown the caboose. All I have to say is WOW!!!! There is a queen size canopy bed, a sitting area for four, a little closet, and a bathroom. The décor was tastefully done in an old Victorian style. It felt very homey.



The second car is separated into two rooms. So the adult Longwell's took one room, while the kids shared the second. These rooms were also decorated in Victorian style.



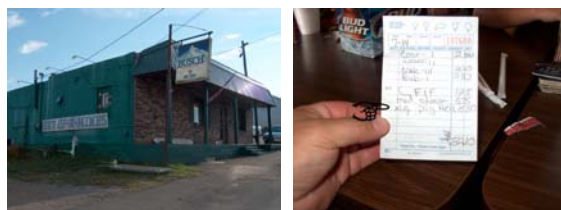
Next, we went into the Depot. There are four rooms available and each room has two single beds and their own private baths. These rooms are huge!!! And again, the décor is done tastefully in Victorian style.

The room that Kendra stayed in was gorgeous...the real plus, she got to bathe in a vault. Yep, that's right, her bathroom used to be a bank vault. Very cool!

There is one other room that is called the "Round Room". It's an area where we could all hang out, play games, drink beer, etc...



We were going to order pizza and have it delivered, but unfortunately, no one delivers, so we went out instead and ate at "Out-of-R-Mines".



Now, on to the diving!!!! The mine is only available on the weekends for diving. First thing Saturday morning (7:30 am), we head to the dive shop to check in. They require your C- card and a second form of picture I.D. You have to fill out the usual waiver and then they send you up the stairs to watch a short SSI video on diving safety. Once the video is complete, we received a briefing on our first dive.



Note: there are 24 trails in the mine. We were scheduled to dive 1 thru 4...that's the requirement. If you have never been there before, you have to start with the first four trails and then each time you come back, you will do the next trails in succession.

After the briefing, we geared up in the parking area and then walked into the Mule Entrance which was the entrance to the mine.



We headed down about 60 something steps and then deep into the mine which was about 150 feet below the surface. The walk into the mine was awesome. There were low lit lanterns everywhere and trails going in every direction. We finally got down to the platform, and boy did some of us realize that holy crap, we are going to have to carry our equipment out of here...*note to self, don't carry own weights*. Down on the platform they have all the tanks and weights waiting. The platform is huge! There were 12 of us in the group and had plenty of room to spread out our gear. Although, they did ask us to stay within a body width area, just like on a dive boat.



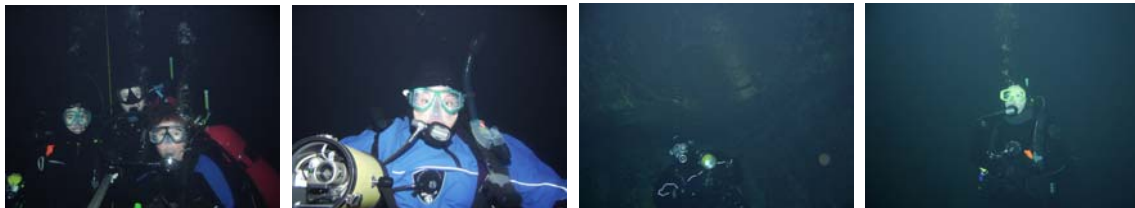
Standing on the edge of the platform, looking over into the crystal blue water, you can see 60+ feet down. You want to jump right in, but remember, the water is only 58 degrees, so you think twice.

We get geared up and got our tanks. Three of us did nitrox...all went well with that. All of our tanks had cylume sticks...the divers wore green and the divemaster/safety divers wore blue. Once we were all ready to go, we could not enter the water until it was announced that the “pool was open”. Once the announcement came, we hopped in with no hesitation...until the water hit our faces...WoW!!! COLD!!! Once we were adjusted and the group was ready, we headed out to our first dive.



The first dive was the “Orientation” dive. They took us to 20 feet of water. We all dropped down, got in line and had to show the dive guide that we could flood and clear our masks, and then do alternate air source breathing with a buddy. Once they were comfortable with our skills, we headed on out for our tour. *Note: they are VERY safety oriented. We had a dive guide leading the group, a safety diver in the back, and on occasion there was a kayaker on the surface following our bubbles.*

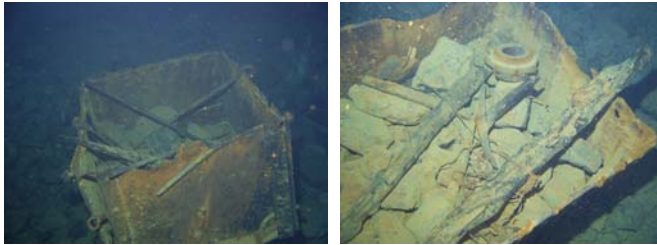
The first thing we saw on the tour was a drill in the wall. Unfortunately, because it was an orientation dive, we were not allowed to bring cameras. We got to swim through a couple of holes in the walls, saw an ore cart filled with tools, etc...The whole dive lasted about 45 minutes...lost a couple of divers a long the way. Julie had her first mishap with a free flowing regulator, so she had to abort the first dive. One diver had too much weight and his weight belt kept slipping so he and his buddy decided to surface and wait it out. Then, three other divers decided that the water was too cold and quit. So that left a nice group of five plus the two dive guides.



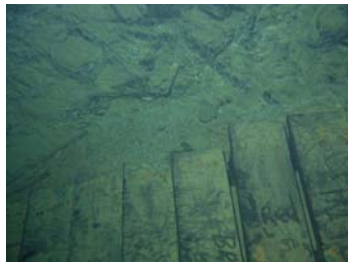
When the dive ended, they escorted us out of the mine for our 1 ½ hour surface interval. During that time we went back to the Depot, ate lunch and sat in the sun to warm up.



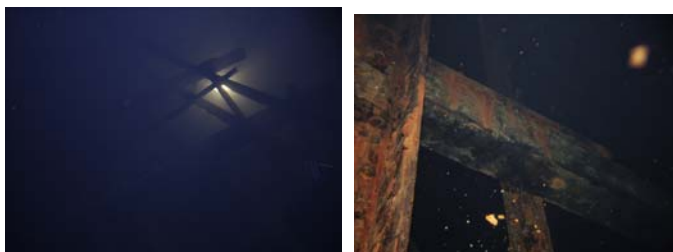
Our second dive was scheduled to begin at 1:00pm. Our group size dwindled down to five divers. We were given a briefing and told that we could bring cameras this time. Our group alone had two cameras and one video camera. Woohoo! We were ready. During this dive we went through more swim throughs and saw more ore carts, there was even a locomotive down about 90ft that we could just barely see. The dive guide told us that we would be able to visit the locomotive on dive number 10, so we have a couple of more visits before we get to go down there. We went under a couple of ledges and when we came out our bubbles were streaming to the surface...made for a very nice pictures and video (see website). Once again, we were down for about 45 minutes. The coolest part was going through what they call the "Grand Canyon". It's the longest swim of your life if you have to go to the bathroom...but it was absolutely amazing. It was a little dark, kind of like a twilight dive, the pillars were just shadows and you couldn't see the bottom...you felt like you were flying!!!! When the dive ended, we had the option of hanging out in the mine or going back up to the surface. We opted for the latter so we could warm up a bit.



Our third dive was scheduled for 4:00pm, but we decided to get in a little earlier. Some of us were not going to bring our cameras so that we could just hang out and enjoy the scenery, but the dive guide informed us that this is the dive that we would see the elevator shaft, which is the featured photo in all of their posters and on their website, so of course, we all opted to bring our equipment. The dive started out with us following old wooden stairs that the miners used to use to head further down into the mine. We followed the stairs down into a room that they called the "Viewing Room". It was like a window looking out into the mine...AWESOME!!!



As we were swimming around the dive guide showed us some calcium falls. There was a wall that had the profile of President Lincoln. It was hard to see it, but if you stared hard enough, he was there. The big stop was at the elevator shaft. To get there, you swim through a "valley" as you come up over a wall and around a corner, light appears shining through the elevator shaft. It takes your breath away!



This massive structure is standing there as it has for over 100 years, the only difference is you have to swim to get to it now. The guide takes us right to the structure and we swim through it, careful not to touch anything. We hang out for a bit to get our pictures and then we move on. Once again we swim in the “Grand Canyon” on our way back to the platform. It’s so peaceful swimming through the canyon and imagining all the miners that worked the mine and what they would be doing. When the dive was over, we geared down and were able to leave everything in the mine until our fourth dive on Sunday.

There are not many places to choose from for eating around Bonne Terre. We were famished from all the diving so we headed to the Homestead Restaurant Country Smorgasbord. The food was good and the company great. We had a lot to talk about.



After dinner we headed back to the Depot. We all sat outside at the picnic table, logged our dives, and had a couple of drinks while the kids caught fire flies. We were all pretty tired, so we hit the sack early for tomorrow was another day of diving...ok, we only had one dive to do, but we were ready for bed.



Sunday, dive four. Again, we met at the dive shop for our briefing. There were a couple of more divers with us so our group ended up having nine divers. This dive took us to an area called “The Chapel”. It was a room that we swam into and did a circle. As we were swimming around, you could see on the walls white “+ “ signs. These were markings of where the miners were to put their dynamite. When we swam back to the entrance to the cavern, the guide had his light on the ceiling where there were two sticks of dynamite calcified into the rock with their strings hanging down...little eery!!! We then headed to another cavern and were directed to a little hole in the wall. As we entered the hole, it became a tunnel that took us a level up in the mine. As we came out of the tunnel, we turned and swam over the top of the cavern we were just in and our bubbles were streaming out of tiny holes...what an amazing sight!!!! We were shown another area where there was an ore cart full of tools and a lead box that was just left where the miner put it when he exited the mine for the last time.



When the dive was over, it was time for us to get our stuff and head to the surface. This had to be the absolute worst part of the trip for some of us. Those who brought their own weights down had to carry them back up the mine. It was a grueling walk, but we were able to take our time and actually made it. After gearing down, we headed back to the Depot to shower and pack. We then headed back to the mine to do our souvenir shopping and say our goodbyes.

We were on the road by noon headed back to Denver.



All in all, and I think everyone who went on the trip agrees, this was an absolutely amazing trip! Shark Bait Dive Club will definitely make this an annual club trip. We highly recommend anyone who has any interest in doing this to just do it! You will not be disappointed! But again, I can not stress enough that this is a TOUR...not a self guided dive. You will dive with the guides and you will do the trails in succession. Make sure to have your log book stamped and signed by the dive guides, because they do check your logbooks the next time you dive with them.

