

Anatomy of a photo contest
by Tim Grollimund

It's Thursday morning, the last day of the Pennekamp 50th Anniversary Photo Contest. Photos are due at 4PM. It's cold. It's rainy and cloudy. It's rough. I have one more shot to get for the contest, which is why I am here on this dreary winter day. There's not enough light for the shot I need to complete the "six-pack" portfolio to keep in tune with the contest theme, but what the heck, everybody else has the same conditions in which to shoot (if they're crazy enough to be out this morning). As a local, this is a day I would not ordinarily be on a dive boat.

But thanks to Quiescence and Captain Don, we headed to the Christ Statue, with a stop at the City of Washington first. Don said conditions at the statue would be better later. And he was right. I got the shot.



This capped a nine day stretch, six days of which I could dive. There were some very good days, and some very cold, rough days. In addition to Quiescence, I dove with Conch Republic and went out with Ken Nedimyer for the Coral Restoration Foundation Pennekamp program he held at Amoray.

A lot of the time I shoot macro under these conditions, but to get the most into a short story of only six photos, wide angle was the only way to go. When I first thought about constructing the six-pack for the contest, I knew the Christ Statue shot was a "must have", and wrecks and big animals had to be involved. So the Spiegel Grove and Duane had to be there. The big animals I

could get in many spots, just a matter of time in the water. Too bad the eagle rays were not here in abundance like they were in November.

I went with Conch Republic to the Spiegel Grove and Duane. We had a group from Dayo Scuba in Winter Park that nearly filled the boat. Great bunch of folks, and I hope I can dive with them the next time they come to the Keys. I told them I was trying to get shots for a contest, and they were willing to help. The diver in the the Duane shot is Mindy, who saw me on the crow's nest and came by with a big smile. I was the last one up the line on the Spiegel Grove, so I hovered around the mooring line to let the divers get ahead of me, into the sun. That was a spectacular day on both wrecks.



On Monday I went with the Coral Restoration Foundation, where I am a volunteer photographer. That was by far the coldest day I have ever been on a dive boat. The volunteers that participated in the program were undaunted by the conditions. It was warmer in the water than on the boat! I also had the pleasure of meeting Leno Davis, the Conservation Coordinator for The Nature Conservancy's Caribbean Program. He is spearheading efforts in the Bahamas, with Ken's guidance, on restoration efforts in his home waters. Lauri MacLaughlin from the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was also on the boat. She is a wealth of information on "anything coral" in the Keys. The photo from the nursery is Leno and Lauri working on a staghorn line nursery. I was also pleased to have the opportunity, through Leno, to send a series of photos from the event to The Nature Conservancy for their use. If you don't know what the Coral Restoration Foundation does, I encourage



you to visit their web site at www.coralrestoration.org. This is a worthwhile effort and we need the support of the diving community. Check out their Adopt A Coral program.

For the big animal shots, I had some nice nurse sharks, stingrays and goliath groupers in the light box, but how often do you see a big green moray with his mouth wide open? Had to put that in. Right after that shot he came up to check out the dome port on the camera housing, so I thought it best to move on. The green sea turtle is a species I have not seen much here... mostly hawksbills and loggerheads. I put the youngster in the six-pack for that reason. He was quite docile and I found him on Snapper Ledge, which is one of my favorite spots.

All in all, it was a great “assignment” to show the excellence and diversity of diving in Key Largo. Great company, new friends, and being in the ocean in December... does it get any better than that? Well, yes. I won the contest.

[Alternative Ending]

All in all, it was a great “assignment” to show the excellence and diversity of diving in Key Largo. Great company, new friends, and being in the ocean in December... does it get any better than that? Well, yes. This past December was of special significance for me. Ten years ago, this contest week, I was in a detox ward wondering what life would be like sober... and if I could make it. If you had told me that in ten years I would be living in paradise, pursuing my life’s passion, I would have asked what you were smoking (and for a hit). So if you are having difficult circumstances in your life, know this: You can begin again.

Pennekamp 50th Anniversary Photo Contest

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