

## **DIVE SITES – out of the 100's of sites here are some favourites of Aliwal Shoal**

The Aliwal Shoal is a rocky reef which is the remains of an ancient sand dune approximately 5 km off the coast of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The reef plays host to many kinds of hard and soft corals and a variety of tropical and subtropical fish species, as well as the migrating pelagic fish, whales, dolphins, and many sharks.

### **The Produce Wreck 24 – 32m**

The Produce is an old cargo vessel that was carrying molasses and was travelling from Durban, heading south when it struck the pinnacles on Aliwal Shoal in 1974. There were no lives lost as a rescue party launched from the Umkomaas River managed to reach her and saved all the people on board. It is 119m long and lies facing north. She has come to rest on her starboard side and her back is broken leaving her midship very flat and scattered. Her propeller has been salvaged, however, her spare prop can still be seen on her bow. There are a number of swim-through's for the more experienced diver and it is advisable to take a torch on this dive as light does not penetrate all the swim-through's. A host of very shy giant Brindle bass about 3m long and 1.5m wide could be seen, as well as Harlequin goldies all around the wreck, they are endemic to the wreck and can only be found on her and the Nebo. Scorpionfish and Stonefish are regularly found on the wreck, camouflaged and blended into the scenery. Manta rays and game fish can also be spotted in the big blue if the visibility is good. The coral on this wreck consists of more soft than hard coral. Some of the soft coral found here includes, Fire coral, Whip coral, Green fern coral, Polyp coral and yellow Turret coral.



### **The Nebo Wreck 18 – 26m**

The Nebo is reported to have been carrying materials for the Van Staden's River Bridge back in the 1800's when she was sunk due to incorrect loading. She was very top heavy and when she encountered rough seas she simply went belly up and sank. The wreck, which is over 100 years old, is broken into two main parts. If the visibility is good or you have an experienced dive master, it is a simple navigation exercise to get from one part to the other. One regular fish species found swimming in and out of the wreck on this reef is the Natal catfish. Harlequin goldies, which are endemic to this area, are seen on the wreck. Round ribbontail ray, Sharpnosed stingray and Greyspot guitarfish are just a few visitors in the sand around the Nebo. Squid and Scorpionfish are also found lingering about the schools of fusiliers, tuna and Hammerhead sharks. Keep an eye out for Green Fern coral, different colours of Polyp coral and Green and Yellow turret coral are found on this wreck. The different dive sites on the Aliwal Shoal have something to cater for everyone's taste including the shark fanatics.



### **The Griqualand Wreck 40 – 51m**

The Griqualand was a 499 ton coastal steamer owned by Green R Line. She left Durban on the evening of 13th November 1970 bound for Port Elizabeth with a cargo of chemicals including bitumen, liquid chlorine and calcium hypo chloride. Shortly after sailing from Durban a fire started in her forward holds and blazed for nearly 12 hours. Despite heroic efforts from the crew as well as the tug 'J.D. White' and salvage vessel 'Statesman' the 'Griqualand' was finally declared a menace to shipping and was sunk by Royal Navy frigate H.M.S. Dido at approximately 16h00 on 14 November 1970. There are an abundance of Daga Salmon, Brindle bass, and large sharks. Access to the wreck is by boat. An experienced skipper is essential. Sea conditions change rapidly with south westerly winds. There is normally a light current, but at times the current prohibits diving.

### **Raggies Cave 12 – 19m**

This is where the Raggies (Ragged Tooth shark/Sand shark) all meet up to spend their winter holidays. Although fierce looking they can be approached with caution. This area has rock formations with a great amount of caves, overhangs, gullies and swim through's. Big caves, where you can easily fit in a couple of scuba divers, are often also inhabited by Ragged-tooth sharks. The coral life consists mainly of hard coral with fewer reef fish to be found. In the gullies and crevices the juvenile fish hide during the day with False stonefish and Scorpionfish also commonly found in this area. Shark's teeth can be found inside the cave and also in the surrounding sand patches. This dive site is known worldwide for the Ragged-tooth sharks that populate the reef.



### **Tiger Cove 12 – 18m**

Tiger Cove is part of the inside edge of the reef and is basically a big overhang that forms a cave at the bottom of the wall. It is named after the great amount of Tiger cowries found in the area. Along the wall you will find big green Fern coral, Black coral, Whip coral and various other soft coral. Goldies and other juveniles usually form a big cloud around the Black coral. Be on the lookout for Raggie scorpionfish and False stonefish as they are camouflaged so well that you really have to look carefully to spot them. Other regular visitors on the sand patch include Guitarfish and various rays. Guinea fowl moray eels and beautiful Nudibranch also occupy space on this reef.



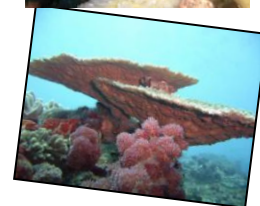
### **Outside Edge 16 – 26m**

The Outside Edge runs from the north to the southern part of the shoal with the wall on the seaside of the shoal. There are different dive spots on this edge, such as Raggie's Cave, Cathedral and Shark Alley. Some other caves and overhangs can also be found on this edge. Tropical fish are found here as well as turtles, and the coral includes hard and soft coral which creates amazing landscape scenes. Always keep an eye out for game fish swimming by in the midwater.



### **Inside Edge 15 – 23m**

Inside Edge is a wall stretching three to six metres high, with ledges, caves and overhangs. Most of the activity is found along the side of the wall - the one side features a big sand patch with scattered rock formations. Along the wall there are various soft corals with Goldies and other juveniles usually forming large clouds around the Black coral. Be on the lookout for Raggie scorpionfish and False stonefish as they are camouflaged so well that really have to look carefully to spot them. Other regular visitors on the sand patch include Guitarfish and various rays. The regular tropical fish are found amongst the coral and crevices. Guinea fowl moray eels also occupy space on this reef.



### **Cathedral 12 – 27m**

This is a spectacular part of the reef, with a huge cathedral like opening. Here you can explore a cave surrounded by a crater-like rock formation with Ragged-tooth sharks swimming in and out patrolling their territory. The rest of the reef onwards is a plateau with the edges dropping five to ten metres at some places. The main attraction at Cathedral is obviously the Ragged-tooth sharks with all sizes coming in and out like planes on a busy landing strip in the summer holidays. Some of them are tagged and under constant surveillance with tracking systems that are placed near the caves to monitor the migration of these incredible sharks.

### **Shark Alley 16 – 20m**

Ragged-tooth sharks congregate in large numbers on Aliwal Shoal between July and November. Travel through the Alley to get into Raggies Cave. This part of the reef has rock face walls with a sandy bottom and it is a favourite place for Ragged-tooth sharks swimming to the outside ledge. Between the scattered rocks in the sand you can find shark's teeth, and in all the caverns in the walls, reef fish hide from the sharks. Scorpion fish are commonly found here.



### **Manta Point 12 – 22m**

Situated on the eastern side of the Pinnacles. As the name suggests this is a popular spot for the magnificent Manta Ray, and is a haven to thousands of colourful reef fish. At Manta Point huge rock formations are found with caves big enough for Ragged-tooth sharks to fit in, and overhangs and ledges with clouds of fish hiding underneath. Swim-through's and gullies are also on the list of interesting landscaping in this area. Ragged-tooth sharks are regularly found seen in November, usually found patrolling the gullies and caves in this area. Schools of tropical fish are also found, along with an array of hard and soft coral on the edges of the reef that look as if has been draped with Leather coral with bits of sea grass in between and a sea urchin here and there. This is a great multi-level dive.



### **Pinnacles 11 – 17m**

This section is a long backbone of mountain-like rock formations that provide a haven for thousands of species of fish and is an amazing place to dive when you want to do a long, slow dive. The depth here averages between 5 – 18 m, depending where you are on the ridges. There are some incredible deep potholes with caves that hide at the base of them. This provides a home for many rays and turtles. On the one side the Pinnacles slope down toward the Raggie Cave and Manta Point area and on the shore-side they gently slope down to the North Sands area. The sea-facing ledges are a lot steeper than the ones which tapes gently off to the North Sands basin. The pinnacles where the reason that the Produce Wreck is now available for divers to explore just off the north point of the Aliwal Shoal. There are a few metal shards still lying on the reef believed to have come from the Produce



### **North Sands 15 – 17m**

This is a huge sand patch on the northern part of the Aliwal Shoal which is surrounded by various other dive spots. This is known for the great amount of Round ribbontail rays found buried underneath the golden sand and under the edges of the surrounding reef. Guitar sharks are also a common sight in the summer months. Be on the lookout for Sole hiding underneath the sand with just their eyes sticking out. For the inquisitive diver, the sand patch has lots of old shells as well as old shark's teeth. Game fish are normally found in the vicinity.

### **South Sands 12 – 15m**

Like North Sands, this site is home to rays, skates, sand sharks and guitar sharks. Average depth is 15m with a maximum of 18m.

### **Chunnels 12 – 17m**

Expect to find a cave full of sharks and tropical fish on this dive, but be aware that not a lot of light penetrates the cave, making it quite a frightening dive. Chunnel, which is near Raggies' Cave, was named as such because it is a waterway where sharks constantly move. The marine life in this area consists mainly of Ragged-tooth sharks which patrol the area. Turtles have been spotted as well as Sand sharks and ribbontail rays in the sand patch nearby. Raggie Scorpionfish are also common in the area. The fish life includes Wrasse and some tropical reef fish. Coral is not that plentiful on this reef



### **Eel Skins 13 – 19m**

At this reef you will find shattered rock formations with a wall on the side full of caverns and overhangs. The scenery on this dive is one of the best on the shoal, you will also see a wide variety of starfish in all colours, shapes and sizes. Cleaning stations are to be seen in small caverns and False stonefish, Peacock mantis shrimp, Pufferfish and Boxfish are just some of the species seen on this dive. Coral consists mainly of soft coral and Green soft coral with clouds of Goldies. Nudibranchs on the rock formations are a must see. Don't forget to be on the lookout for game fish lurking just off the reef. If you can, bring a camera along on this dive as there are many opportunities to take amazing photographs.



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