



EXPEDITION DIARY Musandam 2010

By Ken Atkinson & Kathy Gill

6 October

Hello everyone and welcome to the first diary entry for Biosphere Expeditions' second Musandam expedition. My name is Kathy Gill, Strategy Director of Biosphere Expeditions, and I will also be your expedition leader on slot 1 of this project, training Ken Atkinson, who will take over from me for slot 2.

I write this a few hours before boarding my flight to Dubai and surrounded by paperwork and equipment for me to take over there. The paperwork includes an itinerary (attached). As you can see, it's a packed schedule, especially on the first three days with lots of training and some tests before we let you loose on the reef, collecting data and experiencing conservation in action. No doubt you'll need a holiday after the expedition ;), but please try to come rested and fresh in your minds, ready for the challenges ahead.

Please make sure your PADI medical statements are in order (otherwise you ain't getting in the water!), that your dive gear is working and that your buoyancy skills are up to scratch.

Finally, my mobile phone number during the expedition will be +968 92380988. Remember that this is for emergency purposes only (such as being late for assembly, for example).

I'll see you all at the Holiday Inn Express Jumeira in due course!.

Best wishes

Kathy

P.S. This diary is now also on www.biosphere-expeditions.org/diaries and excerpts of it are also on www.facebook.com/pages/Biosphere-Expeditions/132594724471, so please feel free to pass this on to your families & friends for updates on what we are up to.

10 October 2010

Today started very early when Ken and I set off from our boat, the MS Sinbad, to collect the first team from Dubai. We had arrived the day before in Khasab, along with Rita, our scientist, and Jon, a team member who has previously been an expedition leader for us, after a meeting with the Minister in charge of education for the Musandam. We discussed with him about going into some of the local schools to talk about the conservation work that we are doing and about distributing a colouring book for the younger children to raise their awareness of the marine environment. After that we headed straight for the boat to meet the crew and set up for the team's arrival the next day. An early night and then back to Dubai in the morning.

As soon as the team arrived in Khasab there were brief introductions and new friends started laughing together. We though it was laughing with us, but it might have been at us :) A nice lunch by Poly, who will be everyone's best friend very soon, then the formal brief, admin and then all the interested faces started their training with Rita. Everyone is very happy and keen to get in the water and see how their buoyancy is. We might need to encourage good buoyancy with chocolate, which might be counter-productive, so maybe a different incentive.

11 October

The team has been studying hard as Rita takes them through their Reef Check training. Connie and Suse have been great sounding boards for others about how the expedition went last year and their own experiences. A few of us were talking about the chances of seeing dolphins and then two popped up and rode the bow wave and smiled for everyone to take some great pictures. Everyone is full of laughs and can't wait to get in the water tomorrow.

12 October

The end of day two and everyone has at least one star next to their name for Reef Check. A BIG well done to everyone. The in-water test helped everyone understand just what it's like to collect data with snapper by the dozen, groupers, a little shy but they'll be out soon. The Angelina Jolie of fish (sweetlips) hasn't shown herself to many, but fingers are crossed for tomorrow. Diadema urchins are everywhere and we even had a few baby sharks enjoying the Sinabad's night lights. We had another two dolphins show us their graceful agility today, so I think its only fair for next year, that we include dolphin spotting. Tomorrow we start the real reef Checks and its all hands on deck.

13 October

Three Reef Check surveys completed today and two of the HSBC staff, Mo and Hilal, have teamed up and are treating each dive like they've done it 100 times. The guys have been so quick, they often have to sit back and relax while the team in front moves along. The day ended with some card games and you really find out who is competitive when there are chocolates up for grabs.

14 October

Today was certainly the turning point when it comes to embarrassing moments. Suse couldn't understand why her camera wasn't working until she realised she put it in up side down. Rita had to do some serious mask clearing after Jon popped in front of her with a marker peg on his nose. Good thing the data was collected! Mel, diving with her new great computer, finished her checks early because she thought the computer was telling her she had three minutes bottom time remaining when in fact it was telling her to do a three minute safety stop. I think she just wanted to be first to the shower.

15 October

The final three surveys have been completed and we're on our way to a nice secluded area for the night. The Musandam landscape has been breathtaking and cameras have been working overtime. In a tradition which started last year Suse was woken with cold water today! That joke just doesn't wear out. Mel and Chun are keen to do a night dive today and then the night will finish with another round of cards. Australia v UK v Portugal v Italy v Switzerland. Note to next week's group, the Portuguese are very competitive.

16 October

Final day and half the team had a snorkelling session this morning, whilst the other half had a tour of Khasab Castle and some of its surrounding areas. The team has worked really well during the week and a big pat on the back is deserved by everyone. Most of the first group is now back in Dubai while Rita, Connie, Karin and Georgie are minding the MS Sinbad to ensure it's totally ready for group two who starts tomorrow. A special thanks goes to Rita and Jon for their support this week and making the team feel like a well-oiled machine. Just don't play cards with Rita and we'll all be fine :-).

17 October

Ok, we're back on the road heading to Khasab for week two of the Musandam Reef Check Expedition and the sun is shining and the Omani mountains are just a magnificent sight. Six smiley and keen team members from all over the world with all their dive kit on board and three from week one waiting for our arrival on the 'MS Sindbad'. Rita is preparing to do the training and for some reason everyone seems happy to be bribed with chocolate. It is going to be another good week.

18 October

Everyone woke this morning to another one of Poly's fantastic breakfasts (it's the little things that matter). Training went to plan and everyone is reading up on fish, fish and more fish. The first dive was a bit of a test for some, but confidence is high and skill levels will improve every day. Conny, Georgie and Karin are being very polite and still laughing at mine and Rita's jokes.

19 October

A lot of happy smiley faces today with the training complete and everyone with at least one star to their name. Teams will be allocated soon and the work starts tomorrow. We managed to fit in a short pleasure dive, which gave everyone time to fine-tune their buoyancy and have a look for indicator fish. Helen, Simone and I were lucky to see a school of approximately 80 butterfly fish, which was just great. I got some good video footage of a parrotfish and after looking back through the video, noticed a grouper, school of snapper and a butterfly fish in the background. Just needed a sweetlips and I'd be in Reef Check video heaven.

20 October

First day of data collection has gone well. A few minor changes to the schedule to improve data collection and safety and everyone is happy, albeit a little water-logged. Simone and Anders are floating through the water and Sofie and Helen are getting more and more comfortable with being upside down counting diadema urchins and impacts. Jane is enjoying counting fish with Georgie and Karin, Conny and Badar are doing substrate and assisting Rita. After a relaxing card game everyone was full of laughs. Note to self: don't rig the deck while someone is away, they only win and make everyone else almost wet themselves laughing :-)

21 October

Another good day with more than the usual pranks played. Breakfast, check. Dive briefing, check. Kit put together, check. Overcome Georgie trying to push me in the water, check. Overcome Rita trying to push me in the water, not so lucky. I was about to complete my 1000th dive and the team wanted to ensure it was memorable. How could I forget such lovely people :-) There was talk of putting jam in my booties and let the fish gather around, so I was happy with simply being pushed in the water. Sofie had a dream about diadema urchins last night, but she was very keen to get in the water and overcome her demons.

22 October

Last day of data collection and the practical jokes continued. Today Karin completed her 300th dive, so after yesterday it was only fitting to continue the jokes. Only problem was Karin was in a team, which jumped in the water well after everyone else. Not to worry, teams changed and Karin is first in. After finally getting her away from her dive kit, Karin's BCD mysteriously turned itself upside down. She realised something was up quicker than blinking, so it was laughs all round.

23 October

On the way back to Khasab port now, after an easy morning and a leisurely snorkel around Telegraph Island. Most are packed, but I think everyone is waiting to see where Rita stashes all the remaining chocolates. It's been another great week with data collected and plenty of friends made. Emails and numbers have been exchanged and the photos taken throughout the week will be amazing. I hope everyone gets home well and I look forward to seeing you on another Biosphere expedition in the near future. :-)

Ken

