

# DIVING THE PORT ARANSAS JETTIES



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# Preface

- Shore diving the Port Aransas Jetties can be both very rewarding and frustrating.
- Visibility is often seasonal and weather dependent.
- There are hazards to know about and avoid.
- This is a summary of what I have learned during my lifetime love/hate relationship with the Port Aransas Jetties.
- I hope this is helpful to you.



# Overview



- ❑ The Port Aransas Jetties are situated between inland bays and the open Gulf of Mexico. They protect Aransas Pass which flows between them.
- ❑ Substrate consists of large granite boulders and a fine sand bottom.
- ❑ Visibility is most often poor, but on good days is 5-25 ft.
- ❑ Depth on the channel side is up 45 ft and beach side around 15 ft.
- ❑ Marine species from bays, Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean Sea are heavily concentrated along these rocks. You never know what you might find, which is what makes Texas jetty diving so great!
- ❑ Large granite boulders serve as an attachment for hundreds of rocky shore species, algae, some corals, and provide cover for colorful juvenile Caribbean reef fish, such as Spotfin Butterfly Fish, French Angelfish, Sergeant Majors, and many others.
- ❑ The jetties are loaded with invertebrate species from yellow whip corals to the Horse Conch, the second largest snail species in the world.
- ❑ Sea turtles are very common, but shy.
- ❑ A sandy/muddy bottom slopes away from the rocks and is home to eels, rays, flounder, and other bottom dwellers.



# Skill Level



- While this is a shallow shore dive it can be a challenge for beginners.
- I would suggest being an advanced open water diver or higher.
- A discover local diving experience with a dive professional is suggested for anyone new to the area.
- The information here is for informational purposes only.
- Do proper research and dive planning.
- Dive within the limits of your training and ability.
- Follow all safe diving practices.



# When to Dive

- ❑ Usually late summer or fall are best
- ❑ For good visibility check for:
  - ❑ Low winds and calm seas.
  - ❑ Low Turbidity
  - ❑ A high slack tide
  - ❑ I like the easy to read tide charts at:
    - ❑ [www.ezfshn.com](http://www.ezfshn.com) or just Google "Port Aransas Tides"
  - ❑ Plan to dive just before the high tide.
  - ❑ Best if the tide occurs late morning or noon for highest light penetration and lowest winds.
  - ❑ Recent tropical storms and recent rains will spoil the visibility.
  - ❑ Weekdays are best to avoid too many fisherman.
  - ❑ Do your research at home and don't waste your time going out if tides and turbidity are not favorable.





# Where to Dive



Pier Lab Prior to being destroyed

- ❑ Diving is typically on the leeward side of the jetty.
- ❑ This usually means diving anywhere along the north side of the south Jetty during typical southeast summer winds.
- ❑ Just back your vehicle up, gear up, and go!
- ❑ Favorite sites are the sunken UTMSI Pier Lab.
- ❑ The Spurs- These are piles of rock used to prevent erosion of jetties that extend part way into the channel.
  - ❑ The first spur is just a little seaward of the beach and features a large steel anchor and lots of nooks and crannies to explore.
- ❑ North Jetty- You will need a boat.
  - ❑ The "Jetty Boat" makes regular ferry trips from Fisherman's Wharf.
  - ❑ Because it is less accessible, the North Jetty is more pristine.
  - ❑ You will need to bring/rent a cart to carry your equipment.



# Port Aransas Jetties





# Hazards

## ❑ Water Movement

- ❑ Tides flowing through Aransas Pass can create strong currents.
- ❑ Throw a biodegradable floating object into the water to determine direction and speed of current.
- ❑ Observe the behavior of your dive flag.
- ❑ Dive before/during a high slack tide for best visibility and lightest current.
- ❑ Swim into the current first to avoid fatigue.
- ❑ Be cautious of possible rip currents that could take you toward the ocean.
- ❑ On the surface, swim seaward during large wave sets or boat wakes to avoid being pushed into the rocks.







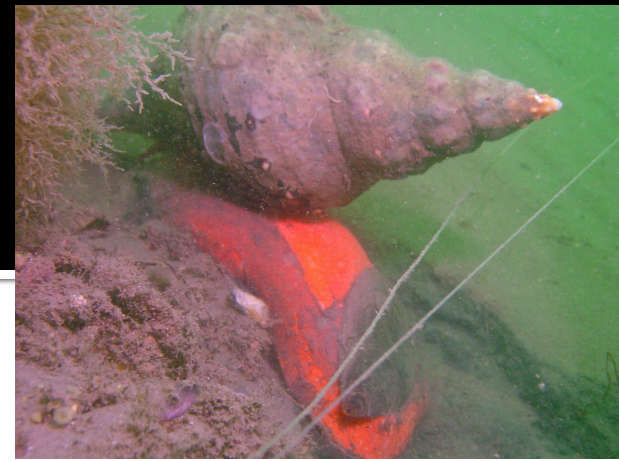
# Hazards



- ❑ Marine Life
  - ❑ If it can sting you, scrape you, or poke you, it's a hazard at Port Aransas Jetties.
  - ❑ **Bring a full wetsuit, booties, and gloves.**
  - ❑ Use good buoyancy control to avoid sea urchins, scorpion fish, oysters, barnacles, stingrays, and others.
  - ❑ Use caution when entering and exiting on the rocks and stay low.
  - ❑ Swim away from the rocks during waves or boat wakes so you won't be pushed against them when on the surface.
  - ❑ Hazardous organisms are highly camouflaged.
  - ❑ Be careful where you place hands, feet and knees.



# Hazards



- Fishermen
  - The jetties are very popular with anglers.
  - You will find snagged fishing tackle such as, fishing line, leaders, weights, nets, and hooks which can be a hazard.
  - Look out for fishing lines and carry multiple cutting tools in the event of entanglement.
  - Bring a mesh bag and do your share to remove and document this material by doing a [Project Aware-Dive Against Debris Survey](#).
  - Add the good stuff to your tackle box or give it to a nearby fisherman. Dispose of the rest properly.



# Hazards



## Boats

- Most boats are constrained to the deep channel but smaller fishing boats may wander near the rocks.
- Listen for boats and avoid surfacing away from the rocks because you could be in the ship channel!
- Use a dive flag to warn boats of your presence.
- Never dive without a compass, because large ships can reduce visibility at any time.
- Know the compass bearing back to the jetty.



# Ships



- ❑ Learn to recognize the loud low rumble of a large tanker or container ship.
- ❑ A large loaded ship can reduce visibility temporarily.
- ❑ They also can pull you towards them as they pass, so be prepared to grab on to a rock or dig in to sediment as they pass.
- ❑ Stay out of the ship channel.



# Emergencies

- ❑ Create a dive accident emergency management plan before you go.
- ❑ Tell a responsible person when you are going and when you will check in with them.
- ❑ Carry oxygen and a well equipped diving first aid kit.
- ❑ Call 911 for shore based emergencies
- ❑ Call United States Coast Guard for emergencies at sea on VHF marine radio channel 16.
- ❑ Call Divers Alert Network +1-800-446-2671
- ❑ Nearest Emergency Room
  - ❑ Bay Area Medical Center
  - ❑ 7101 S Padre Island Dr, Corpus Christi, TX 78412



# Happy Diving!



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