

## Helium, wrecks and sea monsters

By Lara Indra, NextGen Trainee 23/24 and 24/25

### TECH 1 AND TECH PROJECT WEEK

I had two incredible weeks. I can call myself a GUE tech diver now, have done five more trimix dives already, helped to document huge shipwrecks and recover ghost nets, and I saw where the myth of Odysseus' sea monster "Scylla" came from. I had the opportunity to dive with many different GUE divers and re-install my self-confidence underwater. And now I am dealing with tons of new ideas and plans in my head.



### Week 1: Tech 1 course

The first week was the Tech 1 course with Bartek, who offered me the course as part of my GUE NextGen traineeship. The dive part was great, I really enjoyed the problem solving during equipment failures and the "stop, think, act" way of handling problems, learning how to do gas switches and rescuing an unconscious tech diver. Most motivating was to see the improvements we made after every single dive. Hearing your equipment bubbling like crazy right next to your ear while being at depth is intimidating and at the beginning it was hard to keep a calm mind. But the course helped me to understand three things to calm down in such situations: first, the gas does not run out within one second when there is a leak, even though it sounds like it. Second, I can figure out what the problem is by following the protocol – and I might even solve it. And third, we do not just submerge ourselves harum-scarum, we *planned* the dive, meaning that I can get safely to the next gas source even with failing doubles.

With the theory part however, I struggled. Maybe less with the theory itself but more with my own head. I thought I will never be able to understand the dive planning and actually do tech dives. That I am not clever or strong enough to do this because I don't understand it in the first second. With time and more exhaustion – days were long, weather was hot, diving was demanding – it got worse. When I look back now I see the pressure I put on myself and I clearly see the counterproductive effect of that. After half a day of resting and doing something completely different I went back to the theory, took my time to understand and poof – I got it. This was a really big learning for myself.

Thank you Bartek for making this course possible.

## Week 2: Tech week (with a pinch of project)



The second week was just amazing. Wrecks, photogrammetry, boat rides with helium voice sea shanties, the most beautiful gorgonians, fantastic food and ghost net recoveries. I changed dive teams every day and I was thrilled by the GUE concept that everyone has the exact same basis upon which you can plan and conduct a dive. As the newest tech diver, I was able to learn from the experiences of the others who were patient to explain and eager to debate. I tightened my skills, trained being deco captain, calculated pragmatic deco while diving – and I absolutely fell in love with gauge mode. Simple but effective. Teamwork was a big topic and dives were planned according to the preferences and abilities of the divers. When one recovered a ghost net, another documented the process. When one concentrated on wildlife documentation on the wreck, the other focussed on environmental and dive plan awareness. I learned to dive with fun and efficiency, especially relevant for tech diving because it is deep, time is limited and gas expensive.\

I have to say it got "cozy" on the zodiac with eight tech divers, wearing a dry suit in the heat was a pain sometimes and keeping in mind everything I learned sometimes distracted me from fully enjoying the wrecks. But the very last dive was on Pasubio, a beautiful wreck I already knew, with great visibility, a longer bottom time and curious fish shoals joining us at 6m for the deco stop.

For this dive I grouped with the only other tech diving woman in the group and the dive belongs to one of my all-time-favourites – a perfect last dive and even my neck seal waited until after to rupture.

### **A region full of history**

Every drive and dive felt like a tour through history and culture, with Roman, Greek and Arab parts. The wrecks we documented sunk during WWII and there is a lot of known



history behind them. Capitan Antonio, Pasubio, Valfiorita and more, and each and every wreck is so special in its own way. I can't wait to go back and find out more, especially about the ones that are less known. Another highlight of the region is the ocean between Sicily and the mainland called "Strait of Messina". The currents are so strong in some parts that it looks like a whirlpool – making perfectly clear how people in ancient times got the idea of a sea monster living down there. I will not start writing about the culinary highlights we experienced because that would be a blog for itself.

### **Personal highlights**

I don't even know where to start. The people were amazing, we had a really good time full of laughter and fun and even language barriers were overcome. Bartek was a great and very competent instructor, with a huge amount of background knowledge and interests. His passion for wrecks was contagious and I am sure we did not dive together for the last time. My biggest highlight was probably the progress I made during the two weeks, in terms of diving but also awareness of my own capabilities and how excessive self-pressure and self-doubt lead to a strongly decreased performance. I am very eager to apply that newly acquired knowledge to my future diving and everyday life. Furthermore, I am absolutely taken by the GUE way of team awareness and positioning. You always see the other's fist or light (ideally) and don't have to worry or move to search for your teammate, saving a lot of energy and raising the safety level. One less serious eye-opener: everyone calls them argon bottles. None of these bottles has ever seen argon.

### **Personal recommendations**

The most important recommendation I have is that adding a week of tech diving (e.g. project diving, fun tech week) right after the course is a huge asset. Using over and over again what you learned, come into a habit and establish muscle memory, repeat and let everything sink deeper into your brain. I can only recommend the combination of a tech 1 course with a tech dive week.



*Photos by Bartek and Lara, prose by Lara*