

Fuencaliente Necropolis

by Wojciech Dopierala

The Canary Islands have been the scene of many Pirate Stories. But La Palma in particular has attracted the most important characters of the time, giving rise to many legends.

Who wouldn't like scuba diving and history class all together? One of the most popular dives on La Isla Bonita is linked to the Corsairs of the 16th century. In Fuencaliente 15m below the surface divers can find something quite unexpected. A cemetery, 40 crosses placed at the bottom of the sea.

The tale begins June 5, 1570 in Lisbon. From there 7 ships start their journey to Brazil. On board they carried Jesuits who were going to carry out their mission in the conquered lands. At that time, each trip of this format was a great risk, but after 7 days of sailing, "Santiago" along with 6 other ships have docked in Madeira. That's where the ships part. To take the merchandise to Santa Cruz de La Palma "Santiago" takes course to the south, another ship



leaves for the Azores with the same mission. While the rest of the fleet awaits them in Madeira to continue the trip to Brazil after their return.

Although so far everything seemed fine, these first weeks of the expedition was only silence before the storm.

This one bore a French name: Jacques de Sores.

The famous pirate lieutenant to another with even more fame, François Le Clerc, left France in 1554 at the request of Francis I, who envied the riches that Spain was bringing from the New World. Career of these two corsairs was long and successful. Only counting on the looting of Santa Cruz de La Palma, Santo Domingo, Azua, La Yaguana, Monte Cristi and Port-au-Prince, even Santiago and Havana de Cuba, we can imagine the danger that those names carried.

16 years later, in July 1570 on their way back to France, the corsairs decided to make another visit to the island where they started - La Palma.

This is the moment where both stories come together.

The trip from Santiago to the Canary Islands was more complicated and after 7 days of tough sailing they approached La Palma's coasts. Unfortunately, due to a strong storm, they were unable to go directly to the port of Santa Cruz. They had to temporarily dock in Tzacorte hosted



in the property of Monteverde where they remained 11 long days waiting for the weather to calm down.

July 15, 1570 was the day when they were finally able to raise the anchor and continue their journey to the capital of the island. Among those who traveled aboard this ship were Father Ignacio Azevedo and 39 other Jesuits.

Although the storm has supposed to have passed, the clouds of bad luck followed Santiago. It was at the height of Fuencaliente where 5 ships have been observed going at full sail towards the Jesuit ship. The lookout watching the scene had no doubt what is arriving. Jacques De Sores's squad easily closed the distance and attacked Ignacio Azevedo's ship.

The battle lasted minutes and the crew surrendered when they saw their dead captain hitting the deck. The corsair showed no mercy and sentenced all the passengers to death. With shouts "Death to the Papist dogs! They have to be thrown into the water!" ordered the slaughter of 40 monks throwing their naked bodies into the sea.

The corpses sank into the ocean, but the memory about this tragedy has remained. In 1742 the 40 dead were declared "martyrs of the faith" by Pope Benedict XIV and 100 years





Sony A7 III, Samyang AF 14mm f/2.8 FE, SeaFrogs housing with 8" Dome. Ambient Light. Depth 18m

later they have been beatified.

Although 430 years have passed, history has not been forgotten and with the initiative of the director of the Naval Museum of La Palma the famous 40 Crosses Of the Malpique were installed. Placed between 15 and 20m deep, they are part of one of the most visited diving spots on the island.

Passionate about freediving underwater photography, listening to this story we could not resist and together with the guys from Freediving La Palma we visited Malpique wanting to take photos

in this famous spot. Although the weather conditions and water visibility were not the best, thanks to freediver and spearfisher Ruben we managed to locate the crosses and carry out the ideas by taking photos that we had in mind.

It is not a typical dive, but highly recommended. It combines a diving activity in a spectacular place full of marine life with a very interesting history class.

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www.freedivingcruise.com



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