

Tech & Free

By Alexandre Hache and
Graham Owens



I glanced down at my computer and noticed we had already spent fifty-five minutes on the Roraima; it's time we made our way back to the bow to start our long ascent.

I start to visualise each photograph that I have taken from this iconic wreck in Saint-Pierre Bay - the holds, the machine room - so many fond memories of my recent visit.

The visibility is sub optimal and everything but the closest things are a blur. I strain my eyes to make out distant objects and suddenly, I distinguish a distant form; it slowly

evolves with grace and elegance.

Gradually, the mirage becomes clear; two long fins leaving the surface, the diver getting deeper with finesse and no fuss, no bubbles ... it's a freediver ! What a surprise, we are forty-five meters deep!

I quickly turn on my strobes and swim over to him. I manage to grab a few quick shots, then, as quickly as he arrived, he is gone, back to the surface for that life preserving next breath, but not before signalling to me that he will return.

Indeed, it seems that in no time he is back with us and accompanied by his colleagues. They willingly lend themselves to this improvised photo shoot. Some do not stay for long; others make for the sand, ten metres below us at fifty-five meters; others pose for me briefly.



Minutes of happiness pass. My rebreather buddy has already reduced his depth to limit the steadily climbing decompression obligation which is already much longer than planned. An exchange of facial signals with him and it looks like I have his blessing to stay a little longer.

The moment is magic, but I do not abuse it and increase the partial pressure of my rebreather to start the ascent along the shot line of our freedivers. The ninety minutes of decompression between twenty-four meters and the surface allow me to review and savour the pictures of these special athletes.

I know what their presence here represents because I have had my years of apnea diving too. It was at the Hyères club, with such champions of the discipline as Beatrice Rouvier, Alban Burlet and Stéphane Mifsud. They progressed to depths of fifty meters, whilst I was struggling to get beyond thirty.

My three computers finally confirm that my decompression is over. I surface and hasten to thank them. I meet Constance, Aday, Nicolas and the phenomenal Quentin; the man with the pink snorkel.

Olivier, the instructor of the Symbiose Apnea Club asks me to join them on a dusk dive a few days later and I eagerly accept his kind offer.

It is on my favourite dive site in Martinique, the falling anchors of St. Peter, that we find ourselves, at sunset. My dive buddy Ben accompanies me with a 33,000 lumens Big Blue LED light source. I meet Enora, Myriam, Sabrina and I recognize Aday with his giant mono fin.

I am asked if I have any special requirements; suspecting what surprises await me; I let them have 'carte blanche'; the freedom to choose what they want to do.

I am accustomed to dives beyond 100 meters



and the low light levels that we find at those depths and I signal to my dive buddy to position the light. The sun disappears gradually and we continue our dive in total darkness. Sardine shoals come to visit us, attracted by our lights, but they are wary that big predators could also invite themselves to the party!

The surprises are here: I recognize Enora in her climbing gear on the shot line and Myriam in the middle of the sardines, it makes such an original shot!

After 90 minutes spent at twenty-five meters

deep, I surface and the big question that any photographer faces: So, how are the photos?

I did not have any idea but fortunately, for me, they live up to the magnificent show they performed.

Thanks to BigBlue divelights for their support.

Alexandre Hache
Instagram
and Graham Owens