

Blue Heron Bridge

by Phil Rudin

Every November the annual DEMA (The Dive Equipment & Marketing Association) draws about 10,000 industry professionals from around the world. The 2017 show is being held in Orlando Florida from Wednesday, November, First to Saturday, November, Fourth. Many of the exhibitors tear down on Sunday and leave Orlando on Monday.

The Blue Heron Bridge is a hidden gem that is a mere two and a half hour drive from Orlando. This year the stars have aligned and the tides at the bridge could not be more perfect for a few days of diving after the show.

Starting with a high tide at 8:41 AM on 11/5 the tides through 1/14 are ideal. I would encourage anyone making plans for the DEMA show to include a few days after the show for some of South Floridas best diving.

Pure Vida Divers and Force-E dive operations are both less than a mile from the bridge. Both operations are full service with rental equipment, fills, retail and boat operations. Both are quite knowledgeable about bridge diving, night dives at the bridge and more.

When most seasoned divers

talk about muck diving, exotic places like Milne Bay, Lembeh, Anilao and Mabul come to mind not Riviera Beach Florida.

In the last ten years or so the intracoastal waterway between Riviera Beach and Singer Island has become a mecca for muck divers and photographers from around the world. With unusual creatures like the Striated Frogfish, Northern Stargazer, Pipe-horse, Mantis Shrimps, Miniature Melo, Flying Gurnard along with yearly migrations of thousands of bait fish, Tarpon, Snook, Manatee and many more the BHB has become the US. muck diving capital.

Until about ten years ago the Blue Heron Boulevard Bridge, referred to by local divers as “The Bridge” remained below the radar. During the past five decades tens of

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Miniature Melo, Olympus E-3, Olympus 50mm F/2 Macro, Nexus Housing, Two Inon Z-240 strobes, ISO-100, F/22, 1/250th sec





Bluethroat Pikeblenny, Olympus E-3, Olympus 50mm F/2 Macro, Nexus Housing, Two Inon Z-240 strobes, ISO-100, F/22, 1/250th sec

thousands of marine life images from usual suspects to mysterious have been captured at the bridge. Many of these images have been published world wide including images from Paul Humann and Suzan Meldonian's excellent Fish Identification and Reef Creature Identification books. Many of the images were tagged as photographed in the Lake Worth Lagoon named for the intracoastal waterway area surrounding the bridge. Now if you tag BHB



Upside-down Jellyfish, Sony NEX-5, E 18-55mm F/3.5-5.6 at 18mm, Nauticam Housing, Two Inon Z-240 strobes, ISO-200, F/16, 1/125th sec

many in the diving community will need no further geographical locator.

The steel and concrete bridge connecting Riviera Beach and Singer Island was built in 1949 with a drawbridge in the center to accommodate boat traffic. By the mid 1970s the boat traffic and vehicular traffic on the two lane bridge had increased to the point that the bridge had to be replaced by a much higher structure.

The four lane bridge was finished in 1976 and



Seahorse, Olympus E-M5, 60mm F2.8 Macro, Nauticam Housing, Two Inon Z-240 strobes, ISO-200, F/14, 1/250th sec

spans about 400 yards of intracoastal waterway. The main "high" bridge from the Riviera Beach side ends at Phil Foster Park in the center of the intracoastal waterway and a second "low" bridge about 100 yards long reaches east from the park to Singer Island. About 100 yards of the old bridge remain as a fishing pier to the north of the current bridge.

Concrete and steel rubble from the old bridge was dumped south east of the Palm Beach Inlet in



Polka-Dot Batfish, Sony A7 II, Sony FE 90 mm F/2.8 macro, Nauticam Housing, Two Inon Z-240 strobes, ISO-200, F/11, 1/125th sec

an area known to local divers as “The Rock Piles” a great lobster area during the season.

Both bridges have become a mecca for underwater photographers, snorkeling, research divers, creature observation, student diver training and more. A snorkeling trail was opened in 2012 along the southern edge of the swimming area.

The Palm Beach Inlet is about a mile from the bridge and is one of the largest inlets along Florida’s east coast. Billions of gallons of saltwater move in and out with the changing of each tide making the current stronger the

further you get from high tide.

The best way to dive the bridge is to arrive by car and park in the southern most parking lot at Phil Foster Park. From Interstate 95 you would go east on Blue Heron Boulevard until you cross the high bridge, Phil Foster Park is at the base of the bridge on the North side.

Suit-up in the southern park area near the shower and then walk east along the beach to enter near the low bridge. To dive the high bridge go to the south-west corner of the park and enter near the concrete bridge foundations.



Stareye Hermit Crab, Olympus E-620, Olympus Housing, Olympus 35mm macro, Two Inon Z-240 strobes, ISO-200, F/22, 1/180th sec

As always a dive flag is required and divers need to be aware of the heavy boat traffic along the South channel near the park. Entering the water an hour before high tide should reduce the chance of heavy currents at both bridges.

A public beach lies between the two bridges and the marked swimming area is off limits to submerged divers. The area around the low bridge dips to about twenty-two feet in the center and a public boat ramp lies to the north of the low bridge and should be avoided.

Entering near the high bridge you

work your way west and the bottom drops to about twenty-four feet in the center. Once you reach the wooden retaining wall you should turn back. This wall marks the east side of the channel boaters use to pass under the bridge and should not be crossed by divers.

I started diving at the bridge in 1972 and attached are a few of the wonderful creatures which can be found there.

Phil Rudin

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