

Scuba Basics: The Ins and Outs of Diving

by Noreen

Tips for Shore Diving

Shore diving offers diver a freedom unlike boat diving, unless of course you own the boat. Apart from not having to take long boat rides to the dive sites a major plus for those that get sea sick easily, you're not limited to the boats schedule and can dive for as long or short as you and your dive buddy choose. It's also a cheaper and convenient option for divers on a budget or for those that just like the flexibility of diving when they want.

The most exciting part however of shore diving is the element of exploration and adventure. Unlike in boat dives, where you are dropped off at the dive site itself and have a captain or dive guide who knows the site, tides, currents and other considerations, but with shore dives you're mostly on your own (unless you opt for a dive master to accompany you). Shore diving requires you to start planning more than just the dive at the site. It starts with getting to know the conditions and where exactly the site is, plotting a route to get to it, finding the best entry points and techniques, having what will you need when you get there and keeping your scuba gear to a minimum, but having all the essentials as you carry everything on your back to and from the dive site right to exit routes, in short, shore diving requires a lot of planning and preparation to get it right in order to have a pleasant experience.

Here are some handy shore diving tips to remember -

Pre-dive Planning: A lot of shore diving is in the planning. It's important not only to get information on the dive site you are visiting but also how to get there, gps co-ordinates if you're using one (which is a good idea) or a map of the exact location for each site's turnoff, parking and dive entry. This should be easily available at the local dive shop or from fellow divers who have dived there before. It's important to also get find out conditions such as tides, currents etc, before planning a dive. The dive shops and guides know the shores, the sites and the seasonal conditions and they will be able to give you an experienced opinion as to the difficulties you may encounter. Their advice is invaluable. Use them!

Entries and Exits: Another crucial point of shore diving is the best point to enter the walk and exit it. Not all shore dives are from a sandy beach as we picture it in our heads. A Shore dive entry can range from a simple walk down a sand beach to a clamber over rocks, or a short trip down a boat ramp which could turn out to be slippery as an eel. Waves and rough waters at the point of entry can be hazardous and in full scuba gear, it's important to know the right techniques of entry and exit as well.

Gearing up for a Shore dive: Careful consideration must be made to the dive gear and equipment you actually need, you'll have to carry everything on your back for the dive so remember that. Going minimalistic is a good idea as it'll help reduce the weight of carrying excess on the shore and prevents the need of dangling stuff on your BC which will be at risk of

breaking if it hits a rock or you slip and it's very important to keep your hands free too (apart from your fins during entry), for support and to steady yourself if needed. It's also advisable to wear thick-soled dive boots rather than the soft booties as you'll be walking in them, sometimes over sharp and rugged rocks. Take a little more weight than you would normally need on a boat dive. As your tank gets lighter, it can be difficult to stay down as you swim shallower back to shore.

Buddy Communication: It's important to have a reliable and a good dive buddy when shore diving. A lot of times you may require your buddy's help, be it for support when you put on your fins or to co-ordinate an entry or descent, good communication skills and an understanding between buddies really helps here.

Go Slow: As you're exerting yourself to make it to the dive site alone and not just on the dive itself, play it cool and easy, don't rush. Rushing an entry or trying hard to get to the site as fast as you can make you tired and more susceptible to stress in the water. It also increases chance of injury. Take your time, breath, assess the situation and make as smooth an entry as possible. Swim nice and slowly to the site without exerting yourself too much, inflating your BC once you're in swim-able waters helps so does swimming on your back sometimes. Who knows you could even find some great snorkeling sights worth checking out during the swim!

And lastly, have fun and dive safe!

Entry Methods

After you exit the bubble that is your scuba training, you're faced with a whole world of different types of diving. Your next dive trip could have you diving from a live aboard, a small dive boat or shore diving from a sandy beach or even an inland lake. Since chances are, you've only learned the basic scuba entry and exit methods since your training, you're sure to be faced with some unfamiliar ways to get in the water to start a dive and exit the water after one at some point or another. To anyone used to always doing the giant stride entry into the water, suddenly having to do a backward roll off a small shaky boat can be a little intimidating. But this is due to the unfamiliarity and lack of experience. Good news is, they're all fairly simple once you've tried it.

Here's a closer look at some Entry and Exit methods to brush up your scuba skills for diving both from the shore and boats-



BOAT DIVING ENTRY METHODS

The Giant Stride Entry

Most commonly used while diving off a dive boat with a platform, but can also be used to step off a pier or jetty where the water is deep enough, this method can be best used only if the platform is steady.

- Kit up and don all your scuba gear on in the boat itself
- Put air in your BC to avoid making a negative descent
- Stand on the edge of the dive platform with the balls of

your fins on the edge.

- Then holding your mask and regulator with the palm of your hand and fingers holding your mask in place, take a big step off the platform putting one leg forward.
- Once in the water bring your legs together to return to the surface, recheck your gear and signal the boat that you're ok

TIP: Look up at the horizon when you step, to help maintain that upright position before you take that step and avoid jumping or hopping as the aim is to get as far away from the boat/platform as possible.

Backward Roll Entry

This is another common entry method and is preferred when diving from a RIB (Rigid Inflatable Boat) or small unsteady boat. The water needs to be deep for this method of entry just like in the giant stride entry.

- Put all your scuba equipment on in the boat itself
- Sit at the edge of the gunwale of the boat facing inwards with your tank facing the water
- Make sure no one or nothing is behind you in the water
- Then with your legs together bent at the knees, chin tucked in and one hand holding the mask and regulator in place, lean back and let gravity do the rest
- With the weight of the tank and gravity doing its thing you'll be pulled into a full somersault and hit the water

Controlled Seated Entry

The controlled seated entry method is best used where the water is too shallow for a giant stride off the boat or where your boat/platform is low to the surface of the water or the platform is unsteady. A good entry method for disabled or older divers

- Start by sitting up on the boat itself
- Sit at the edge of the boat/platform and using your hands on each side of you, lift yourself up and outward with your hands and lower yourself into the water.
- Care should be taken while pushing yourself off the boat that you clear both yourself and your tank from hitting the side of the dive boat or platform.

SHORE DIVING ENTRY METHODS

Beach Entry/ Surf Entry

Walking into the water may sound like an easy method of entry, but wading through the surf backward while wearing heavy scuba diving equipment is no easy feat. Depending on the condition and your waddling skills, you may keep your fins on or in your hand.

- Hold your fins securely with one hand. (For surf entries keep them on, along with your regulator in your mouth and mask on).
- Walk slowly backwards into the water. Make sure that your tank is facing the water as you enter the water to prevent yourself from falling face-first.
- Inflate your BC.
- Use your buddy's assistance and support to put your fins on in the water.
- As soon as you are deep enough, gently submerge and move off into deeper waters.

Rocky Surface Entry

This is one of the toughest entries and can be quite nerve wracking for some, however, it's not very uncommon. It's very important to note the conditions before such a dive as rough rocks with high swells are a recipe for disaster if not while entry then potentially during exit as well.

- Avoid carrying any extra scuba accessories such as cameras or torches, so that you can keep your hands free to steady yourself. If you require such gear make sure you can attach it securely to your BC or it can be stowed away in pockets.
- Wear hard sole boots rather than soft booties for a better grip on the rocks and protection for your feet.
- Find a stable rock closest to the water where it's deep enough for entry and sit or lean against it while securing your fins and mask.
- Sit down and edge your body towards the entry point slowly, in a seated position, until your legs are in the water.
- Time your entry with a swell (if any) so that you hit the water at the top of the wave and allow it to carry you out.
- Once in, fin hard to move away from the rocks.

Exit Methods

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BOAT DIVING EXIT METHODS

Hard/ High Boat Exit With a Ladder

It's almost certain that if a dive boat has high sides or a raised platform, there will be a ladder to help climb out of the water and get back into the boat. Depending on the conditions and type of ladders provided, you can exit wearing your fins or you may have to take them off to climb it.

- Don't make your way to the ladder if anyone is already on it or still climbing up, keep a safe distance to the side as they may fall back.
- Always watch your fingers as you hold the ladder, you don't want them getting caught between the ladder and boat.
- If there are swell and depending on the conditions keep your mask and regulator in.
- Get a good grip on the ladder and climb up a couple of rings and pass up your weight belt first or use whatever kit removal sequence you've been told to follow by the dive guide.
- After you take your weights off, you may take off your fins before proceeding to get in the boat.

Small Boat Exit with No Ladder

To get out of a RIB or small boat or even a lower platform where no ladder is needed, you first hand over your weight belt and take off your whole BC kit while in the water. After handing these to a boat hand and keeping your fins on, you need to get a good grip with both your palms on the side ridge of the boat or platform. Then timing your push with a swell (if any), kick up with your fins as you pull yourself up, then twist and plop your behind on the ridge or platform facing the water. It's just like sitting up on a wall or getting out of a swimming pool.

SHORE DIVING EXIT METHODS

Beach Exit

- Make your way to shallow water until you are roughly hip-level with the water.
- Deflate your BC so that your feet are firmly on the ground
- Facing the beach, remove your fins using your buddy for support.
- Walk back to shore.

Surf Exit Method

- Determine the best route for entry and exit before the dive itself.
- Move as quickly as you can and stand up as soon as you are able.
- If you are not able to stand up comfortably, shuffle up the beach, allowing the breakers to push you forward. Keep your hands in front of you to fend off obstructions.
- Avoid the highest part of the wave.

KELP DIVING

Dense kelp beds are common features along the Southern California coastline, and most research divers will encounter situations involving entering and exiting the water through the surface kelp canopy. Divers should consider the following when planning or executing a kelp bed dive:

- Entry through kelp is best accomplished by making a feet-first, feet-together entry, rather than a headfirst or backroll entry that could result in entanglement.
- Slates, tapes, bags and other hanging equipment should be held close to the diver's body to avoid getting hung up in the canopy.
- Carrying a dive knife strapped to the inner calf can reduce the chances of entanglement.
- By entering without an inflated BC a diver can avoid entanglement and begin descent as soon as he or she enters the water.
- Divers should expect a darker dive as the result of a thick surface canopy.
- By remaining in one place during ascent, a diver can make an exit hole by allowing exhaled bubbles to move kelp fronds.
- Once at the surface, a diver has three choices to reach the boat or shore:
 1. Move in steps toward the shore. Get a visual of the exit site and head toward it by continuously sub-surface swimming towards the area and popping up in holes in the canopy.
 2. Get a visual on the exit area, take a compass heading and make a sub-surface swim toward it.
 3. Use the "Kelp Crawl". Keep your body on the surface of the surface canopy and use a Dog Paddle technique to make your way to the surface. Inflated BCs, Game bags, tools and slates should be organized to minimize interference.
- When getting into a boat the diver should clear any kelp from equipment and tanks so they are not pulled back into the water as they pull themselves up onto the boat.

NIGHT DIVING

Introduction

Night dives can be great fun, but they're not without risks.

Ensure the following conditions are met:

- Divers are familiar with dive site & the weather is good.
- Good surface visibility, don't dive in fog, heavy rain etc.
- All divers to have a main & backup light with new batteries along with a light stick attached to the tank valve.
- Exit points are clearly marked (colored lights or something to distinguish from other lights).

Night vision

Before getting on-site, warn about night vision. It takes at least 15 minutes of near-darkness for our vision to adjust to low light. A light beam shone in the eyes, or car headlights can destroy night vision for another 15 minutes. Advise that all divers check lights before gearing up and turn headlights off and use dim light while getting ready. When ready to dive, eyes will be well adjusted for night vision.

Lights

Divers should have two lights each, one main and one backup and a glow stick or similar small light source should be attached to the tank valve and left on during the dive. Avoid head-mounted lights on night dives as one glance at your buddy destroys their night vision.

If the lights have rechargeable batteries, make sure they are fully topped up. If they're disposable, put a fresh set of batteries in regardless.

Signals

Signal with the beam on the seabed where your buddy is looking, not in face. Common signals include:

- Rapid side-to-side movement underwater = attention, look this way.
- Rapid side-to-side movement on the surface = problems come get me.
- Slow large circle = OK (like finger and thumb circle).
- Steady beam straight up at surface of water - alarm to surface cover (most lights balanced to do this if let free for this reason).
- When giving hand signals, shine light at your hand so buddy can see it (tricky if two-handed signal - tuck torch under arm).
- It is important for buddy to confirm signal by repeating it as it is easy to misunderstand in dark.

Buddy checks are important as it is easy to miss things at night. Go through the checks religiously and test things work properly. On the dive, pay special attention to navigation as there are fewer cues than with sunlight. It is easy to get disorientated and to go deeper than you intended as you lose the normal darkening cues that you would get in the day. Watch your depth gauge often and check buddies too.

After dive and de-equipment, and search of whole area to ensure nothing left behind.