

Diving New Hope Rock

Text and Photography by Bob Willey

Laying less than a mile off the western shore of Point Loma and about a third of the way south from the Mission Bay Channel to the Point Loma Light, rests New Hope Rock. Accessible only by boat, New Hope Rock is located deep in the kelp forests of Point Loma, at N32 41.139, W117 15.950'.* Rising approximately 10 to fifteen feet off the hard rock bottom, that slightly rises from the north and east, extending upward to within twenty feet of the surface, this roughly flat



Jackie Willey swims the length of an overhanging reef. New Hope Rock.



Black Smiths, school over the rocky reefs, like storm clouds over the Sierra Nevada mountains.



One of the many arches at New Hope Reef.

topped rock, is capped with a healthy growth of Purple hydro coral and algae. A few boulders lay strewn about the bottom and up against New Hope Rocks

sides. On its south and west sides the bottom begins descending slowly into deeper water. Presently located in a clearing

in the kelp forest, New Hopes water worn and undercut sides harbor a multitude of life. Brightly colored red, orange, yellow, white, and gray sponges, with the occasional blue sponge, can be seen under the rocks over hanging sur-



A giant Sun star on New Hopes colorful reef.



A Garibaldi makes his home within the cracks and holes of New Hope Reef.



Turning quickly around, I found some of the locals in hot pursuit.

face. Pillowy tufts of red, pink and orange Strawberry anemones are inter mixed with the sponges and corals inhabiting the rock. On the south side a small cave gives refuge to a Moray eel and its cleaner shrimps.

As enjoyable as New Hope Rock was, the real gem of this location is the New Hope reef system located, in slowly descending, deeper water to the west. Taking a 270 de-



gree heading, due west, will bring you quickly to the beautiful structures that make up this reef system. These large structures will appear to slowly materialize out of the blue mist. Looming ahead like wrecks of proud ships, lying side by side, upon the bottom. These



Sunlight streaming through the kelp canopy.

reefs extend length wise, oriented toward the east and west. Interestingly, all the rock struc-

tures I've seen throughout the Point Loma kelp forest, have always run in the north and south direction. Finding the rock walls running east and west was a surprise. In the distant past some major feature of the land must have diverted the water to flow to the east and west rather to the north and south



A Garibaldi against the deeply textured reef wall, with the blue green light from above illuminating the top of the reef.



Shaped like a volcano sponge, this gray sponge grows with long conical appendages, extending out from the rock reef.

One of the unusual characteristics of this reef system is the close proximity of its members to one another. When diving NRAD reef for example, most of its reef members lay within 30 to 50 plus feet apart of each other. Here at New Hope, in some cases, one reef may be six feet from the other. This provides a wonderful diving experience of passing through long, deep channels, with the reefs walls rising high overhead. These rock walls afford plenty of places for interesting creatures to hide and make their homes. Plenty of

and thus provided the mechanism to cut these beautiful structures.

One of the unusual characteristics of this reef system is the



Sea Palms populate the top of the reef.

lobsters, a few Moray eels and a surprise find by Mark Kukuchek



Deep channels, running from east to west, extend for a hundred feet.

were two Leopard sharks, laying side by side, deep with a cave, can be found inhabiting many of the reefs

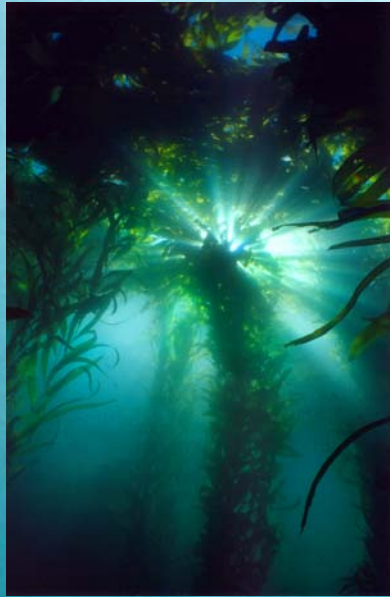
undercuts.

Another interesting characteristic of this dive site, is some of the almost impossibly long overhangs, some seemingly defying gravity. Holding a heading of 270 degree from New Hope Rock should put you into the deep channel pictured here in the upper right of this page. After exiting the west end of this channel turn right and



A Moray eel along with its cleaner shrimp reside in some of the deep holes of New Hope Rock.

head north, you'll now be entering the 50 foot range. In this area you'll find an incredible overhang. The west end of the reef has been undercut by approximately 25 to 30 feet. Looking like a submarine sitting on the bottom with almost half its length hanging over an abyss.



The Sun's rays form a sunburst through the kelp.

As with many dive sites, the abundance of natural arches, pass through holes and crevices are not unusual. And New Hopes reef system is no exception. There's plenty of naturally colorful picture frames, with which to look through into the beautiful undersea world beyond. The forest of kelp swaying lazily in the ocean's surge. Dazzling bursts of sunlight, ablaze like the flash from a camera, from the beams of the Sun's rays, focused by the waters rippled surface, sweeps past your eyes and over the ocean bottom.



Large Gray Moon sponges adorn the underside of the reef.

In the distance, clouds of countless numbers of fish, hover over the top of an adjacent reef. The mass of life, ever changing shape and form, like the clouds of a clearing winter storm over Yosemite Valley.

Another feature I found to be different here was the depth of the bottom from one side of the reef to the other.

While exploring the southern end of this wonderland, I found that as I passed

over or around the reef wall, I would normally have expected to find the bottom looking similar to what I left behind. But here it was not so. Passing over some reefs heading south I was surprised to find the other side descending deeper. A shallow submarine canyon, maybe



Jackie Willey passes through one of New Hope reefs largest arches.

more like a depression was coming in from the south. The south side of some reefs would stair step down into the deeper water below. This made for a real nice twist from what I have normally come to expect.



Looking up from the clear water of the upper kelp canopy.

New hope Rock and its accompanying reef system was a real treat. Its diversity of terrain and reef structure make it a place to be visited again and again. An hour here was just way to short of time to visit.



Returning to the Extremis. Another day in paradise!

New Hope Rock is definitely on my top ten list for San Diego diving. I know I'll be back again!

Bob Willey

