



**PADI Divemaster (Candidate) Mapping Project**

**Location for Project:** Ambergris Caye, Belize, Central America

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**PADI Course:** Divemaster

**Instructor:** Ed Gabe

**Affiliated Dive Store:** New Horizons, Lexington, Kentucky

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## **Background to Ambergris Caye, Belize, Central America**



### **Location Information**

Name – Belize

Population – 287,730

Capital City – Belmopan

Currency – Belizean Dollar (1BZD = 2USD)

Language – (Official) English, Spanish, Mayan, Garifuna, Creole

National Day – September 21<sup>st</sup>

Religions – Catholic (50%), Protestant (27%)

Time Zone – UTC -6 (UTC = GMT)

## Land Statistics

Coastline – 240 miles (386km)

Land Areas – Land – 8,805sq miles (22,806sq km)  
- Water – 62 sq miles (160 sq km)

## GPS Coordinates –

Latitude - 16°, 13' N

Longitude - 88°, 48' W



Figure 1



Figure 2

## Ambergris Caye History

### **A NECKLACE DRAPED ALONGSIDE A BEACH – Glen Godfrey**

Ambergris Caye is the largest of Belize's more than 200 off-shore islands. About 25 miles long and narrow, it resembles from the air a spiny backbone, a vertebrae of land divided by discs of irregular grey mangrove lagoons.



About three-quarters of a mile off shore, draped along the

**Aerial View of Ambergris Caye, 1959. Courtesy Neil Fraser  
Courtesy of [Cubola Productions](#), Belize**

beach on the windward side of the island is the longest and most spectacular coral necklace in the Western Hemisphere, the Belize Barrier Reef.

The beach runs more or less parallel to the reef except at a place called Rocky Point, where it reaches out and touches it. Rocky Point is about 4.5 miles south of Boca Bacalar Chico, a partly man-made channel which separates the island from the Xcalac Peninsula and forms a portion of Belize's northern border with Mexico. This channel is, for the most part, narrow and shallow. In some spots it shrinks during low-tide to a stream which can be crossed on foot.

It is in fact so inconspicuous that a Mexican expedition which went to inspect it in May 1898 had to search several days before finding it. The expedition was led by the newly appointed Mexican Consul to Belize, Brigadier de la Armada Don Angel Ortiz Monasterio and his Vice-Consul, Ingeniero Naval Miguel Rebolledo. They took the boat *Ponton Chetumal* to the mouth of the Rio Hondo.

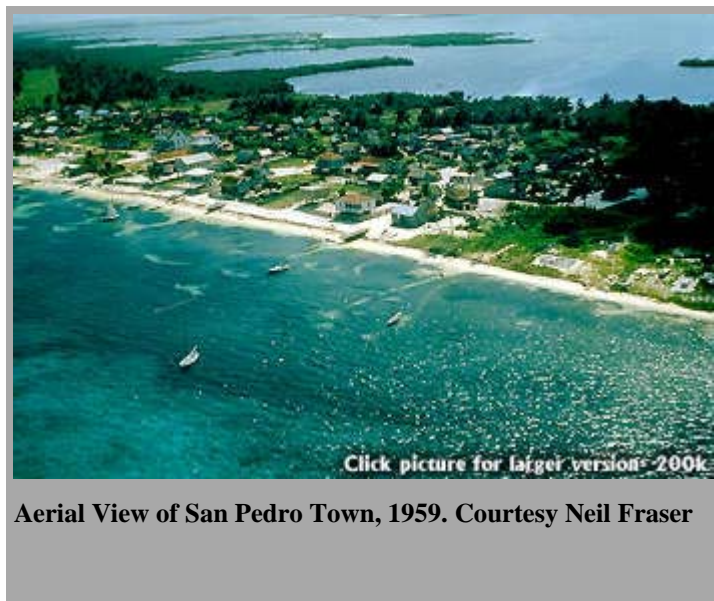
From there two members of the expedition left the *Ponton Chetumal* with a small sailing boat to try to find the mouth of the Boca Bacalar Chico. They anticipated an entrance

some 50 to 60 yards wide. After searching several days, they finally chanced upon a fisherman who directed them to Boca. They decided to sail through, but although their boat was only two feet deep they had to push it part of the way. They emerged on the other side of the island to the white caps and the ceaseless roaring of the waves crashing against the reef. Turning south they came across Bacalar Chico, a fishing village inhabited by people of Yucatecan descent who told the Mexicans that the channel had been dug by hand by their ancestors.

The Boca was even shallower than it is now. In 1899, when the Mexicans built a permanent fortress just north of it, they dug it deeper and wider to allow the passage of their warships across the Peninsula. Nonetheless, despite its small size this channel is geographically important, for it has made Ambergris Caye an island rather than the extension of the Xcalac Peninsula it used to be.

## ISLAND GEOGRAPHY

Geographically, the island can be roughly divided into three main areas: the mangrove swamps, lagoons and sands; a plateau in the north called Basil Jones after a magistrate who around 1790 owned a lease on it; and the sand ridges which comprise the rest of the island including San Pedro Town.



There are 12 lagoons on the leeward side of the island and into them run numerous creeks. The largest lagoon is Laguna de San Pedro, situated to the west of the town. This body of water extends for over two-and-a-quarter miles and is fed by over 15 creeks and channels.



The Basil Jones area consists of a seaward beach ridge and leeward mangrove swamp with a broad intervening plateau of palm thicket. Parts of the area are covered with a rich black soil which may have been transported to the island by the ancient Maya, the island's first known inhabitants, who used it to grow their crops.

South of Basil Jones the main part of the caye extends for about 14 miles. It consists of a seaward sand ridge between 100 and 500 yards wide, flanked on both sides by mangrove. Within the marshy areas are found large circular depressions rimmed by sand and occasional vegetation. The sand ridge itself, at three to five feet above sea level, is the highest part of the Caye and reaches a height of almost 10 feet at San Pedro Town.

Wind, rain and tides combine to constantly alter the windward shoreline. The sands grow and recede from year to year along the entire length of the caye. From the 1960s to the 1980s, for example, certain parts of San Pedro Town lost as much as 30 feet to the encroaching sea.

At the extreme southern end of Ambergris, the sand gives way to numerous mangrove patches divided by navigable channels which connect the waters of the shoat reef area to those of the main lagoons.

## **THE BARRIER REEF**



**Aerial View of Belize Barrier Reef, 1959. Courtesy Neil Fraser**

The Barrier Reef lies about half a mile off the windward side of the island. It is the longest barrier reef in the Western Hemisphere and the second longest in the world.

Flying south into Belize, you can see the reef as an unbroken chain of white surf. It runs

along the Caribbean coast of the Yucatan Peninsula and continues south almost the whole length of the country to the Ranguana and Sapodilla Cayes. Inside the reef the water is



shallow, with a blue tinge; outside the reef the water is deep and from the air shows a dark royal blue. On very clear days the reef appears as a narrow yellowish line dividing the two shades of blue.

Only in Ambergris Caye - and to a lesser degree, Caye Caulker - does the reef run so close to a well-populated caye. Here it is an almost solid wall of magnificent coral formation broken only by narrow channels called quebradas. The remarkably clear water inside the reef allows excellent viewing of the fabulous marine life of the area. Rainbow tinged tropical fish, delicate sea fans and majestic coral gardens abound, with a variety of shapes and colours than can keep an observant diver entertained for hours. Outside the reef, the seabed drops sharply in a series of plateaus to depths of thousands of feet. Out here in the blue are found the gamefish: mackerel, kingfish, wahoo, tuna, sailfish, and marlin.

But the reef is more than just a decorative sideshow. Without it the island would not exist, for it serves as a natural breakwater protecting the beach from erosion by the waves, and sheltering the caye and its inhabitants.



The reef is a living wall formed **Aerial View of San Pedro Town, 1959. Courtesy Neil Fraser** by millions of coral organisms. These corals are carnivorous animals known as polyps, which eat small sea creatures that float by, capturing them with stinging tentacles. Polyps feed only at night, pulling their tentacles back into the skeleton during the day. Within the reef's skeleton live minute blue-green algae. These give off oxygen which the coral polyps breathe; the algae, in turn, absorb the carbon dioxide which the polyps give off, forming thus a genuine symbiotic relationship. Corals are multicoloured varying from gold to red, orange, green, brown and yellow. The soft, living tube-shaped coral polyp protects itself by generating a hard layer of calcium carbonate called the corallite.

Colonies of these polyps form the reef structure growing in strange and exotic shapes from which the different varieties of corals take their popular names, such as brain coral, staghorn coral and elkhorn coral.

The reef needs two factors to survive: solar energy and chemical nutrients. The nutrients flow into the sea as plant and animal organic material from rivers and creeks on the mainland and on the caye itself. The organic material is broken down into its chemical derivatives by bacteria and other microorganisms, thus providing the nutrients necessary for the growth of the reef.

The warm clear water off the coast of Belize, fed as it is by various mainland rivers and streams, makes up an excellent environment for the reef. The entire island of Ambergris may actually have resulted from the conglomeration of coral fragments along with silt from the Rio Hondo. The 1959 report of the British Honduras Land Use Survey Team notes: "The connected chains of coral islands known as Ambergris Caye was formed from the accumulation of coral fragments, first as a shoal patch. These shoals tend to build up in long lines parallel to the coast of the mainland. It is thought that their orientation may be connected with submarine geological strata rather than being entirely the work of sea currents."

## **PIRATES AND STOLEN TREASURE**

Though abandoned by the Maya, Ambergris Caye did not remain uninhabited for long. By the beginning of the 17th century, English, French and Dutch pirates were attacking the ships and towns of the Spanish Empire in the New World. These pirates needed remote retreats and safe harbours where they could care for their boats, rest their crews, hide their treasures and obtain food and water for their next raid. Ambergris Caye probably served such a purpose. Like Cayo Cosina (later to be known as Saint George's Caye) it was a place which could readily provide fresh water and food in good supply. The discovery of small treasure-troves on the island and of gold coins washed up on the beach together with old bottles suggest that it was visited often and its abundant resources utilized.

Ambergris Caye also served as a source of food for the woodcutting camps which multiplied along the river banks and further into the interior of Belize as the logwood, and later the mahogany trade developed, making Belize one of the major providers of these two valuable wood products for the British and European markets. Turtle and manatee harvested and dried on the cayes were staples in the early logwood and mahogany camps. Ambergris Caye, with its plentiful supply of these creatures, undoubtedly supported several turtle fishing camps.

The first firm evidence of a permanent British settlement on Ambergris Caye comes from the Archives of British Honduras of 3rd December 1828. In a Magistrates' Meeting of that date it was stated "on report that a party of Spanish troops from Bacalar had landed at Ambergrease key and committed outrages on British subjects resident there, the officer of Police with 20 soldiers was sent to release them."

## **THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF THE TOURISM INDUSTRY**

The tourism industry in Ambergris Caye had its rather unpretentious beginnings in the efforts of a Scotsman, Jim Currie, who brought the first tourists to the island in his boat Pamelayne in the late 1950s. Soon after, Jim Blake and an American partner established somewhat crude accommodations for visitors in the south of the island, which were destroyed by Hurricane Hattie in 1961.

In November of 1965, the Premier of Belize, George Price, inaugurated the first hotel on the island, the San Pedro Holiday Hotel, owned then and still run by the Grief family, who a few years later established the first commercial flights to and from San Pedro. Today, three companies serve Ambergris Caye, and Tropic Air, managed by John and Celi Grief's son offers services to all of Belize and neighbouring countries.

In 1967, Paradise Hotel followed Holiday Hotel, and shortly after a group of San Pedranos got together to form the third tourist establishment in San Pedro: the Coral Beach Hotel Limited. Tourist accommodations started mushrooming all over the place, as

several local entrepreneurs enthusiastically converted their homes into hotels or built small guest houses, all managed by single families who invited their guests to share their table. Visitors enjoyed this personalised atmosphere and family-style hotels became a landmark of San Pedro.

More and more fishermen began supplementing their incomes by serving as fishing and diving guides for tourists. Many San Pedranos gave up fishing as their main source of revenue and turned completely to guiding - a job that came naturally to them for it involved fishing, snorkeling and sailing. So, while fishing declined, the tourism industry prospered.

By 1970, the Coral Beach Hotel had established the first dive shop on the island. Victoria House was built, and the airstrip began getting a little more business. The tourist industry began to grow faster.

Today, Ambergris Caye hosts some 13 dive shops, many offering full equipment rental and the services of qualified dive masters and instructors. Three-day courses provide the novice diver with theoretical and practical lessons in a safe underwater environment.

Other attractions include glass-bottom boats, jet skiing, hydro sliding and para sailing. On the island itself, visitors can enjoy beachcombing, horseback riding, bird-watching, basking in the sun or riding one of the many electric carts which are the main means of transportation in the town.

Besides a number of Belizean hotels with five to 10 rooms, Ambergris Caye also operates larger establishments, both local and foreign-owned. The tiny part of the island that is developed for tourism comprises 51 hotels, which provide a total of more than 700 rooms. San Pedro Town is also dotted here and there with a variety of fine restaurants with international chefs. Gift shops and boutiques have also blossomed throughout the town, displaying a variety of Belizean and Central American souvenirs.

Widespread nightly entertainment and regular cultural happenings complete the picture of a quiet and charming little town.

At the southern tip of the caye, a recent and successful project has been the establishment of the Hol Chan Marine Reserve. Covering a part of the reef, a shallow area, a beach and a mangrove area, Hol Chan ('little channel' in Maya) was declared a national marine reserve in 1987, thereby protecting its abundant marine life and making it an important spawning ground. A popular spot to dive and snorkel, Hol Chan provides visitors with a memorable experience as they come into contact with a large variety of multi-coloured fish and sea creatures.

With the continued decline in fishing, tourism has become Ambergris Caye's economic pillar and the San Pedro Tourist Association has some 200 members. The islanders nevertheless try to keep San Pedro an enchanting and welcoming spot for visitors, while retaining its local charm and hospitality.

## **ISLAND CULTURE**

As an island of immigrants, Ambergris Caye has adopted a diversity of customs and ways of living. Constantly changing, the island has embraced several cultural traditions common to its evolving population.

One of the island's great artistic institutions was *La Banda de San Pedro*. Created in the 1920s, *La Banda* was the result of a long-standing musical tradition in San Pedro. Two Mexicans, Amatón and Toledo, were instrumental in the development of *La Banda*. *Serving* as musical directors, they were paid a stipend of about \$2 a month by members of the band, a revenue which they supplemented by giving private music lessons.

In 1928 *La Banda* won the National Concert Festival held at Loyola Park in Belize City, beating such well-established city bands as Colonial Band, Imperial Band, Eureka Band and L.E.C. Old-timers from *La Banda*, for whom the victory is still a matter of great pride, credit their success to their masterful rendition of the piece 'La Boheme'.

The delights of *La Banda's music* in the 1920s no doubt provided San Pedranos with a relieving counterpoint to the hardship and suffering of a life of cocal and chicle servitude.

One set of cultural events on the island which attracted nationwide attention were the *Mestizadas y Vaquerias*. These centered around various important annual occurrences such as the leavetaking of the chicleros (when the celebrations were sponsored by chicle contractors), the feast of San Pedro on the 29th June, the feast of El de Esquipulas on the 15th January or the Day of the Cross on the 3rd May.

The San Pedro Fiesta, celebrated in honour of the town's patron saint, is a religious and cultural festival which begins nine days before Saint Peter's Day. On each night during that time, novenas - so called because they run for nine nights - are offered for the town's patron. Then at 3 a.m. on the 29th the town siren and church bells, along with firecrackers, herald the morning, inviting all of the island's boys and men to the Catholic Church to attend a mass for men only. Meanwhile, the women prepare coffee and sweet bread to be offered after the mass to the men and whoever else wishes to take part in the celebrations. Everyone who attends the early breakfast socialise to the sound of mariachi music until the time comes for the sea procession.

The sea procession on Saint Peter's Day is a spectacular event. One boat carrying the church's statue of San Pedro leads the procession, followed by hundreds of skiffs and boats carrying fishermen and their families. The vessels draw alongside the fishing cooperative, where a priest blesses the fishing boats and prays for the protection of all who live off the sea. Then a land procession takes the statue of San Pedro back to the church and the festivities continue into the night. The 29th June celebrations culminate with another procession held late in the evening with prayers and singing, which every San Pedrano tries to attend.

Another important annual cultural event involves the Carnavales, which are held from the last Sunday before Lent until the day before Ash Wednesday. A local legend says that Don Juan Carnaval, a very wealthy man with several wives and children, once threw a three-day party prior to Ash Wednesday to compensate for the abstinence to be



maintained during the forthcoming 40 days of Lent. After his death, the village continued Don Juan Carnival's tradition, holding cultural dances every year.

San Pedro has celebrated carnival since the early settlement days of the village. Men, women and children dressed up and danced on the streets celebrating a variety of themes. Some of the dances that developed from the carnivals are: la Jarana, el Zapateado, el Torito, el Negrito, los Indios, los Arabes and las Estudiantinas. Men delighted in dressing up like women, bringing much humour and entertainment into the dances, called comparsas. Current events, such as a scandalous pregnancy or a theft, and criticisms of local and world leaders and politicians were also used as a source of inspiration for other dances. With the island's evolution and the appearance of a variety of new groups, San Pedranos incorporated new themes to the comparsas, such as: los Americanos, los Garifunas, los Hippias, los Cubanos and el Flamenco. Furthermore, each dance had its own theme song composed by one of the musical maestros of the island. Translated from Spanish, these songs typically will go something like this:

"We are the Chinese,  
From the gate of Shanghai  
We come from Asia,  
To dance in the Carnival  
We are the happy Cuibans,  
We come here to dance  
With the pretty San Pedranos,  
In the Carnival  
We are good bullfighters  
Of world-wide fame  
We have a very angry bull  
Now we are going to bullfight.

Paintings depicting different ethnic and cultural groups also gave way to mass painting on the streets during Carnival days. Water paints, lipsticks and other make-up are used in this game and everybody is at risk of having colour splashed on them when walking on the streets of San Pedro during this festival.

More recently, Garifuna Settlement Day, which commemorates the arrival of the Garifuna to Belize in the 19th century, is also celebrated. Following the examples of Dangriga, Punta Gorda and other places throughout the country, San Pedro hosts a re-enactment of the arrival of the Garifuna refugees on the 19th November each year. Garifuna dances and punta music fill the streets, and shows staged at the various hotels give Garifuna Settlement Day an air of festivity.

Independence Day, a patriotic and civic celebration held on the 21st September throughout Belize, also gives rise to festivities in San Pedro. At midnight on the eve of Independence Day, the Mayor traditionally salutes the flag and leads the gathering into the Independence cheer at a colourful yet solemn ceremony. Shows at Central Park, pageants, cultural dances and other performances come to commemorate the day Belize became independent on the 21st September, 1981.

Two annual festivals have been put up in more recent years, mostly prompted by the development of tourism but bound to become popular traditional events. A Seafood Festival is held around Thanksgiving in November. Sponsored by the local tourism association, this fair gives local businesses the opportunity to advertise and sell their products and services, attracting many tourists and San Pedranos who long to sample the island's seafood delights.

In the summertime, the local chapter of the Chamber of Commerce organises the Sea and Air Festival, adding an international cultural flavour to the usual advertising, food, drinks and giveaways. The festival lasts five days, each of which is hosted by a different country, such as Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and of course, Belize. The showgrounds host music, folklore dances, food, pageants, speeches and typical drinks from the various countries. Belize closes the festivities with a colourful evening parade, which includes a grand marshall and floats. A diversity of contests, games, competitions and prizes completes the celebration.

Apart from these regular celebrations, cultural life in San Pedro is expressed by other artistic manifestations. The island has several art galleries which promote the work of local and national artists.

Finally, another fundamental element of Ambergris Caye's culture is food. San Pedranos have inherited from their Mestizo ancestors a liking for dishes such as tortillas and beans, chilimole, mole, escabeche, relleno and tamalitos. With the growth of tourism and the introduction of television, the islanders now also look forward to their Thanksgiving turkey and enjoy Chinese, Italian and American cuisine at the town's restaurants.

## **PARADISE WITH A FUTURE**

Ambergris Caye has a past full of contrasts. The Maya who settled throughout the island and developed an economy based on trading and exploitation of the marine resources had practically nothing in common with the pirates who succeeded them, or with the British agriculturists who marshalled their slaves in a futile attempt to convert the island into a cotton plantation. And, of course, all these were distinct from the Mestizo refugees who fled the war in Yucatan for the tranquility of the caye.

Conditions in the island have also differed greatly from time to time. The way of life of the first permanent residents of San Pedro was quiet and unpressured. The villagers fished, farmed their milpas and tended their chicken and livestock with almost no outside interference. They had brought with them their Yucatecan culture and customs, their diet of beans and tortillas, their simple homes of thatched roofs and walls plastered with white lime and mud.

Then the unexpected advent of the Blake Dynasty radically changed the life of the San Pedranos. Overnight they found themselves without any legal rights to remain on the land they had lived on and farmed for several decades. From independent small fishermen and farmers they became wage labourers working for a triumvirate of ruling families in a succession of new industries - logwood, chicle, coconut - their lives transformed into a grinding monotony, guided only by their employers' need to accumulate more wealth.

This was a time when ownership of almost the whole island was concentrated in the hands of a few people. Virtually any person on the island could be ordered to vacate, for the flimsiest of reasons and at a day's notice, the house in which he or she had been born, raised and lived all their life. This was the case of the local midwife, Desideria, who was ordered to dismantle her home because its rustic condition detracted from the elegance of the Casino which was being built on the lot next door.

Those were the days when a desperate bachelor such as Natividad Guerrero could get a bride from the transient Maya settlements at Basil Jones in exchange for a box of groceries from Belize City.

Life is no longer this way on the island, of course. The absolute power which the Blakes exercised over almost every facet of the villagers' lives has long gone. The erosion of this hegemony began in 1943, when the Colonial Government initiated the forerunner of the present day village council by appointing a small group of villagers to make recommendations on plans and projects for the caye. In the 1960s, it continued with the acquisition and redistribution by the government of large portions of the village to San Pedranos. Finally, it culminated with the growth of the fishing and tourism industries which allowed the villagers to break the Blakes' economic stronghold.

The growth of the fishing co-op had a profound effect on life in Ambergris Caye. The establishment of the co-op's headquarters and processing plant on the island kept the maximum amount of money circulating in the community and therefore significantly contributed to the overall increase in the villagers' standard of living. San Pedro, which was abandoned by several residents during the 1940s as a result of the economic depression which followed the devastation of the 1931 hurricane and the decline in the coconut industry, was by the mid-1980s one of the most economically affluent communities in Belize.

Today the island's prosperity is dependent on tourism. Innumerable job opportunities created by tourism and related activities have attracted people from throughout Belize and new immigrants from Central America mix with the island population. Although

official figures reflect a population of about 1,200, it can be estimated that close to 4,000 people reside on the island, half of whom are new arrivals.

San Pedro's education system includes two primary schools, a private school, three pre-schools and a high school established in its own new building. At the latter, training for the tourism industry is offered, as well as ample preparation for higher studies. San pedranos can also receive medical care at the recently established clinic.

In line with world trends in communications San Pedro now boasts a T.V. station, cable network with 22 channels, fax machines and a telephone exchange system linked by satellite. A new desalination water system has been installed and will soon be followed by a second one. The island is extending a complete water and sewerage service, which will reach the new areas of San Pablo and San Pedrito.

Tourist accommodation is provided by over 50 hotels, ranging from small pensions to luxury resorts which can double the island's population during the high season. With the only hyperbaric recompression chamber in Belize, Ambergris Caye keeps up its reputation for being a diver's paradise.

What used to be a simple airstrip located at the south end of the town has grown to a small yet busy airport surrounded by houses and tourist establishments. Frequent flights from three airline companies link the island to various destinations in Belize, Guatemala and Mexico. The government has recognised the urgent need for a new airport outside the inhabited areas and plans are under way for its relocation. The island is also accessible by sea by the many boats which provide regular ferry or special taxi services to and from Belize City, a ride of about one hour through the numerous neighbouring cayes.

One of Ambergris Caye's most pressing concerns is the availability of lots for houses. Real estate has been subject to high speculation and prices for lots have become unaffordable for most Belizeans. Foreign ownership has helped to complicate the problem, making it difficult to obtain good lots for the future expansion of the town and to accommodate its growing population of 800 young people. In an effort to find solutions, the Town Board has set up a development project known as San Pablo. Some

200 lots have already been issued and sold at affordable prices and some 600 more are available for distribution and sale. An additional 250 lots will be distributed, mostly to young people whose needs are immediate, through a reclamation project spearheaded by the government.

With the continued development of the tourism industry, San Pedro and Ambergris Caye must carefully chart the course of its development. Close attention must be paid to the protection of the environment: the land and beaches, the sea and the reef, as well as the air. Ecology is threatened and it is urgent that San Pedranos develop an increased appreciation of the island's fragile environment and learn to respect and protect it in their daily lives. The passing of laws and development of conservation measures is also necessary. One step in the right direction is the creation of the Hol Chan Marine Reserve. Following its success, Ambergris is considering other reef reserves, beach reserves - as in the case of turtle nesting grounds - and bird sanctuaries. The reef and its underwater beauty must not be taken for granted. Development and sea dredging can result in damage to the reef. Moreover, the water table on the caye flows out into the sea so that waste water and sewage disposal must also be considered carefully.

Ironically, it is the very vehicles of emancipation, the development of the fishing and tourism industries, which pose the most serious threats to the island's future. The caye's fragile ecology is threatened by massive and uncontrolled expansion; the resources of the sea are being rapidly exhausted; the village's sense of community and cultural identity has been altered.

Paradoxically, it is by turning back to their past that San Pedranos can find solutions to their problems in the future. Today, as tourism takes an ever increasing share of the caye's economic and human resources, as the villagers are submitted to increasing bombardment by foreign values, ideas, and influence, it is important that San Pedranos have a strong sense of their history, their identity and self-worth. A people cannot choose the circumstances in which they make their history, but they can become conscious of themselves and their past, and from that font they can attempt to draw this confidence, discipline and ideas to deal with their potential problems in the future.



In the past, San Pedranos have proved that they are resilient, resourceful and courageous. The problems and challenges that they face in the future are no worse than the problems they faced and partly overcame in the past. Given a continuing commitment on their part to finding workable solutions to their problems and a continuing belief in their own dignity and value, there is no reason why they should not succeed and no reason why the island should not remain, for many years to come, a paradise with a future equal in richness to its past.

## Weather and Climate



### **WARM TEMPERATURES, WINDS AND HURRICANES**

**Aerial View of San Pedro Town, 1999. Courtesy Sal Mazzullo** Like most of northern Belize, Ambergris Caye has a long dry season which usually extends from March through May.

These months bring steady, often quite strong, southeast winds. The rest of the year, most of a yearly average of 50 inches of rain can be expected. During this period, winds are mainly easterly, but subject to occasional shifts. Mornings, for example, will often bring a light breeze blowing from the northwest, making it an excellent time to dive the deep eastern side of the reef; by noon, however, the breeze may stiffen and haul around to the east.

One significant feature are the Nortes or 'Northerners', violent winter storms which blow in between October and February and pelt the island with several days of rain, winds and rough seas.

Then there is the hurricane season. Despite its name, this period is usually characterized by balmy and delightful weather, although a tropical terror may strike now and then. The most devastating hurricane to hit the island occurred in 1942. It destroyed many homes and the sea crossed the island. Other lesser storms have caused beach erosion and ruined coconut plantations, but never has a single life been lost in a hurricane on Ambergris Caye. Although temperatures are for the most part quite warm - ranging from 89 to 94 degrees Fahrenheit during the summer months and from 70 to 85 during winter - the heat is usually tempered by the sea breeze and the weather remains quite comfortable.

The overall climate of Belize can be described as sub-tropical. The humidity while high, is seldom oppressive for long and is most noticeable along the coast. The mean annual humidity is 83%, but many days the humidity is masked by the cooling sea breezes. The Belize coastal area is exposed to southeast tradewinds averaging 10-13 knots and attain an uncanny consistency during the month of July.

Temperatures in Belize range from 50°F to 95°F with an annual mean of 79°F. November to January are traditionally the coolest months with a 75°F average and May to September are the warmest at about a 81°F average. Location is a big factor for temperature as Cayo to the west can be several degrees colder than along the coast and during November at night, temperatures can fall to a beautiful 46°F in Cayo. In the mountains, the coldest days and nights might seem relatively very cold and blankets will definitely be needed at night. However, the mean annual temperatures on in the mountains is a perfectly comfortable 72°F.



Figure 3

**Wet and Dry Season's**

There are definite wet and dry seasons. The onset of the "dry" varies widely from year to year, but once the onset of the dry commences, the actual amount of rain falling during the "dry" is a predictable amount. This is not necessarily so for the remainder of the year though. As a general rule though, the higher the average rainfall, the greater are the departures from the norm. For example, rainfall in Punta Gorda to the south in September maybe 12 inches one year and 36 inches the following.

The number of rainy days varies considerable from place to place. The Cayo District has an average of 125 rainy days per year; Belize District averages about 171 rainy days, the Stann Creek District 183 days per year while in Punta Gorda they often have over 200 days of rain every year. Many of these rainy days are insignificant though, with early morning showers (called "night rain" by the locals" blossoming beautiful rainbows. These "night rains" are caused by cool air moving down from the mountains which cools the air along the cost causing a light rain.

Belize weather may not be a cure all but it's the next best thing. Luxuriate on some of the world's most pristine beaches while Belize weather provides your rejuvenation. The Belize climate, and Belize annual rainfall gives you and nature the best of all worlds.

Mean temperatures range from an average daily minimum in January of 67.1F (19.5C), to an average daily maximum in May of 89.2F (31.8C). The mean daily maximum in January is 81.7F (27.6C). You can readily see that there is not a huge fluctuation in temperature, and that the January minimum is affected by lower lows inland. The mean minimums are higher on the coast, meaning even smaller fluctuations than would appear at first glance. Does this picture look like the rainy season has much impact. Look at the fantastically beautiful surf crashing over the barrier reef about 1/3 of a mile away.

Belize's annual rainfall can go from a mean number of rain days from as low as 3.9 in April, to a high of 16.3 in July. The number is higher in the south, where annual Belize rainfall is up to 170 inches, and lower in the north where Belize annual rainfall is 60 inches. Does this picture look like the rainy season has much impact. Look at the fantastically beautiful surf crashing over the barrier reef about 1/3 of a mile away.

Belize annual rainfall isn't as heavy as it sounds, and of course the number of rain days sounds worse than it is, because the rain comes in two ways. Usually there are early morning showers called "night rain", followed by lots of sun, and thunderstorms during the rainy season, which can dump a lot of moisture, but move on very quickly. Usually these are accompanied by fantastic cooling breezes off the Caribbean.

This picture is of a lagoon residential area in San Pedro, on Ambergris Caye during the rainy season. Apparently the rainy season isn't all that rainy.

What this means of course, there is no shortage of sunshine and beautiful temperatures to seduce you all to visit, move, and/or retire to beautiful Belize.

Belize climate is sub tropical, similar to the Florida Keys, without all the hurricanes. Belize certainly has experienced hurricanes, and will continue to experience them in the future, but the number compared to Florida is much, much lower. Interestingly, no one has ever lost their life to a hurricane on Ambergris caye.

For some reason, most hurricanes seem to veer either south or north, just east of Belize. We hear all about the problems caused in Florida by hurricanes, but what's interesting is, that the most frequent occurrences and the most damage happens in the Carolinas. This fact doesn't seem to be widely known.

However, during July the hottest month, with highs in the high 80's F (low 30's C), we have trade winds, averaging 12-15mph (19-25km's), which provide a wonderful cooling effect and reduce the feeling of humidity.

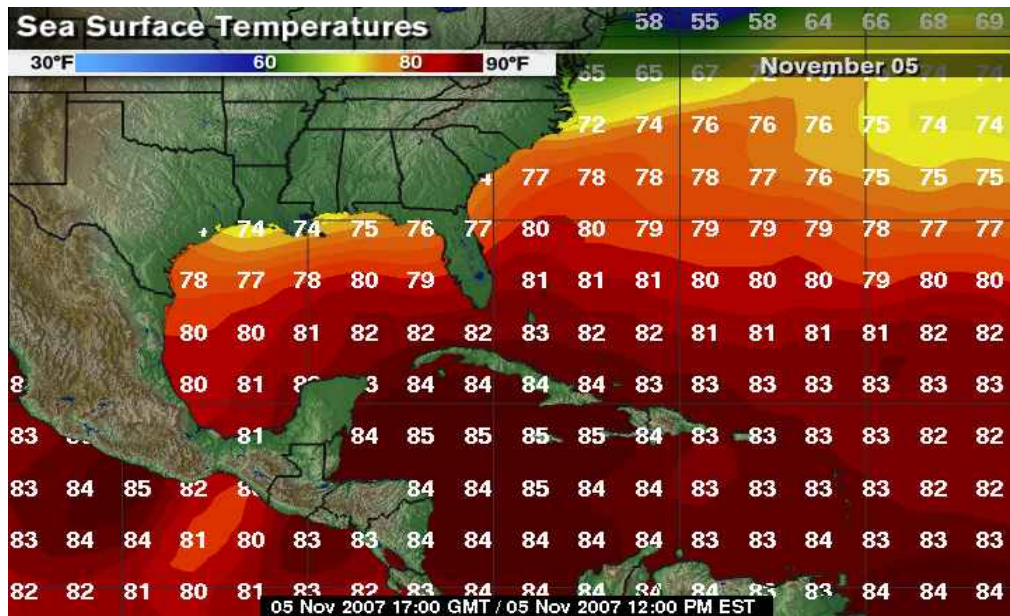


Figure 4 - Average sea temperatures for November 5th 2007

**Diving Information for Ambergris Caye, Belize,**  
**Central America**



## ***General Diving Information for Belize***

### **CONSERVATION**

A well-known British politician once said, "We have not inherited the sea from our parents, we have borrowed it from our children."

Our very existence, the future of life as we know it, rests on the successful conservation of the sea and its creatures. The sea cannot continue to dilute pollution forever, so we must not add to this problem by thoughtless behavior. In the same way, the coral reef cannot stand a constant barrage of damage from anchors and divers forever.

Few appreciate the sea and its life as much as divers, and it is our responsibility to minimize any impact divers' excursions may have. Below are a few simple guidelines to help prevent damage to the marine environment:

- Do not throw any non-biodegradables into the ocean.
- If you see trash on the sea floor, bring it up.
- Anchor only on sandy patches to avoid breaking coral which has taken hundreds of years to grow.
- Practice good neutral buoyancy to keep from banging into the reef and thus inadvertently causing damage to coral.
- Secure any dangling straps and be conscious of where your fins are.
- If your neutral buoyancy skills are weak, take a refresher before diving the reef.
- Divers without gloves will be less inclined to touch marine life. Set a good example for other divers and leave your dive gloves in your equipment bag.
- Divers should not remove any living creature from the sea including shells, shellfish, fish and coral.
- Do not buy jewelry or souvenirs made from turtle shells. It is illegal to bring them into the United States.



## **DIVE FLAGS**

When divers are actively diving from a boat, a dive flag should be raised. A rigid flag or one held open by a stiff wire is preferred to a cloth flag which can only be viewed on a windy day. Two patterns of dive flag will be seen in Belize. The most common is the red and white flag used in the United States. Occasionally the international blue and white "A" flag will also be seen. Both flags have the same meaning: "I have divers down. Keep well clear at slow speed."

A typical two-day offshore trip would have a program something like this:

### Day One

- 6:30 A.M. Depart San Pedro
- 9:00 A.M. Dive northern Turneffe Islands
- 12:30P.M. Dive Long Caye, Lighthouse Reef
- 3:00 P.M. Dive Half Moon Caye Lighthouse Reef
- Night On Half Moon Caye with a bar-b-que and visit to the bird sanctuary.

### Day Two

- 7:00 A.M. Depart Half Moon Caye
- 9:00 A.M. Dive the Great Blue Hole
- 3:00 P.M. Dive northern Turneffe Islands  
(different site)
- 4:30 P.M. Arrive San Pedro

## **TIDES, WAVES AND WIND**

Diving is generally conducted without any reference to the tide as the average range is only about 1 to 1-1/2 feet (31- 46 cm). When the north winds really blow, this can be in

excess of 2 feet (62 cm). Of course, hurricanes and other tropical storms can cause tidal extremes. Currents are usually negligible.

The wind is mostly steady from the northeast at 5 to 15 knots, except in the south where southeast winds are frequent. The northeast winds generate large Caribbean swells which can make diving difficult on exposed shores.

While wave action inside the reef or on the sheltered side of atolls is minimal, divers must still be cautious of the surge when close to the reef and near the surface.

The sea breaking over the reef crest allows the skipper of a boat to see the extent of the reef. On those occasions when the sea is flat calm, an additional hazard is present for small boats as the edge of the reef becomes hard to define.

## **TOPOGRAPHY**

Blue holes, as they are known throughout the Caribbean, are common in several countries, but the largest one of all is right in the center of Lighthouse Reef and is known as The Great Blue Hole. Formed in the limestone substrata, they are officially called "karst-eroded sinkholes" and were created prior to the melting which ended the Great Ice Age, when sea levels were much lower than today. Caves, caverns, tunnels, stalactites and stalagmites are common along the entire Belize shelf.

*Explanations for some of the more common topography are listed below*

**Caye:** A caye is an island of sand and/or mangrove which is a permanent feature above the surface, but is not a reef crest.

**Coral:** The conditions for coral growth and the long term development of the reef are considered near perfect in Belize. Clear water, sunlight, water temperature, a firm substrate, salinity levels and the constant circulation of well-oxygenated water all play a vital role in the process.

While the corals are typical of the Caribbean they tend to be especially well developed. There are many varieties of corals, but the major reef-building ones are the massive

forms of brain coral; various types of finger coral; two well-known branching corals, elkhorn and staghorn; and sheet coral.

**Cut:** A navigable gap between two reef crests.

**Patch Reef:** These are small clumps of coral heads on a shallow sandy bottom. They are particularly common inside Glover's and Lighthouse Reefs and at the southern end of the barrier reef. In most cases they are too shallow for scuba diving, but are excellent places to snorkel.

**Reef Crest:** Underwater the barrier reef or any of the atoll reefs are a single entity, although at the surface they appear broken. That part of the reef which reaches the surface is the reef crest and each of these has an individual name, often adopted from the nearest caye.

**Reef Wall:** Both the barrier reefs and the atoll reefs fall away vertically into the abyss. This reef wall or drop-off is most dramatic when it faces east.

## **VISIBILITY**

Many of the natural circumstances which contrive to reduce underwater visibility do not exist in Belize. It is because the reef is between 8 to 16 miles (13-26 km) offshore (except at Ambergris Caye) that it is not affected by river outflow and rainfall washing off the land. In addition, the strong currents created by large tidal ranges are non-existent in the Caribbean. With very few exceptions, such as diving close to mangroves, the underwater visibility is always at its maximum for anywhere in the world- 165 feet (50 m). Beyond this distance the water is simply blue. The effects of storms elsewhere in the Caribbean can, however, reduce the visibility to between 65 feet (20 m) and 100 feet (30 m).

## **WATER TEMPERATURE**

The water temperature is fairly constant throughout the year and is generally in the mid to high 70's F (23-26 C), but can reach the low 80's F (26-28 C). A lightweight lycra body suit, more for protection from coral abrasions than for warmth, is a good solution. For those needing more thermal protection a 1/16th inch (4 mm) suit should be adequate.

## Dive Sites of Ambergris Caye

- 1) Mexico Rocks
- 2) Buena Vista
- 3) Tres Coco's
- 4) Boca Del Rio
- 5) Mayan Princess
- 6) Tacklebox Canyon
- 7) Esmerelda
- 8) Tuffy Canyon
- 9) Dardenelo's Canyon
- 10) Victoria Canyon
- 11) Victoria Cavern
- 12) Cypress Tunnel
- 13) Cypress Garden
- 14) Boca Ciega
- 15) Pillar Coral
- 16) Eagle Ray Alley
- 17) Hol Chan Marine Reserve Park
- 18) Shark and Eagle Ray Alley
- 19) Amigo's Wreck

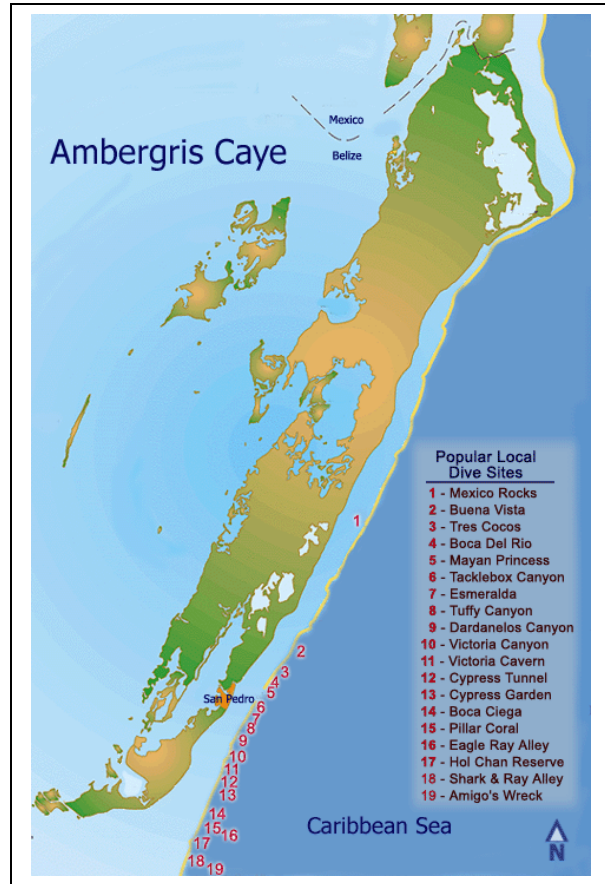


Figure 5





is easy to mix diving and snorkeling. Trips usually run once in the morning and again in the afternoon.

The popularity of Hol Chan Marine Reserve and Shark Ray Alley are due to the close proximity of San Pedro, the large amount of fish life found with the Hol Chan "cut" accessible by snorkelers and beginning divers, the diversity of marine life encountered throughout the 4 zones of the park and the excitement and novelty of swimming with large numbers of nurse sharks and sting rays.

The break in the reef called Hol Chan, ranges from about 20 to 35 feet deep. This area was recently made into a national park under the auspices of the Belizean Government and the New York Zoological Society (Dr. Jacques Carter, was instrumental as representative for the NYZ). Since establishment of the sanctuary, the return of all species of fish has been quite dramatic. This break was probably was formed by erosion during the last low sea level stand (while sea level was much lower and the reef was exposed as dry land). This pass returns much of the sea water that comes across the reef as waves, back to the sea. Even when wind generated surface currents are moving inward through this break in the reef, a few inches to a few feet down there is normally a strong current toward the seaward side of the reef. The small blue hole in the Hol Chan Park (just off the beach at the Marco Gonzales site area), is a collapsed solutioned vertical fracture, called a joint. Carbonate sand and mud washed into this depression falls down this cave system leaving very little sediment around it. The entrance to the cave is a favourite spot for numerous fish that are fascinating to watch. The water depth down to the cave is about 12 feet, making it relatively easy to snorkel, but with SCUBA equipment a most enjoyable hour to hour and a half can be spent. Larger fish are seen in this cave, including jewfish and grouper. The edges of the joint are sparsely encrusted with living coral.

Strong outgoing currents at times, can be found in the various channels. At Hol Chan, because it is such a narrow deep channel, tremendous volumes of water are tunneled from the outer reef lagoon through it on outgoing tides. This hydraulic effect can produce strong currents and snorkelers and divers should pay attention to these currents. Under

the cave overhangs in Hol Chan, divers should look out for the very pretty Royal oF Fairy Basslets (these are 2 to 3" long, purple and yellow fish - Gramma loretto). Hol Chan is also the habitat of a large moray eel population. With 5 different morays, the Green Moray (Gymnothorax funebris ) is the largest, up to 6 ft long. note: OBSERVE BUT DO NOT PROVOKE, THEIR BITE IS A NASTY ONE



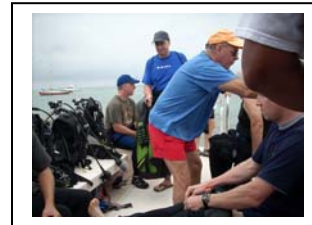
## Boat Diving



**Our Newest Blue Hole 52ft Dive Boat**  
The Largest, Most Comfortable and Spacious in San Pedro  
Come Join Us!  
Call Now: (501)226-3415 or 3222



**Blue Hole / Lighthouse Reef Atoll Trip**  
Come and dive the world famous Blue Hole. The limestone stalactites and stalagmites are some of the largest in the world, and of course the thrill of seeing Reef and Bull Sharks. Your second dive is at "Half Moon Caye Wall". The highlight of this dive is the sheer vertical wall, variety of sponges, sea fans and amazing marine life. Following the second dive you will visit the island of Half Moon Caye for lunch break. There will be plenty of time for a short walk over to the Red-Footed Booby Bird sanctuary established by the Audubon Society that carries a pack fee of US\$40.00 P/P. The third dive is at Long Caye it is a spectacular wall dive, "The Aquarium". The crystal-clear, blue water has an abundance of colorful coral and marine life such as Angel Fish, Reef Sharks, Dolphins and of course, Belize's friendly "turtles".  
This tour Departs at 6 am & Returns at 5 pm.  
(Includes continental breakfast, lunch, snacks, sodas, rum punch on your return).  
Rate is US\$185.00 per Diver/  
US\$125.00 per Snorkeler.  
1-800-641-2994  
Fax: (501) 226-3882 E-mail: aquadives@bd.net  
Our Dive Shop Open Daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.



## Boat Diving Procedures

Procedures will vary from boat to boat, and between dive operators and concessions. In general, you will need your own equipment but here are a few pointers as reference:

- \* Not all boats supply air cylinders (including Nitrox)
- \* Weights
- \* Most diving is done "self guided" once in the water and on the marked underwater trail.
- \* The dive supervisor is on the boat, you do not usually dive with a Divemaster (but this also varies from Dive Operation to Dive Operation)
- \* Briefings explain the terrain and conditions, you and your dive buddy dive based on your abilities.

**BWRAF: “Begin With Friend And Review”**

- \* **BCD** – Check adjustment, operation, low pressure connection and tank band is firm
- \* **Weights** – Check for proper weighting and the release is clear for ditching
- \* **Releases** – Make sure you’re familiar with your “buddy’s” releases
- \* **Air** – Confirm you both have ample air for your dive, Valves are open and “Octopuses” work
- \* **Final Check** – Give each other a final inspection before entering the water

\* Entry is made using the "giant stride". It is important when surfacing to give the boat the "OK" sign, since the dive supervisor is watching many divers.

\* Should you experience any form of problem, wave for help.

\* Be considerate while on the boat and “gearing up”

\* Work in and out of your gear-bag

\* ALWAYS make sure your tank/cylinder is SECURED

\* Some boats may provide food and beverages, if not then be prepared and avoid dehydration

\* Some include airfills, and others will charge for airfills.

\* It is customary to tip the crew at the end of a trip

Should you become sea sick, it is best to be sick over the side of the boat

\*\* A well recommended anti-nausea non prescription medicine is “Triptone” and your local dive store can provide this for under \$10 US.\*\*

# Marine Life

## Species Report For:

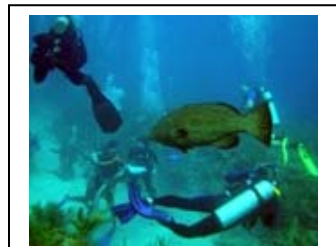
### Ambergris Cay to Cay Caulker Hol Chan Marine Park

CODE	SITE	-----SURVEYS-----				BOTTOM TIME (H:M)
		EXPERT		NOVICE		
		SA	SO	SA	SO	
55010002	Hol Chan Marine Park	0	0	6	0	5:08
TOTALS		0	0	6	0	5:08

NOTE: SA = Species & Abundance surveys / SO = Species Only surveys

RANK	SP#	COMMON NAME	TOTAL		EXP		NOV	
			SF%	DEN	SF%	DEN	SF%	DEN
1	97	Nassau Grouper	83%	1.2			83%	1.2
2	52	Sergeant Major	67%	3.5			67%	3.5
3	170	Southern Stingray	67%	2.5			67%	2.5
4	203	Squirreelfish	50%	3.3			50%	3.3
5	197	Yellowtail Snapper	50%	3.0			50%	3.0
6	3	French Angelfish	50%	2.3			50%	2.3
7	31	Foureye Butterflyfish	50%	2.0			50%	2.0
8	63	Green Moray	50%	2.0			50%	2.0
9	130	Hogfish	50%	1.7			50%	1.7
10	91	Black Grouper	50%	1.3			50%	1.3
11	117	White Grunt	33%	4.0			33%	4.0
12	135	Crevalle Jack	33%	3.5			33%	3.5
13	10	Fairy Basslet	33%	3.0			33%	3.0
14	39	Flamefish	33%	3.0			33%	3.0
15	105	Bluestriped Grunt	33%	3.0			33%	3.0
16	151	Rainbow Parrotfish	33%	3.0			33%	3.0
17	34	Spotfin Butterflyfish	33%	2.0			33%	2.0
18	199	Dusky Squirreelfish	33%	2.0			33%	2.0
19	202	Reef Squirreelfish	33%	2.0			33%	2.0
20	396	Channel Flounder	33%	2.0			33%	2.0
21	171	Spotted Eagle Ray	33%	1.5			33%	1.5
22	207	Black Durgon	33%	1.5			33%	1.5
23	186	Blacktip Shark	33%	1.0			33%	1.0
24	77	Yellow Goatfish	17%	4.0			17%	4.0
25	42	Blue Chromis	17%	3.0			17%	3.0
26	133	Bar Jack	17%	3.0			17%	3.0
27	144	Blue Parrotfish	17%	3.0			17%	3.0
28	149	Princess Parrotfish	17%	3.0			17%	3.0
29	152	Redband Parrotfish	17%	3.0			17%	3.0
30	155	Stoplight Parrotfish	17%	3.0			17%	3.0

31	156	Striped Parrotfish	17%	3.0	17%	3.0
32	453	Black Jack	17%	3.0	17%	3.0
33	6	Rock Beauty	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
34	48	Bicolor Damselfish	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
35	51	Longfin Damselfish	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
36	54	Yellowtail Damselfish	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
37	61	Chain Moray	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
38	111	Porkfish	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
39	131	Spanish Hogfish	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
40	148	Midnight Parrotfish	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
41	160	Saucereye Porgy	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
42	205	Doctorfish	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
43	220	Yellowhead Wrasse	17%	2.0	17%	2.0
44	5	Queen Angelfish	17%	1.0	17%	1.0
45	59	Spotted Drum	17%	1.0	17%	1.0
46	66	Spotted Moray	17%	1.0	17%	1.0
47	69	Orangespotted Filefish	17%	1.0	17%	1.0
48	75	Peacock Flounder	17%	1.0	17%	1.0
49	93	Coney	17%	1.0	17%	1.0
50	194	Mahogany Snapper	17%	1.0	17%	1.0
51	523	Whitefin Sharksucker	17%	1.0	17%	1.0
Total Species:			51	0	51	



## **Dive Day Example at Hol Chan Marine Reserve Park**

### **Dive Information**

- Dive No: 25
- Date: 10 / 15 / 07
- Dive Buddy: Price Watkins
- Location: Ambergris Caye, Belize, CA
- Dive Site: Hol Chan Marine Reserve Park
- Mode of transport to site: Boat
- Time In: 14:34
- Time Out: 15:34
- BAR Start: 3000
- BAR End: 500
- Exposure Protection: Shorty 3mm / Boots
- Weights: 14lbs
- Water Type: Salt
- Bottom Temp: 84°C
- Visibility: 25-35ft

### **Dive Notes:**

Things we saw:

- Eagle Rays (such an amazing sight)
- Moray Eels between 3ft and 5ft in length (scary ish)
- Nursing Sharks (between 3.5ft and 4.5ft in length – graceful)
- So many Fish species to see, such vibrant colors and variety
- “Mr Grouper” was there again.....think Carlos (DM) pays him appearance money

### **Equipment Used:**

- BCD: Halcyon Eclipse Wing w/alu backplate
- 1<sup>st</sup> Stage: Scubapro MK25
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Stage: Scubapro S600
- Octopus: Subapro 295
- Tank: Alu
- Computer: Suunto D6
- Pressure gauge: Halcyon
- Fins: Scubapro Twin Jet Max
- Mask: Halcyon



## DIVING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES

A diving accident victim could be any person who has been breathing air underwater regardless of depth. It is essential that emergency procedures are pre-planned and that medical treatment is initiated as soon as possible. It is the responsibility of each Dive Operator to develop procedures for diving emergencies including evacuation and medical treatment for each dive location.

### GENERAL PROCEDURES

Depending on the nature of the diving accident, stabilize the patient, administer 100% oxygen, contact local Emergency Medical System (EMS) for transport to medical facility, and contact the diving accident coordinator, as appropriate. Explain the circumstances of the dive incident to the evacuation teams, medics and physicians. Do not assume that they understand why 100% oxygen may be required for the diving accident victim or that recompression treatment may be necessary.

Make appropriate contact with victim, or rescue as required.

- Establish (A)irway, (B)reathing, (C)irculation as required (D)efibrillator (AED)
- (DAN – Divers Alert Network) Administer 100% oxygen as per Trained O2 Provider training
- Contact local Emergency Medical System (EMS) for transport
- Notify Belize Coastguard VHF Channel 16 or 2182khz
- Contact DAN @ 00 1 919 684 4326 (Collect)
- Notify Diving Safety Officer or his / her designee
- Complete and submit Diving Injury / Incident Report.

### PLANNING FOR EMERGENCIES:

- Know the nearest phone location at each shore site (a cell phone is recommended if a public phone is not near the dive site). Make sure public phones work and that cell phones have reception.

- Have a VHF / Cell Phone radio on board for boat diving, and make sure it works before leaving.
- Have an oxygen system and first aid kit on site, and personnel trained to use them.
- Have a "beach master" or boat tender present whenever possible.
- \* Activate EMS / Hyperbaric Chamber on standby \*

## Important Emergency Information

### Divers Alert Network (DAN)

Tel: 00 + 1 919 684 8111

Tel: 00 + 1 919 684 4326 (Collect)

### Hyperbaric Recompression Chamber

SSS Network, Belize  
Subaquatics of Belize

Tel: (501)-226-2851



### Belize Emergency Response Team

Air Ambulance (Plane and Helicopter)  
24 hrs / 7 Days a week / 365 Days a week

Tel: (501) - 223 - 3292

Fax: (501) - 223 - 0549

#### Address:

PO Box 1370  
1675 Sunrise Avenue,  
Coral Grove Area,  
Belize City, Belize  
Central America



National Coordinator: Yvette Burks Tel: (501)-610-3890

### **Ambulance Service**

Bert (Belize Emergency Response Team) is dedicated to providing fast, professional emergency care to anyone in a medical emergency situation, in the areas served. Fully trained and licensed Emergency Medical Technicians (*EMT*) determine careful analysis of the situation, apply immediate emergency pre-hospital care stabilizing the patient/s and then transfer safely to a medical facility in well attended Ambulances and Aircrafts.

Transport services to medical facilities outside the country is also available to patients at a minimal cost, this service includes the same professional care and equipment.

### **Air Evacuation/Donation Flights**

In emergency situations requiring transportation to a distant medical facility, an Aircraft, EMTs and pilots are available, and guarantee a take off within 15 minutes. B.E.R.T Aircraft are equipped with stretchers, oxygen, and medical supplies and an EMT. One family member may accompany a flight. In addition to domestic flights, the B.E.R.T aircraft can safely transport to neighboring-country hospitals and medical facilities. Upon request B.E.R.T will arrange medical air evacuation through outside services.

### **Scheduling Donation Flights.**

Donation Flights are available to all Belize residents and visitors. If your flight is not being scheduled by the Ministry of Health (MOH), contact the BERT headquarters in Belize City. CALL 90 FOR ANY EMERGENCY. The BERT staff will need to know the condition of the patient and any special medical equipment to be used during the flight.

Ground arrangements for getting the patient to the departure airport and from the arrival airport are the responsibility of the patient, or the MOH, if they schedule flight. At certain destinations, a BERT ambulance may be available for delivery of the patient.

### **The Cost Of Donation Flights.**

BERT/WOH asks only for actual costs of operation. These flights are donated to the people of Belize, using volunteer personnel. The Ministry of Health (MOH) will pay for operational costs on flights that are scheduled by a doctor under the MOH or other representative of MOH. If privately requested, the patient is asked for a donation to cover only the operational costs. However, all requested emergency flights are made, to the best of ability, regardless of payment or non-payment.

### **Important Operating Rules**

It is imperative that the flight schedule is maintained in order to maximize the time the aircraft is available for other emergencies. Arrangements should be made so that the aircraft waiting time at the arriving airport does not exceed 20 minutes domestically or 60 minutes internationally. One family member may accompany the patient. The patient, the family member and the EMT or medical attendant is each limited to one travel bag weighing no more than 7 kg. All passports and other travel documents must be up to date and in complete order for any international flight.

**EMERGENCY DIAL 90**

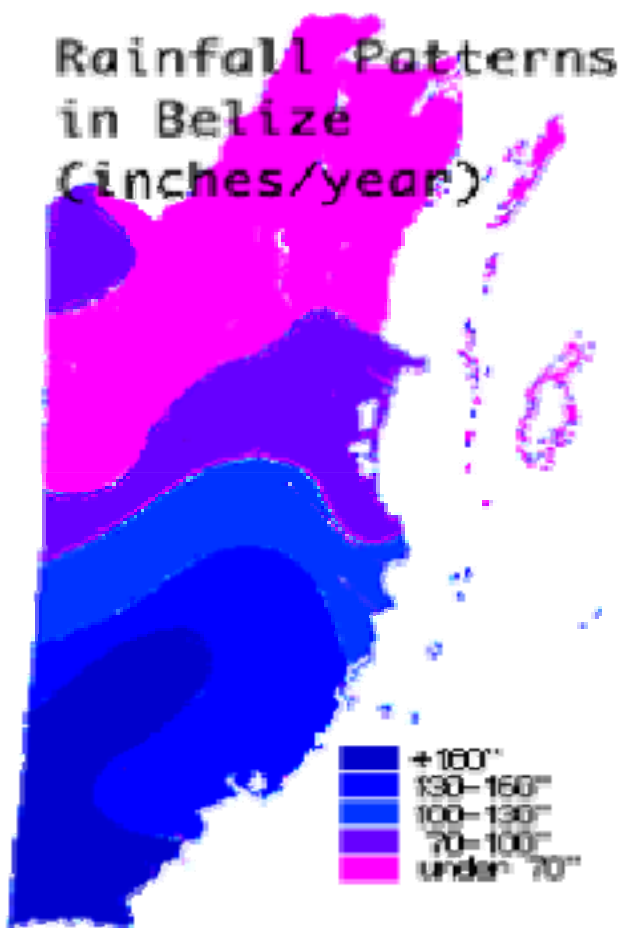
## **Appendix**



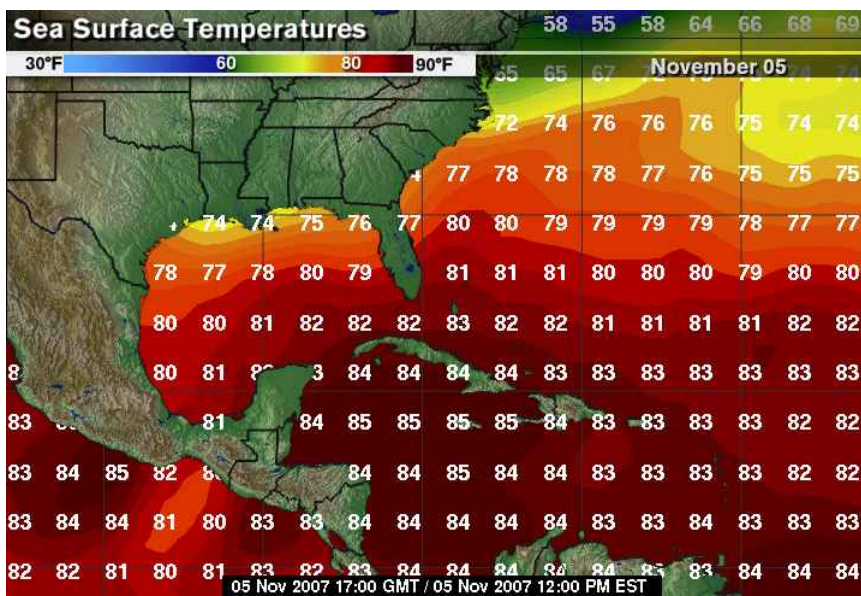
**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**

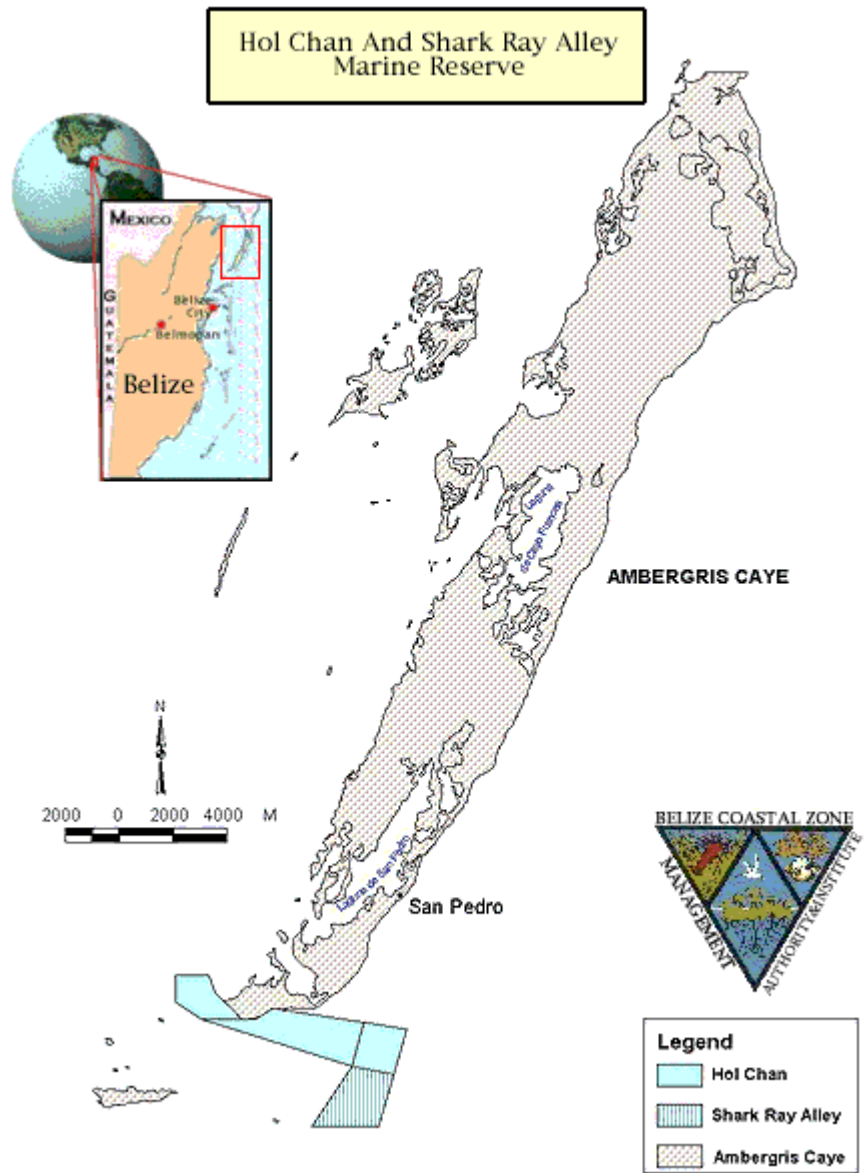




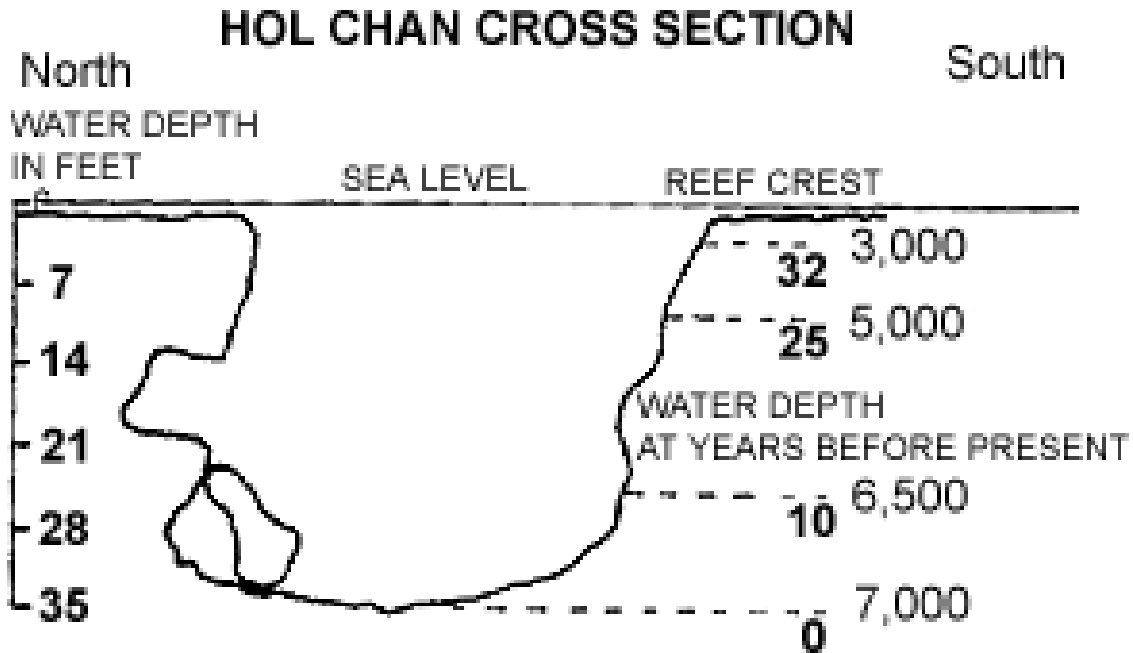
**Figure 4**



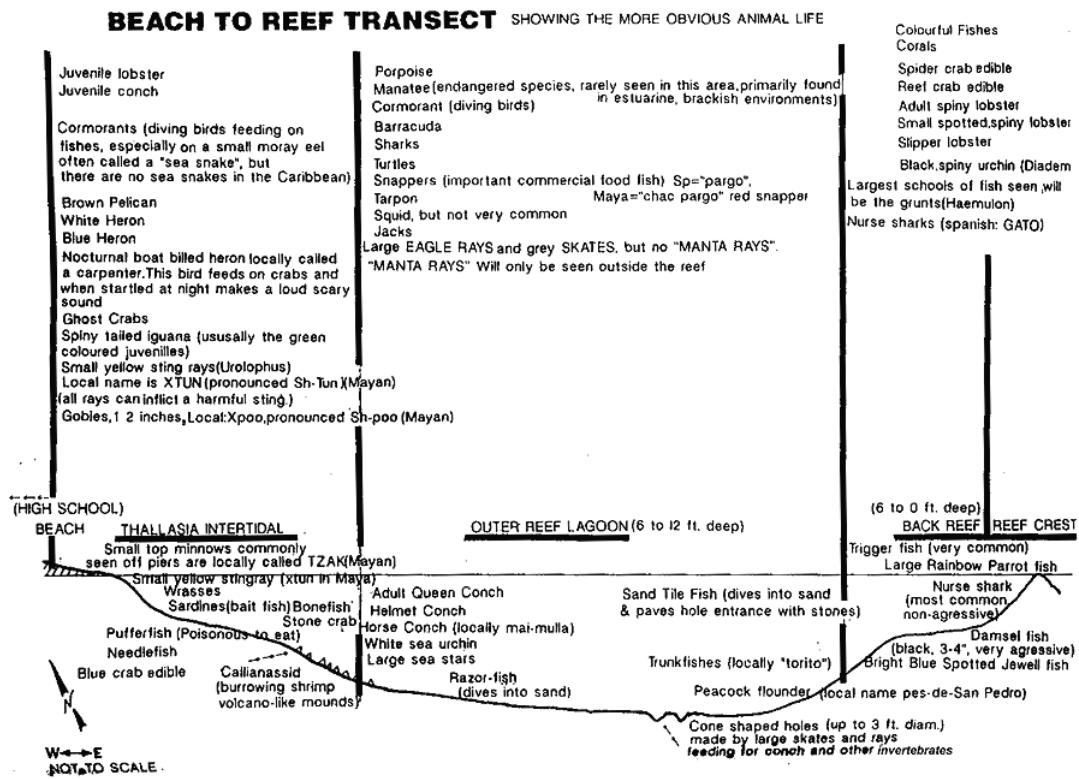
**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**



**Figure 8**

Dive Operator



# AQUA DIVES

BELIZE

## Our Newest Blue Hole 52ft Dive Boat

The Largest, Most Comfortable and Spacious in San Pedro  
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### Blue Hole / Lighthouse Reef Atoll Trip

Come and dive the world famous Blue Hole. The limestone stalactites and stalagmites are some of the largest in the world, and of course the thrill of seeing Reef and Bull Sharks.

Your second dive is at "Half Moon Caye Wall". The highlight of this dive is the sheer vertical wall, variety of sponges, sea fans and amazing marine life.

Following the second dive you will visit the island of Half Moon Caye for lunch break. There will be plenty of time for a short walk over to the Red-footed Face Boobie Bird sanctuary established by the Audubon Society that carries a park fee of US\$40.00 P/P.

The third dive is at Long Caye it is a spectacular wall dive, "The Aquarium". The crystal-clear, blue water has an abundance of colorful coral and marine life such as Angel Fish, Reef Sharks, Dolphins and of course, Belize's friendly "turtles".

This tour Departs at 6 am & Returns at 5 pm.

(Includes continental breakfast, lunch, snacks, sodas, rum punch on your return).

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Our Dive Shop Open Daily from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.

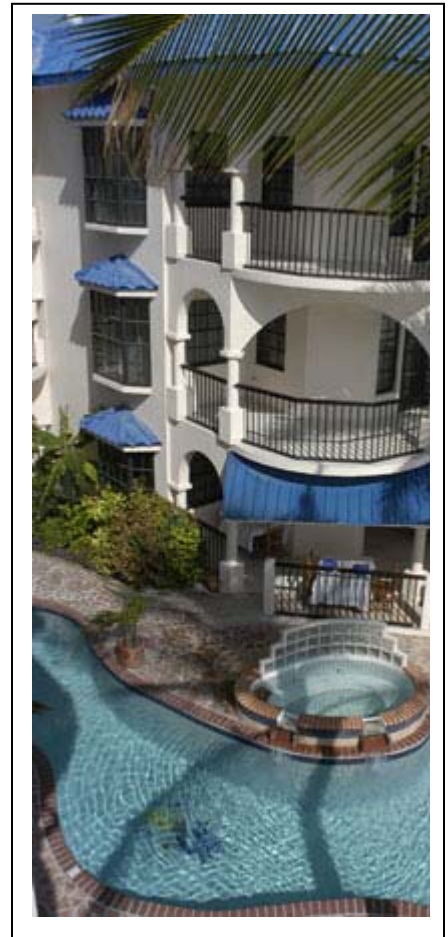




**Accommodation**



Aqua Marina Suites, Ambergris Caye, Belize, CA



**Aqua Marina Suites** (now under new ownership and called “Sunbreeze”)

Contact Details:

Email Address: [Aquamarina@btl.net](mailto:Aquamarina@btl.net)

Tel: 1-800-820-1631

## **2007/08 Rates**

SUITES	
May 1 to December 14, 2007:	\$140.00 Double Occupancy \$130.00 Single Occupancy
December 15 to April 30, 2008:	\$175.00 Double Occupancy \$165.00 Single Occupancy
May 1 to December 14, 2008:	\$145.00 Double Occupancy \$135.00 Single Occupancy

- Extra Person is US \$25.00 per night/per person
- Children age 11 and under stays for free when sharing room with parents without extra bedding.
- Special Group Rates & Packages are available.
- Check in: 2:00 p.m. Rooms are not guaranteed to be ready prior to 2:00 p.m.
- Check Out: 12:00 p.m. Late departures are liable to extra charges.
- The above rates are subject to 9% room tax and 6% service charge  
Room tax subject to change without notice

### **Other Hotels in Ambergris Caye –**

These are just a representation of the accommodation available and more can be found doing a simple “google” search.

Paradise Villa’s – [belizevilla.com](http://belizevilla.com)

SeaScape Villa’s – [seascapebelize.com](http://seascapebelize.com)

Martha’s Hotel – [marthashotel@yahoo.com](mailto:marthashotel@yahoo.com)

Ambergris Condo – [ambergriscondo.com](http://ambergriscondo.com)

Sands Hotel – [sandshotel@btl.net](mailto:sandshotel@btl.net)

## **References**

Dr Jacque Carter / Janet Gibson – Wildlife Conservation International

Rick Sammon – CEDAM International

Glenn Godfrey – Ambergris Caye, Belize History  
“A necklace draped alongside a beach”

George Parham – Belize History

Herman A. Smith – Faculty Corpus Christi Museum  
“Maritime Trade on Ambergris Caye”

## **Electronic Resources**

[www.ambergriscaye.com](http://www.ambergriscaye.com)

[www.bert.com](http://www.bert.com)

[www.padi.com](http://www.padi.com)

[www.aquadives.com](http://www.aquadives.com)

[www.aquamarinesuites.com](http://www.aquamarinesuites.com)

[www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

[www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)

[www.noaa.com](http://www.noaa.com)

## **Special Mention and with thanks**

Stephen – PADI Instructor – Divemaster Mapping Project of the BVI

Nicole – PADI Divemaster – Inspirational Songs of the 70's

“Cinch” – for just being “kewl”

Mr Ed – mmmmm.....for accepting large denomination checks...?

Johnny – for his particular inspirational kudos

Last but not least.....

Cadence - .....because you are.....

Mum and Dad – Thanks, you know how much this means.