

North Carolina

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95fsw in two pieces 25 miles out of Masonboro Inlet. The *Gill* is the largest ship sunk off the NC coast so there is always something new to see even after dozens of dives. Time and heavy seas have taken its toll on this wreck; it is slowly deteriorating, exposing new areas to explore.

Another wreck worth mentioning is the *Normannia*. In 1924, this vessel foundered in rough seas about 40 miles off of Wrightsville Beach. It is sitting in 115 fsw, making this a dive for the advanced recreational diver. The marine life on this wreck is amazing, with dozens of species of tropical fish, including the now-infamous Indo-Pacific lionfish and monster lobster. This wreck is considered to be one of the prettiest wrecks off the North Carolina coast.

Shipwrecks are not the only thing to dive. Hard bottom ledges are very common. Ledges are like mini walls with 5-25 feet of relief. Generally the higher relief ledges are farther offshore. Sites 23 miles out and farther are home to massive amounts of marine life and are some of the most popular spearfishing and lobstering sites in the area. Many ledges produce large fossil Megalodon sharks teeth. One ledge in particular, the



Sand tiger with mating scars on Hyde

Fossil Ledge has produced thousands of Meg teeth (some over 6.5"), large whale bones and even dolphin teeth.

One of the most popular hard bottom sites is the Frying Pan Shoals Light Tower. The tower marks the shallow shoals outside of the Cape Fear River and is considered one of North Carolina's premiere sites. The Tower is 55 feet deep so dives of up to an hour are possible in clear, warm tropical water. Many tropical fish species, some of which are not recorded in this area, are prevalent. Current at the tower can be a problem but there are several deeper ledges within a few miles that can provide an alternative dive site.

Generally, the peak dive season is from May to September with bottom temps ranging from the mid 70's to

lower 80's. Visibility can range from 10-40 feet on the inshore wrecks, to 50-80+ ft on the offshore wrecks 18 miles out and farther--generally increasing with the site's distance from land. North Carolina is known for its variable sea conditions, so a close eye must be kept on weather and sea states. Current is not usually a problem at most sites, but it takes a level headed diver to navigate the sites to make it back to the boat safely.

Pat Carroll has been working as a crew member for Aquatic Safaris in Wilmington, NC for six years. He's interested in shipwreck exploration, technical diving, and UW photography/videography. When not on the dive boat, he works at the University of North Carolina Wilmington as a Marine Biologist.



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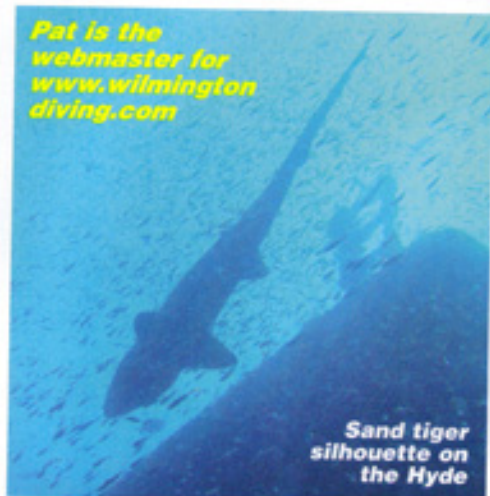
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Sand tiger silhouette on the Hyde

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