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ARGO

Prologue

Steve Drogin

During the months of August, September, and October of 2008 we brought our newly remodeled 132-foot vessel ARGO from Costa Rica to Mexico. At first, she was deployed in the Gulf of California, where we conducted several charters for tourism, science, filming, and discovery. My personal objective was to film the giant Humboldt squid, which has spread all over the Gulf during the past 5–10 years. I thought that by using my DeepSee submersible, we could get down amongst them. We spent a total of 84 days in Mexico, which also included time at Guadalupe Island. We had 63 days of submarine diving, during which we made 118 dives.

We supported a group of scientists from several Mexican universities and research centers, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and the San Diego Natural History Museum. This great team of scientists came onboard and was able to SCUBA and submarine dive for their research. During their expedition, the scientists gathered lots of samples, took thousands of photos, shot hours of video, and made a large number of observations. Scientists and divers from Mexico and California joined together to accomplish many tasks and conduct exciting new research. With the DeepSee submarine, many scientific dives were made and hundreds of samples were picked with our new remote manipulator system and robotic arm and brought to the surface to deposit into museum and research collections in Mexico.

It was a pleasure to be able to collaborate with my friends Brad Erisman, Octavio Aburto, and Exequiel Ezcurra, and with the great team of Mexican scholars assembled to study the seamounts between La Paz and Loreto.

Oceanographic vessel "Argo",
mother ship of the DeepSee submersible.
Photo © Undersea Hunter Group.

And then, so many exciting events, so many stories to remember, and so many adventures!

One day I was making a dive on the sub searching some new geological features. At a depth of 136 meters off the north end of Danzante Island, we came upon a huge pile of rocks. Looking more closely, we saw what appeared to be a scene like you experience in the desert in the summer—a mirage that made the water shimmer in the eddies of a vertical turbulent flow. We positioned the sub very close to the rocks, and to our amazement, it turned out to be a hot water vent with water coming out of the rocks at a temperature which has now been estimated by Scripps scientists at 135°C.

In my 50 years of SCUBA diving, I had never seen anything like this. The area around the rocks was covered with multi-colored bacteria. It was stunningly beautiful.

Then, we saw a school of baitfish, and soon, from out of nowhere, the sub got attacked by a huge school of the Giant Humboldt Squid. They went crazy. They banged into the sub, ate baitfish, ate each other, and flashed like crazy, surrounding the sub completely like a swarm of bees. The squids shot in and out of our view, and when all the baitfish were eaten, they disappeared. This deep water vent has never been seen by anyone else. It was a huge thrill for us to discover something new; especially in the Sea of Cortez, one of the most beautiful seas in the world.

It is a cause of deep emotion for me to prologue the work of the expedition's research team. I hope this report signs the beginning of many future discoveries in this marvelous and unique ecosystem.

Brad Erisman and Ralph Chaney starting a dive in the DeepSee. Photo © Octavio Aburto-Oropeza.

Pages 18–19: At sunset, the DeepSee submersible is towed back to the Argo by the support boat TopSee. Photo © Margarita Caso.





