The Green Banana

The Green Banana is one of many sink holes that dot the gulf floor. In fact, if it were possible to drain the Gulf of Mexico it would probably look like Swiss cheese with all the sinks scattered about. The Green Banana was rumored to be very deep. Exactly how deep was unknown. Other divers had penetrated to a depth of about 320fsw. Reports indicated that it just kept going.

An expedition was planned to, hopefully, find the bottom of the Green Banana. The expedition was lead by Curt Bowen, a veteran explorer originally trained by Sheck Exley. Other team members included Frank Richardson, David Miner, Jim Cutway, Larry Borden, and Win Remley. The team set out loaded with eight sets of doubles and 32 singles filled with various mixtures of nitrox, trimix, air, and oxygen. Several exploratory penetrations plus two deep penetrations were planned over a four day period.

The Green Banana Sink is located in the Gulf of Mexico 42.3 miles west of Sarasota, Florida. Several stories exist that tell how the Green Banana got its name. The most credible seems to be that it was discovered by a fisherman (as most sinks in the Gulf are) who got an awesome catch while trolling around the sink. As he was pulling in his nets he noticed a case of green bananas floating by—hence the name Green Banana.

This particular trip to the Green Banana was planned after an exploratory survey dive the previous year by Curt Bowen. Not knowing the maximum depth of the sink, the team pre-calculated decompression tables for depths from 300fsw to 500fsw in 10 foot increments, each with a 15 minute bottom time. Both Dr. X and DPA decompression software was used to plan the dives and decompression schedules.

Two setup divers initially set up the site by anchoring two ascent lines to the Gulf floor (154fsw) next to the mouth of the sink. The ascent lines were held taunt with large orange surface floats. This also minimized ascent line motion due to surface waves. The mouth was measured to be 134 feet wide. A guideline with direction markers was laid across the diameter of the mouth and attached to the anchored ascent line to provide directional guidance should the divers ascend in the center of the hole and lack the visibility to see the ascent lines. After the site preparation was complete, the deep penetration team prepared for their descent.

Air was planned for the decent to a depth of 200fsw. At 200fsw the

switch was made to their bottom gas, trimix 10/50 (10% Oxygen, 50% Helium, 40% Nitrogen). This mixture provided the divers with a partial pressure of oxygen (ppO2) of 1.66ATA at the maximum planned depth of 500fsw. The bottom gas also provided the deep team with an Equivalent Narcotic Depth (END) of 236fsw.

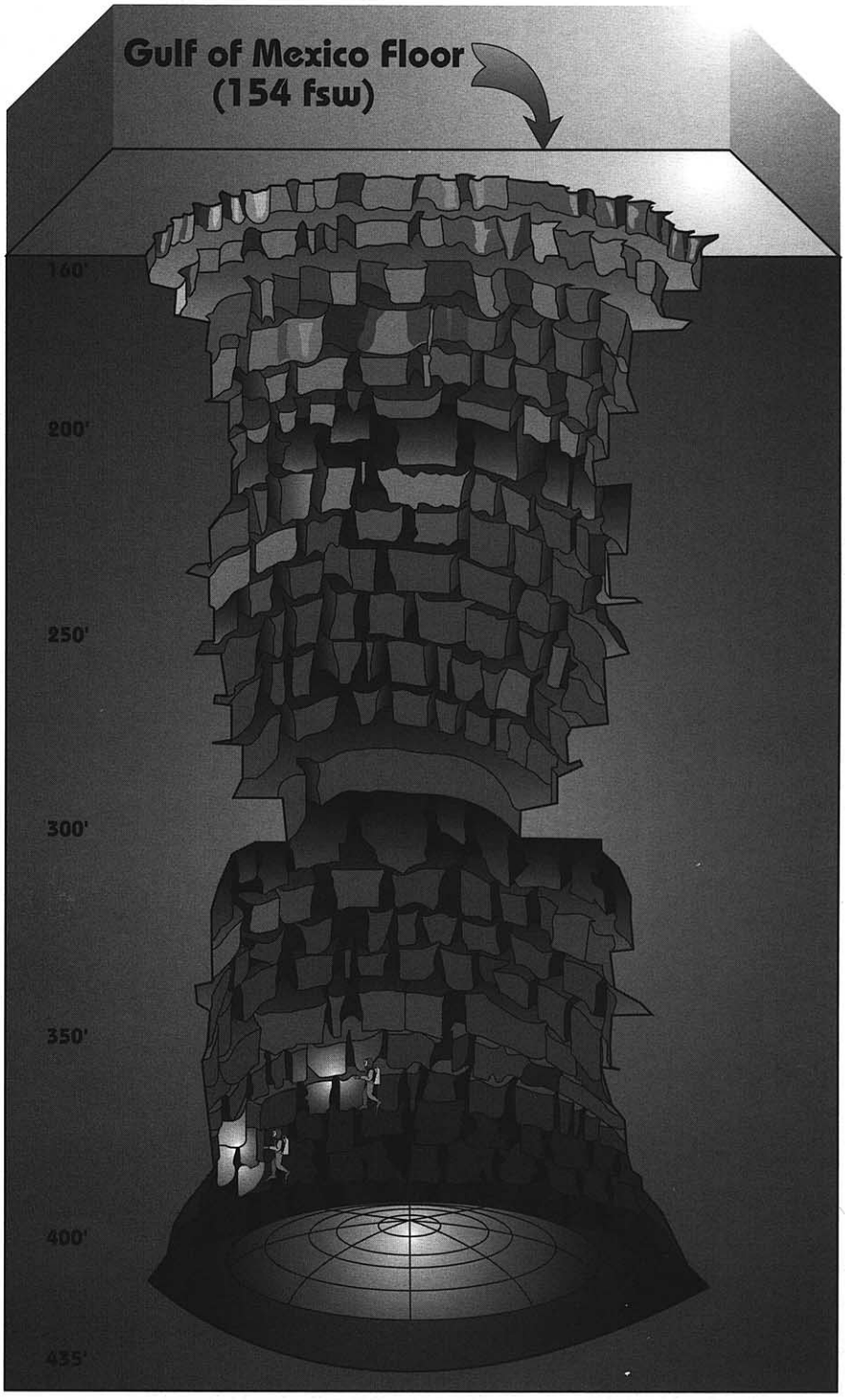
The deep team consisted of Frank Richardson and Curt Bowen. They each wore double 121s filled with air on their back and two single 80s filled with trimix clipped to their sides in a cave configuration. Nitrox 40 was staged at 100fsw and 100% O2 was staged at 20fsw. Safety divers were placed at 300 fsw, 170fsw, 50fsw, and surface to ensure the safety of the deep team.

On the first of the two deep penetrations the divers descended to the lip of the sink where they attached a guideline and reel for entry into the sink. They descended at a rate of 50 feet per minute. The divers found the silt mound located at a depth of 394fsw. They explored briefly reaching a maximum depth of 405fsw. The silt mound sloped very gently outward so they speculated that the bottom was probably not too much deeper.

During the ascent, survey measurements and drawings were made for cartography purposes. The ascent rate of 33 feet per minute provided ample time for these measurements to be taken. The total ascent, with decompression, lasted 175 minutes. The first decompression stop was made at a depth of 220 fsw where the OK sign was made to the deep safety.

Decompression on ascent was accomplished on trimix to 200fsw where the divers switched to air. Air was used from 200fsw to 100fsw and then exchanged for the staged Nitrox 40. Oxygen was used at the 20fsw and 10fsw stops.

After the dive, the team met to discuss the dive and plan for the second penetration. The next day the same dive profiles were used with Curt and Frank descending to the bottom. On this dive a quick survey of one wall was made that confirmed their suspicions about the maximum depth. The deep team found 435fsw to be the deepest spot in the sink. The mystery of the Green Banana depth having been exposed, the team set off for port.



▲ **The Green Banana sink is located 42.3 miles west of Sarasota, Florida in the Gulf of Mexico. The sink begins at the Gulf floor (154fsw). The bottom was found at 435fsw.**