



FLORIDA KEYS Field Trip

Introduction to and Exploration of the Reefs of the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary

Date: 3-5 July and/or 13-15 July 2008

Trip Leader: Leigh Espy, et al.



Photo credit: Jeff Anderson, FKNMS

Looe Key

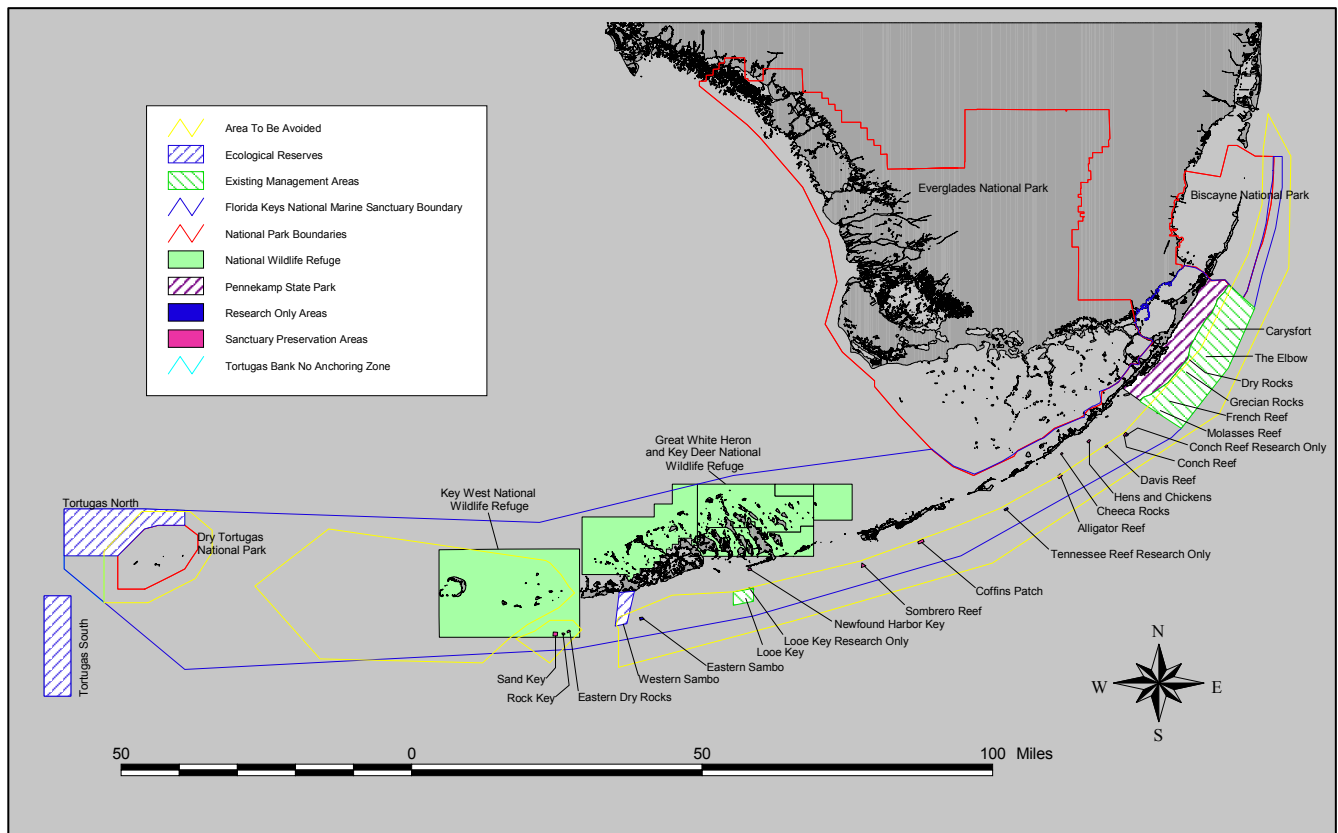
Field Trip Overview:

Participants will explore the shallow, heavily used, bank reefs of the Florida Keys Reef Track. They will have a chance to observe the various management tools being used by the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and to learn from Sanctuary staff who have day-to-day management responsibilities. Participants will also be able to experience the stony and soft corals, sponges and reef inhabitants of the areas including fish, lobster and other marine life.

The Florida Keys ecosystem contains one of North America's most diverse assemblages of flora and fauna. The Florida peninsula and Florida Keys serve as a partial barrier between the temperate waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the tropical to subtropical waters of the Atlantic Ocean, resulting in a unique distribution of marine organisms.

The coral reef tract, arching in a southwesterly direction for 220 miles, comprises one of the largest communities of its type in the world. It is the only emergent coral reef system off the continental U.S. All but the northernmost extent of the reef tract lies within the sanctuary.

The reef tract is a bank-barrier system comprised of an almost continuous reef community. One of its most noticeable features is its seaward-facing spur-and-groove formations that are connected by a linear transitional reef that runs from Miami to West of the Marquesas Keys. Over 6000 patch reefs, circular to oval in shape, lie in nearshore to offshore areas.



The Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary extends approximately 220 nautical miles southwest from the southern tip of the Florida peninsula. The Sanctuary's marine ecosystem supports over 6,000 species of plants, fishes, and invertebrates, including the nation's only living coral reef that lies adjacent to the continent. The area includes one of the largest seagrass communities in this hemisphere. Attracted by this tropical diversity, tourists spend more than thirteen million visitor days in the Florida Keys each year. In addition, the region's natural and man-made resources provide recreation and livelihoods for approximately 80,000 residents.

The Sanctuary is 2,900 square nautical miles of coastal waters, including the 2001 addition of the Tortugas Ecological Reserve. The Sanctuary overlaps four national wildlife refuges, six state parks, three state aquatic preserves and has incorporated two of the earliest national marine sanctuaries to be designated, Key Largo and Looe Key National Marine Sanctuaries. Three national parks have separate jurisdictions, and share a boundary with the Sanctuary. In addition, the region has some of the most significant maritime heritage and historical resources of any coastal community in the nation.

Date: 3-5 July and/or 13-15 July, 2008

Cost: \$300 US for each participant (does not include travel to and from meeting points, dive gear rental, lodging, or meals)

Field Trip Leaders:

Leigh Espy and a team of staff members from the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary. These individuals have considerable experience and knowledge about the marine environment and coral reef system of the Florida Keys. The team intends to provide a good field briefing and exploration of three areas (Upper, Middle, and Lower) of the Florida Keys.

Itinerary:

Pre-Conference Trips

July 3 (Thursday): Molasses Reef (Key Largo) 8:30am – 1:00pm

July 4 (Friday): Looe Key (Big Pine Key) 8:30am-1:00pm

July 5 (Saturday): Western Sambo Ecological Reserve (Key West) 8:30am-1:00pm

Post-Conference Trips

July 13 (Sunday): Molasses Reef (Key Largo) 8:30am – 1:00pm

July 14 (Monday): Looe Key (Big Pine Key) 8:30am-1:00pm

July 15 (Tuesday): Western Sambo Ecological Reserve (Key West) 8:30am-1:00pm

You must be at the dive shop location by 8:15 AM, EDT on each day

Upper Keys (Key Largo) – Molasses Reef Trip

Dive Shop: Quiescence Diving

Mile Marker 103.5

305-451-2440

Middle Keys (Big Pine Key) – Looe Key

Dive Shop: Underseas Outfitters

Mile Marker 30.5

305-872-2700

Lower Keys (Key West) – Western Sambo Ecological Reserve

Dive Shop: Dive Key West

3128 N Roosevelt Blvd

305-296-3823

Number of participants: 15 people

Requirements and other Important Information:

Water Temperatures are expected to be 24° to 30° C (75° to 85°F). Dive certification proof is required for divers, not for snorkelers. Divers must include proof of at least one successful dive within the 12 month period prior to the day of the dive. Dive operators include the cylinders and weights, if you need other equipment, call and reserve with the operator. Participants that are going to scuba dive must provide proof of emergency insurance (Diver Alert Network or Workers Compensation Insurance).