SAVING RED SEA WRECKS A nonprofit conservation group in the Egyptian Red Sea gives the SS Thistlegorm a facelift and promotes sustainable diving on the Red Sea’s most famous wrecks.

VANDENBERG SET TO SINK It’s sinking time, and Key West divers are gearing up to have a blast.

Q&A WITH DALE SHively The leader of the Texas Clipper project tells Scuba Diving what it’s like when your ship lands sideways.

SIX GILLS IN SEATTLE A new live-aboard gives divers unprecedented access to one of the world’s most elusive predators.
**NEW WRECK**

**Vandenberg Set to Sink**

Mark your calendars. The long-awaited sink date is May 15.

**KEY WEST’S soon-to-be-artificial reef, the USS Vandenberg, is scheduled to make the trip to Key West in March and hang out for a couple of months before her scheduled sink date of May 15. And since there ain’t no party like a Key West party, you can bet the Rum Runners are gonna flow when the ship goes down. “I can envision 1,000 boats out there watching when it happens,” says Sheri Lohr, a project volunteer and board member for the Artificial Reefs of the Keys organization. Lohr is especially excited because she’s using her years of maritime research to organize a temporary exhibit of the ship’s colorful history at Key West’s “Little White House.”—Mark your calendars.**

The Florida Keys Community College is getting in on the action as well. College students and staff will take charge of pre- and post-sinking diver monitoring to find out how effective the ship’s presence is at lightening the diver load on area reefs. Also, during the months that the ship is docked in town, students from the school’s port-security program will patrol the near-shore waters, keeping their eyes and sonar screens open for unusual activity. And once it sinks, those port-security divers will make the first dives on the ship to make sure it’s sitting properly on the seafloor, that there were no major shifts onboard and that all the blast charges went off as planned.

Truly a twenty-first century wreck, the Vandenberg is a unique side project. Scientists from the Center for Maritime Systems at the Stevens Institute of Technology (SIT) plan to install an internet-based ocean observation system around the ship once it goes down. “We’ll get information—everything from currents, temperature, salinity, all the way to streaming video—from the wreck and into classrooms,” says SIT professor Michael Bruno. He explains that solar/wind-powered batteries in a marker buoy turned transmitter platform will fuel electric and data cables running to web cameras mounted on the ship, marine sensors, which, from the very beginning, will check the ship’s influence on the surrounding environment, and motion sensors that will measure any shifting of the vessel itself, especially during heavy storms or hurricanes. See more at bigshipwrecks.com.

**CONSERVATION**

**SAVING RED SEA WRECKS**

Diving the SS Thistlegorm off the southern tip of Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula has a hint of the Wild West to it. The site—undoubtedly the most famous wreck in the Red Sea—is unmarked, largely unregulated and visited daily by a swarm of dive boats. Until recently, when one of these boats arrived, a divemaster would bounce-dive to the wreck and tie a rope off to any solid structure that would hold, putting constant strain on this beautiful but eroding World War II casualty, still packed to the gills with her photogenic cargo of Bedford trucks, motorcycles and live ammunition.

“There has been a vast increase in the number of divers and dive boats here in the Red Sea over the last few years without any consideration for the carrying capacity of the resources here,” says Amr Ali, the managing director of Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association (HEPCA). Ali’s nonprofit conservation group closed the Thistlegorm to all divers for a month in December 2007, installed a mooring system in the ground surrounding the ship and drilled air exhaust vents in the decks, releasing the air pockets left behind by the tens of thousands of divers who penetrate the hull every year.

The Thistlegorm is just the first step in HEPCA’s “Saving the Red Sea’s Wrecks” campaign, which addresses similarly unsustainable practices throughout the Egyptian Red Sea. Next in line for HEPCA’s mooring treatment is the Rosalie Moller, another stunning World War II cargo ship that recently lost one of its signature masts to careless boat mooring procedures. And the group is working diligently to spread awareness and education about sustainable tourism. “The whole diving industry needs a strong shake-up and awareness-raising project like this,” Ali says. “We need to bring back their environmental consciousness.” Visit hepca.com to find out more. —TRAVIS MACKAY

**BIG SHIPS**

**Does Size Matter?**

Here’s a side-by-side look at five big-name, intentionally sunk wrecks in the U.S.

**HMS Yukon**

**location:** San Diego, Calif. **length:** 366 ft. **depth range:** 60 to 134 ft.

**USTS Texas Clipper**

**location:** Galveston, Texas **length:** 310 ft. **depth range:** 16 to 154 ft.

**USNS Vandenberg**

**location:** Key West, Fla. **length:** 313 ft. **depth range:** planned: 160 to 134 ft.

**USS Spiegel Grove**

**location:** Key West, Fla. **length:** 313 ft. **depth range:** planned: 60 to 134 ft.

**USS Oriskany**

**location:** Pensacola, Fla. **length:** 110 ft. **depth range:** 70 to 212 ft.

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