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Missing scuba divers rescued after five hours adrift

DURBAN, South Africa (24 Oct 2008) — A large-scale sea, land and air search ensured the discovery and rescue of eight recreational divers who had gone missing off the coast at Shelly Beach, south of Durban, on Thursday.

The diving party, comprising of tourists visiting the country, had spent more than five hours in the water before they were pulled to safety.

Their disappearance prompted the mobilisation of private and rescue craft on Thursday afternoon.

The boats scoured the coastline in the area where they had gone missing, while people in 4x4 vehicles scanned the shore in the event that the divers had made it to the beach.

It is thought that the party was last seen at 1pm, when the captain of their diving boat lost sight of their bubbles on the water's surface. The pilot searched unaided for nearly an hour before calling for assistance.

The diving party was last seen in the vicinity of South Pinnacle, five nautical miles south of Shelly Beach and four nautical miles out to sea. It was speculated that the divers had been carried away from the boat by a strong undersea current.

National Sea Rescue Institute spokesperson Craig Lambinon said that rescue boats from its Shelly Beach and Port Edward bases had scrambled to the area.

"The Transnet Ports Authority helicopter was also launched from Durban harbour to assist with an aerial search." Lambinon reported that the divers were eventually found by the National Sea Rescue Institute boat.

"All the divers are safe. They were found near the spot where they went missing."

Netcare 911 spokesperson Chris Botha said paramedics had been on standby, awaiting the discovery of the missing divers.

Authorities in South Africa launched a massive air, sea and land search after the divers were reported missing.

"We had ambulances and paramedics standing by at the Shelly Beach Ski Boat Club."

He said the divers were transported to the institute's base where they were treated by paramedics.

"All were mildly hypothermic and paramedics actively warmed them at the scene. One man was taken to Margate private hospital."

Botha added that the divers were "ecstatic" to be out of the water.

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