

**SPECIAL 40TH ANNIVERSARY ANDREA DORIA ISSUE**

# SUB AQUA

 **dive gear for your brain**

**Volume 6, Number 3**

**FORBIDDEN CUBA:  
Taboo Dives**

**Secrets of a Street  
Smart Dive Traveler**

**"I covered the Doria  
sinking for LIFE."**

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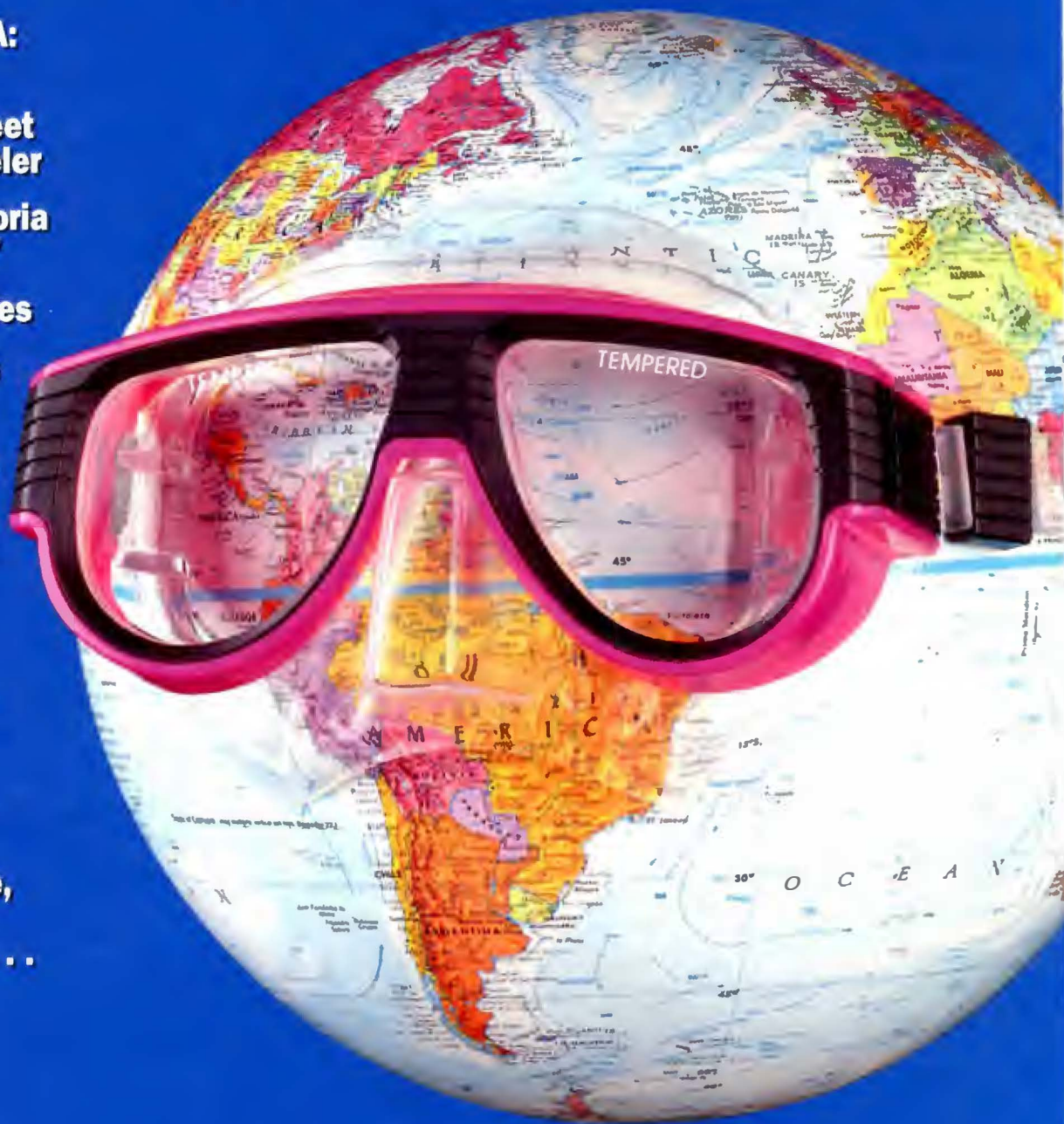
**California's  
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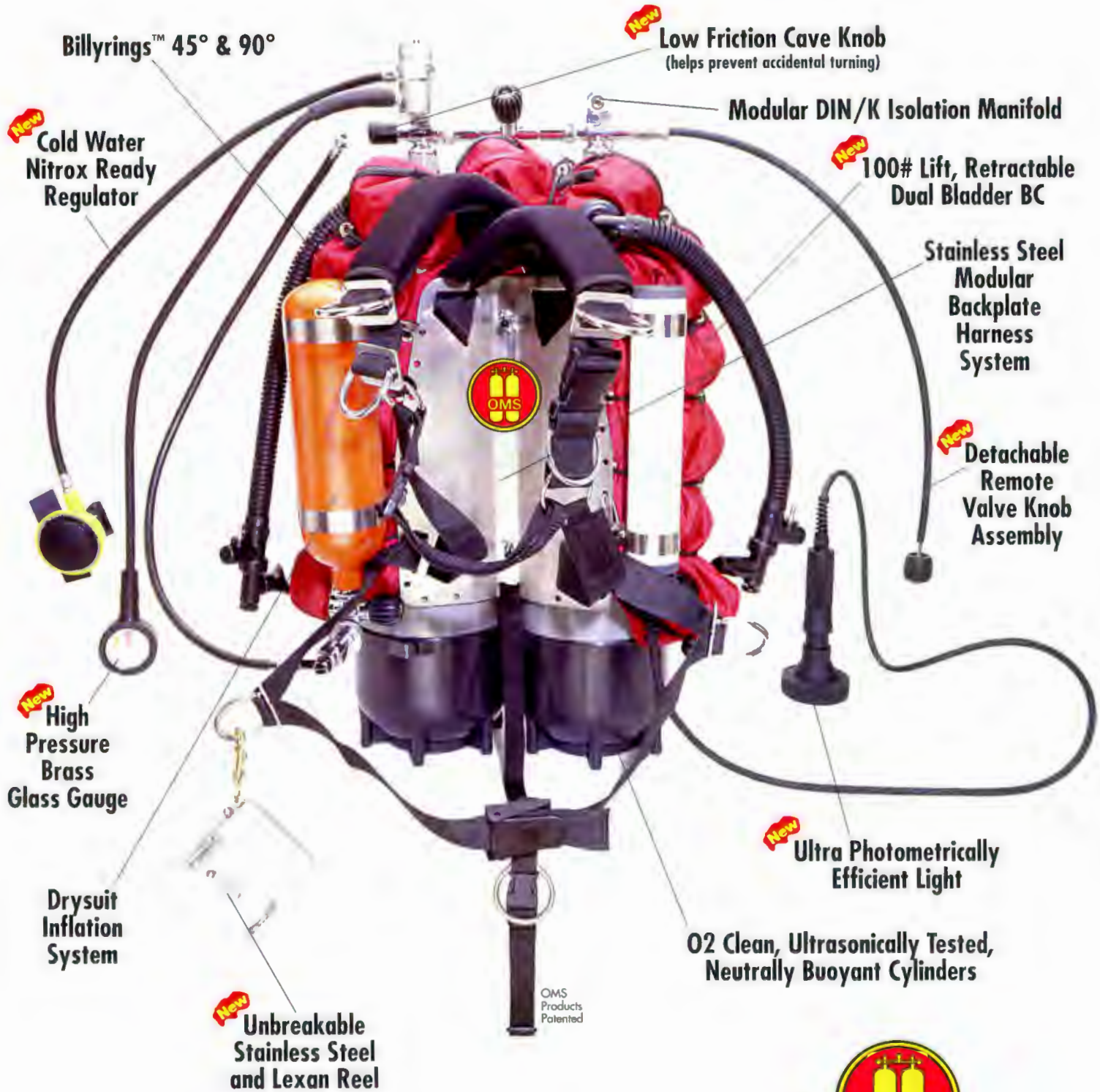
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# **World Diving**



# Technically Correct



# SUBAQUA

Vol. 6, No. 3

## World Diving



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# World Diving



Whether you jump in the car and drive to the local dock, or struggle through customs in a foreign airport, the objective is the same — get in the water — have a great adventure — get home safely. No matter where or how you dive, the problems of planning and executing your trip are essentially the same. More and more readers make **SUB AQUA** their first source for dive information. We designed **WORLD DIVING** to help you become a better and safer traveler.

Consider this issue of **SUB AQUA**, along with your yellow pad or laptop, as a toolkit. It's dive gear for your brain to help you face and interpret that growing stack of consumer dive magazines and pretty travel brochures. You'll benefit from advice and tactics by expert dive travelers including a tech hero, a vacation maven, an investigative journalist and a disabled diver. Each has their own special needs and we can all learn from their unique experiences.

Some locations in this issue are for the select few. Others are far more accessible. But the travel lessons are critical. In **SUB AQUA** you'll read about places and topics that frankly, you're not likely to see in other magazines. We can hear other publishers saying "Cuba? Too controversial." "Patagonia? Too hard to get to." "That place? They don't buy ads." "Alcohol? Taboo subject." That's why we *are* covering them.

**SUB AQUA** has done a first-ever report on the physiological and psychological effects of alcohol and diving, a vital and under-discussed subject. Just so you don't think we're crusading prohibitionists, check out Captain Joey's article on the Great Dive Bars of the World.

And finally, Mount Everest. Many divers write about their *Andrea Doria* experiences. Ask any of them, and odds are their mentor was Captain Steve Bielenda. In an exclusive interview, the "Godfather of the Doria" expounds on the history and future of diving this special wreck. And in a very rare visit, Walter Lord, author of *A Night to Remember*, takes us back to July 1956 and what it was like to cover the *Doria* sinking for *LIFE*.

Enjoy safe diving wherever in the world you go.

Joel Silverstein, Publisher

# Secrets of a Street Smart Dive Traveler



By Bill Bleyer



No matter what your level of diving, industry experts say if you don't make the effort to be a smart consumer, the likelihood of being disappointed rises significantly.

## **A young growing industry.**

The dive travel industry is relatively young. Until the 1960s, people went on vacation and sometimes went diving when they got there if they could track down an operator like Captain Don on Bonaire to take them out. Booking a scuba vacation is a recent development.

The development of the dive travel industry owes a lot to the coverage and promotion of *Skin Diver* magazine. "We picked up on a very small pioneering effort by a couple of divers like Captain Don and Burt Kilbride on Bonaire," Editor Bill Gleason says. "Much of what we did in the early days was to help integrate these dive operators into mainstream travel." The magazine's editors sat down with the dive operators and suggested they link up with hotels to build a market of dive travelers.

"Once you had a base of 100,000 solid traveling divers, which happened about 1980, then you saw the explosion happen," Gleason continues. "You almost couldn't create destinations fast enough. The '80s was definitely the boom time for dive travel. That's also when the live-aboard explosion took place. We went from a couple of older boats to what the Aggressor guys did. Early attempts at live-aboards failed because you didn't have that many divers out there traveling. The resorts had to get their act together first."

Peter Hughes, who runs four live-aboards and one dive shop, says that when he set up his operation in 1968 he had very little company. Today, the live-aboard segment is the fastest growing part of the industry, which explains why Hughes has ordered his fifth boat.

"There are 3 million divers in the U.S. alone and almost all of them travel someplace to dive," notes Karoush Mahboubian, owner of New York-based Mad Dog Expeditions, which organizes tech diving charters

John Brienza is a frequent and smart dive traveler. Some divers spend more time figuring out their vacation dive profiles than they do planning their trips. Not Brienza, a 36-year-old Long Island wreck-diving buff. He's always used a dive travel agent to book his trips since he got certified seven years ago. But first, he makes his own calls to resorts to make sure that the agent is getting close to the lowest cost, so he's not paying too much for the luxury of having someone else do all the paperwork.

"I use *Skin Diver* and the other maga-

zines as a starting point because they are very thorough in describing the dive sites," he says. But, he adds, he learned not to trust everything he reads. Convinced some magazines trade positive stories for advertising, Brienza visits dive shows to talk to wholesalers, fires up his PC and surfs the Internet, and queries other divers about their experiences before heading to Florida or the Caribbean. "You get a thousand responses saying: This is good, or I've had bad experiences here." Finally, he calls the resort directly to get more specifics on the packages.

around the world. Because dive travel has become a big business, the intense competition between packagers can yield bargains for smart shoppers.

"The dive travel business is continuing to grow very quickly," says Scott Jones, spokesperson for PADI. "A major reason for that is that there are many, many new divers coming into the industry and travel is an integral part of the diving experience. If people aren't going to see new and exciting places, they're not going to stay motivated divers."

"Many dive stores are establishing their own dive travel operations," Jones adds. Divers like to be able to do their training, buy equipment and plan dive trips all at the same place with people they know. That's why when the agency set up the PADI Travel Network in 1989, it worked through dive travel agents at local shops. The PADI Travel Network has grown an average of 40 percent annually for the past three years, according to its president, Christine Grange. Later this year it will launch PADI Travel Network-UK for the British and European markets.

#### **What kind of diver are you?**

The first step is to figure out what kind of diver you are, what your travel style is, and what your underwater interests are.

"Are you looking for nightlife and fun, or are you looking for the best diving, or some combination?" Mahboubian asks. "There are different packages for different needs," Jones adds. "I have customers I tell, 'Don't bother to go there,' because I know they are upscale and the conditions in the area are relatively primitive," says Arthur Travers, president of Poseidon Ventures, a 20-year-old California dive travel wholesaler. "I also want to make sure that a person can handle the diving at his destination."

"Once you are clear about your vacation goals and where you stand as a diver, that will suggest certain destinations and not others," say David Taylor, Executive Editor of *Rodale's Scuba Diving*.

#### **Where to start your research?**

When the self-examination is completed, it's time to start researching. The best place to begin, those in the industry say, is by reading dive magazines that write about travel. But there is a caveat. Jeanne Tiedemann of Tiedemann's Diving Center on Long Island, a dive travel agent since 1981, says divers should be suspicious of magazines that rave about every resort and live-aboard. "The writer is getting a free trip, so they don't want to write anything bad."

Scratch below the surface of many experienced divers, and there is a prevalent opinion that the "newsstand glossy" dive magazines are driven by the travel advertisers. Many divers believe that advertisers pay for "editorial-type" space. Even though these magazines usually place the word "advertise-

ment" on these sections, the type styles, layout, and position all imply the article is the "voice" of the magazines' editors.

What do the magazines say about their editorial and advertising policies? At *Skin Diver*, the largest of the dive magazines, Gleason says, "We do not trade editorial for anything including advertising. Our editorial policy on travel stories is that we don't publish any story unless the publisher, a member of the management team, or a senior contributing editor has been there within three to six months to personally observe the operation. We don't do negative stories about resorts. When we do find the resorts which are not up to snuff, we prefer not to write about them. Why would we want to waste a reader's time telling them not to go someplace? We write positive things."

Gleason says *Skin Diver* also doesn't want to do negative writeups because the magazine's dominant position in the industry could put developing resorts or operators out of business. He also worries that enjoyment of a dive vacation is so subjective. "If you take 10 divers and drop them in the same dive site, it is possible to get 10 different reactions because of the subjective nature of the diving experience."

"So *Skin Diver* readers should presume that if they haven't read about a resort or live-aboard in the magazine, it's because the magazine hasn't been there to rate it or the experience was less than satisfactory."

"We're usually there two to three years prior to you seeing anything in *Skin Diver*," Gleason says. "That is a 30-year tradition." Part of that tradition is working with the dive industry to develop diver services and then to promote them. He says there's "ongoing discussion" with resorts and operators on ways to improve their product, particularly if the magazine staff finds it lacking. They frequently tell an operator, "Guys — you don't measure up, so don't expect any coverage in *Skin Diver*." The latest example of the magazine's efforts to work with the industry on development and promotion has been an effort over the past several years to get resorts to develop snorkeling programs independent of diving for non-divers. This effort has been successful and will now result in a new, spinoff snorkeling magazine.

The ad policy is separate and independent, and Gleason says the magazine would accept ads from a resort that the editors chose not to write about unless "they weren't up to snuff safety-wise. On a couple of occasions, we've rejected ads for that reason."

About 60 percent of the editorial content is about dive travel and it's also the biggest source of ads, Gleason says. "That's been the case for about five years. Dive travel and reef diving always top subscriber interest surveys."

"In the travel industry, it is a professional courtesy not to charge editorial people

when they visit a resort," Gleason says. "But they do charge our advertising people. The decision to assign a story is not based on a free trip. We assign the stories, and if the resorts choose to comp the writers, then it's up to them. If we have to pay, we pay. If we're offered complimentary, we take it. It is a well-established travel industry, not just dive travel tradition."

At *Sport Diver*, Editorial Director Steve Blount says, "We don't trade editorial for advertising. We try to go places our readers will enjoy going and when we get there we call it as we see it." But he concedes *Sport Diver* writers sometimes accept free trips. *Sport Diver*, in its media kit, offers advertisers the opportunity to buy ad space next to articles created by staff, about the destinations advertised.

Taylor says that at *Rodale's Scuba Diving*, which bills itself as "the magazine divers trust," there is no connection between editorial and advertising, and writers never accept free trips. He notes that *Rodale's* this year began running a reader rating program. "Our dive operator and resort profiles in the back of the book are advertising and they're clearly marked as advertising," although they look like editorial.

Clair Moore, Regional Sales Manager for the Cayman Islands Department of Tourism, says when the magazines hype destinations, it makes his job harder. "If every dive operator is promoted as being great then it makes it harder for the consumer to decide which is which."

The experts say tourist boards are a good source of accurate information because even if they say good things about themselves, they provide the factual information needed to make informed decisions. Blount says dive guide books that don't rely on advertising usually give accurate descriptions of what to expect.

Another way to avoid the hype is reading one of the publications that publish solely reader's comments like *Undercurrent* and *In Depth*. John Trigger, Editor of *In Depth*, a 12-year-old monthly magazine that rates dive operators and accepts no advertising, says "all the writers pay their own way and tell you how it is." Reader ratings are also published. The magazine also acts as an ombudsman when divers have a problem with a resort or wholesaler. "The reason there's a market for us is all the slick magazines have reviews that say the sun's always shining, the water's always blue, and right next to it is a \$20,000 color ad that they just sold to the resort. In this industry they do not review you unless you buy big ad contracts."

"The big magazines do a disservice to readers because they ignore new fledgling resorts or dive boats without large ad budgets," Trigger says. But the conflicting opinions in reader ratings can be confusing. "You get such a positive opinion from one person

and the next person writes that they hated the place,” says Marilyn Wick, a Long Islander who takes three dive trips a year. “The secret is to research it and find people who have been there before and go through someone you feel is competent and has been there.” That could be a wholesaler, a dive travel agent or dive shop.

“The more experienced diver looks at travel a little differently,” says Joel Silverstein, publisher of SUB AQUA. “After you have been diving a few years and have had a ‘dog’ trip or two you become quite savvy as to what you want in a location. If it’s a pretty fish dive, you probably won’t overlook the air conditioner that isn’t working or the smoke coming out of the diesel engine box.” He adds, “If you’re heading out for five days in the middle of the Atlantic, word of mouth reputation is the key. If a skipper is not running a tight ship the inner circle spreads that like wild fire. At SUB AQUA we recommend just asking the operator straight out, ‘What problems should I expect?’ — most will give you a straight answer.”

#### **Who to trust?**

“Sometimes a trip booked through your dive shop is more expensive than a trip you see in an ad in the back of a magazine,” Mahboubian says. “But it’s a good way to travel. You’re traveling with a group. You know who you’re going with. Problems are sorted out for you. You’re dealing with someone local, someone you’ve probably bought equipment from already. That’s a better way to do it than through some stranger.”

“The best way to find someone you can trust is through word of mouth,” Travers says. “We go back every year to recheck places to make sure people will have a good experience. Some resorts deteriorate over the years.”

“People come to me because I’ve actually seen the rooms,” Tiedemann says. “A lot of times when they send you a brochure it really doesn’t look like that when you get there.” Like Travers, she debriefs her customers on their return.

What should you look for in a travel agent or wholesaler besides someone who has visited the resorts?

“You want to book with somebody that’s got at least a few years’ experience,” Jones says, because they are less likely to go out of business.

#### **Look at the fine print.**

When you’ve selected a destination and someone to book your trip, it’s time to get down to specifics — which resort or live-aboard and which package. Look not only at how many dives are offered but where they go, whether they are boat dives, beach dives or night dives, and what equipment is included.

“You need to look a little deeper than

just the advertised price,” says Jones. Some packages include things that may not be included in another. One price may include two tank dives and another single tank dives. One may include taxes and transfers and another may not. “You need to make sure you’re comparing apples with apples. The dive travel business is very competitive, it’s very cutthroat. There are a lot of price wars going on today.”

“Usually tanks and weights are included, but in the Keys they don’t include that because it’s very competitive,” Tiedemann cautions. She says you should be particularly careful about resorts that offer “unlimited beach diving. It sounds terrific but sometimes there’s no place to dive. They do that in Cozumel sometimes and I’ve had that in the Caymans.”

Tiedemann also advises checking on the specifics of how the operation runs its boat dives. “You want to find out if they have a limit on how many people they’ll put on the boat. Sometimes they’ll just keep packing them in.”

“You should confirm directly with the resort anything that’s important to you,” Blount says. “If the resort offers photo developing and that is important to you, make sure the dark room is working and will be staffed when you’ll be there.”

“Unfortunately because a lot of the resorts are outside of the U.S. there are no laws governing truth in advertising, so you need to be a little bit cautious,” says Lisa Mitchell, an owner of Baskin in the Sun, a British Virgin Islands dive operator. Some destinations including the Caymans have dive operators’ associations which police their own members, however.

#### **Can you negotiate the price?**

As for the price of a package, “there’s not much room for negotiation,” unless you plan to bring a lot of business to a small company, says Mahboubian.

“Usually when there’s a rock-bottom price advertised, there’s no flexibility. You have to travel within certain dates and you get X, Y and Z,” says Mitchell, who got involved in the dive travel business in Florida in 1980 after becoming a dive instructor. “The dive operators will work with resorts and airlines to come up with packages in the off-peak periods and the players are usually giving up their commissions so they have no room to maneuver.”

“Customizing is always your best option to save money,” says Mahboubian. You can often customize elements of a trip to reduce the cost.

A good way to cut costs is all-inclusive packages. “For example, a Club Med vacation, where everything is included — your diving, your meals, your transfers, and your activities. Those kinds of resorts are gaining in popularity,” Jones says. “There are pluses

and minuses.” Make sure they have enough dive equipment and boat accessibility so you won’t be waiting around on the beach for someone else to finish diving.

Sometimes you can deal directly with a hotel and customize your vacation and save money, particularly if you’re not interested in doing several dives every day. Going to a hotel that has a dive shop instead of a dedicated dive resort can often result in diving with a small group and going where you want when you want rather than following a fixed schedule on a large boat with a mass of divers.

“Small organizations are sometimes better,” Mahboubian says. “They may not have the best name or have the best boat but they may give you a lot more personal service.”

While divers can make their own arrangements in the Caribbean and other heavily visited areas, Travers cautions that only the most experienced and sophisticated traveler should try to go it alone in places like Asia and the Red Sea. “You can have real big problems. People don’t show up or you can get stuck at an airport because there’s nobody interfacing for you.”

#### **Before you go.**

Even after the trip is booked, you shouldn’t stop making arrangements, says Bill Turbeville, a Florida-based attorney specializing in diving liability. “Before you go, get travel insurance that covers recompression therapy.”

Joel Dovenbarger, director of medical services for Diver’s Alert Network, notes that between 20 and 25 percent of reported dive injuries — 1,164 in 1994 — and deaths occur on dive vacations outside the U.S.

Turbeville also recommends buying travel insurance that provides reimbursement for many of the types of problems that could scuttle a trip. “If a plane crashes or a boat sinks or the company files for bankruptcy, you’re covered.”

But there are no guarantees in taking any vacation, and every traveler has his own perspective. “Two people can go to the same resort the same week and one of them could have an absolutely wonderful experience and the other one could be very disappointed,” Blount says.

No matter how much homework you do, “you can always have some problems,” says Brienza. “I ended up on a dive boat in Cozumel where the rudder fell off.”

Travel is becoming far and away the largest portion of the dive dollar. If you pay as much attention to learning how to travel as you do learning how to dive, you too will be a street smart dive traveler. ■

*Bill Bleyer is a SUBAQUA contributing editor. His column, On the Waterfront, appears regularly in Newsday.*



# LO SINGS You Must Answer

By Hillary Viders

## Thinking of taking a dive trip to an exotic location? Before you begin globe-trotting, here's what you should ask yourself first.

### 1. CAN YOU AFFORD IT?

Regardless of how low-priced your trip seems up front, you can easily incur unforeseen expenses once you arrive. All-inclusive resorts and package deals run by reputable dive travel agencies are often your best bet. Even then, always read the fine print and ask what expenses are *not* included.

### 2. SHOULD YOU TAKE TRIP INSURANCE?

Absolutely. Even a reputable dive travel operation or resort can suddenly go belly up with your money in tow. Trip insurance can also provide financial reimbursement if you have to cancel your trip. Check the insurer's policy, however; many companies require documented proof of illness or death in the immediate family before they pay.

### 3. HOW CLOSE WILL YOU BE TO THE NEAREST MEDICAL FACILITY?

Whenever you dive, have all your insurance cards, the list of local and DAN emergency phone numbers, and personal medical information with you. You should speak with your dive resort beforehand and verify that there is a working hyperbaric chamber and a medical facility within a reasonable distance from your dive site.

### 4. ARE THE WATER AND FOOD SAFE?

Most developing countries do not have water that meets U.S. safety standards. Check with your travel operator and your doctor before you go. If you are going to be in a high risk area, stick to bottled or boiled water, beer and wine. Make sure that you break the seal on bottled water yourself, to be sure

that it has not been filled with tap water. Also, watch out for ice. If you're not absolutely sure about the safety of the food, follow the Peace Corps recommendation: "Boil it, cook it, peel it, or forget it."

### 5. WHAT IMMUNIZATIONS DO YOU NEED?

In developing countries you may encounter areas of poor sanitation and a high risk of contracting a disease. To minimize your risk, have your physician or a travel medicine clinic review your itinerary several months prior to your departure to determine which, if any, immunizations you will need. To find out which countries require yellow fever and cholera vaccinations, and where you should take malaria pills, contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Hotline (404) 332-4555.

### 6. CUSTOMS HASSLES?

Ward off problems ahead of time by registering all camera and video equipment at customs as you leave the U.S. and keep the receipt handy to show when you return. Do the same for other valuable items, such as expensive dive watches and computers. If you carry your computers in your hand luggage, don't be surprised if you are asked to open the case and turn them on.

Keep all your prescription drugs in their original labeled containers. Don't even *think* about traveling *anywhere* with illegal drugs unless you don't mind doing some time.

### 7. DOES YOUR CREW SPEAK ENGLISH?

Don't assume they do. If you do not speak the language of the country you will be visiting, arrange beforehand to have local divemasters and/or guides who speak English. If you want to get the most out of your foreign travel experience, take a course and bring a foreign phrase book with you. Local people are usually delighted and particularly friendly to visitors who make the effort to converse with them in their native tongue.

### 8. WHAT EQUIPMENT IS AVAILABLE?

Even if you bring all of your own gear, choose a dive operation that rents high qual-

ity dive equipment. If the first stage on your regulator unexpectedly blows out and you have to rent gear to see you through the week, you shouldn't have to contend with beat up, substandard equipment. Many dive shops in remote islands do not have rental equipment with alternate air sources, depth gauges, or computers, so make sure the gear you take from home has been tuned up and bring your repair kit with spare parts.

Find out what emergency accident management equipment will be available. If your dive operator does not carry emergency oxygen on board, unless you are prepared to bring your own oxygen and lots of it, find a different dive operator.

### 9. CASH OR CREDIT CARD?

Even if you prepay your trip before you leave, make sure that local businesses and restaurants will accept your credit card. Foreign currency changes can occur daily, so when making charges on your credit card overseas, make a note of the exchange rate posted by the bank that day, and when your billing statement arrives, make sure that you have been charged that same rate or better. Even if you plan to pay by credit card, still bring at least \$100 in local currency for tips, taxis, and incidentals. You usually get more for your money if you change U.S. dollars for the currency of your destination at a U.S. bank before you leave. Second best is changing money at a bank when you arrive. Last choice is changing money at your hotel or a local store where additional fees are added to the actual bank rate.

### 10. CAN YOU HANDLE PROBLEMS?

Diving is for the adventurous and unsinkable spirit, and Murphy's Law was surely created to explain overseas dive travel. Canceled flights, lost luggage, broken gear, a sudden bout of "tourista," dive boat engine trouble, a favorite dive site scratched because of rotten sea conditions... none of these are beyond the realm of possibility. A sense of humor, contingency planning, and the ability to go with the flow are the best antidotes for unavoidable dive travel screwups. ■

F O R B I D D E N

# CUBA

Diving's Last Taboo

A SUB AQUA Special Report



By Kevin McMurray



J. Silverstein

Like the secret thrill of sneaking contraband Montecristos through customs, the prospect of diving Cuba has seductively called to American divers for years. Up until early 1996, all appearances were that trade might be reopened. Many American divers got their hopes up, only to be shot down on February 28.

Cuba lies tantalizingly close to the United States and its countless wrecks and seven hundred species of fish beckon. Yet, travel to Cuba for Americans is strictly prohibited. For obvious reasons, Cuba has been all but invisible in American dive magazines. However, a significant number of American divers have broken the taboo.

*The Trading with the Enemy Act* prohibits business and travel to Cuba for Americans. Infringements are punishable by up to 10 years in prison and \$250,000 in fines. Yet 30,000 American tourists traveled to Cuba last year. No travel agency nor the Cubans themselves would speculate on how many of Cuba's estimated 740,000 1995 visitors

were scuba divers. However, they did indicate that diving is becoming an increasingly popular activity.

### **The Political Climate**

The largest island in the West Indies, Cuba is a mostly agrarian nation inhabited by over 10 million people. The island is semi-tropical with a relatively comfortable average summer temperature of 81° F due to the prevailing northeastern trade winds. For the last 35 years, the United States and Cuba have had no formal relations. In the 1950s, Cuba was a deliciously corrupt vacation spot for Americans and a welcome and profitable operation for organized crime interests. *Godfather II* dramatizes Fidel Castro's overthrow of Fulgencio Batista on New Year's Eve in 1959, during which he got rid of underworld mastermind Meyer Lansky and the casinos. Two years later, Castro seized a billion dollars in United States-owned properties which led to the disastrous Bay of Pigs incident.

Relations between the United States and

Cuba began to improve after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1992. Castro recently visited New York City for the UN 50th Anniversary celebration. Cuban citizens were finally allowed to use American currency, and American businessmen began to scout the island for investment potential. However, on February 28th of this year, two unarmed civilian aircraft operated by expatriate, anti-Castro Cubans were shot down in Cuban airspace by a Cuban airforce MIG. Their base of operations was in Miami.

To placate the exile community in southern Florida, President Clinton was forced to support the Helms-Burton Act, sponsored by U.S. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC). The bill will strengthen the present embargo. Presently the United States is the only country in the world that maintains an economic embargo against Cuba.

### **Tourism Options**

Relations between the countries are now uneasy, but many Americans successfully dive there and manage to avoid the wrath of the Department of the Treasury and the State Department. One way, according to Sondra Levinson, the Director for the Center for Cuban Studies in New York, is to simply fly to Cuba via another country. There are direct flights to Havana from Toronto, Mexico City, and Nassau, Bahamas. The Nassau route is particularly popular with divers, since connecting with the Bahamian city is en route and fairly easy. During the Russian patronage of Cuba, many 10,000 foot runways were built all over the island, making many diving areas easily accessible.

Tourism has become a major source of income for Cuba since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and over 740,000 international tourists visited there in 1995; the highest percentage of visitors are Canadians and Germans. Cubans especially welcome Americans with open arms, and don't require Americans to have a special visa. If requested, customs officials will not stamp American passports. Not that it makes any difference. Levinson says the U.S. State Department is not interested in prosecuting

Americans for visiting Cuba, since the United States would probably lose in court on the constitutional grounds of restricting freedom of movement.

According to Darren McKinney, a Public Affairs Officer with the Treasury Department, if you could travel there without putting money into the Cuban economy, "Uncle Sam would have no problem with your visiting the island." He adds that since that is virtually impossible, "one can extrapolate the ultimate meaning of the law." McKinney would not comment on the numbers of illegal visitors to Cuba (via a third country) but he did say that it is "conceivable" that the Treasury Department would prosecute. Treasury would handle violators on a case-by-case basis. McKinney added that it would be unlikely that they would prosecute, for example, some honeymooners for vacationing there, but would probably aggressively pursue a regular traveler there who engages in smuggling activities.

The prohibition of tourism for Americans may even be an asset for some tourist businesses. Nick Lawley of General Tours in Toronto hopes the US State Department never lifts its ban. Calling Cuba the best value in the Caribbean, Lawley says an influx of Americans will make hotel space a premium. Presently, General Tours runs trips for divers for as low as \$639 a week from several Canadian cities to one of eight Cuban cities. Airfare, hotel, food and drink and 10 dives are all included.

### Popular Destinations

What about the diving? Is it worth the hassle of getting there? Divers who have been to Cuba all agree that it definitely is.

Probably the most popular dive locale in Cuba is **Isla de la Juventud** (Island of the Youth). Formerly known as Isla de Pinos (Island of Pines), this island is found off the southwest coast of Cuba and is said to be the model for Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. Discovered by Christopher Columbus in his second voyage of discovery to the New World, the Island of Youth has a rich history as a pirate haven and many a Spanish Galleon rests in the tranquil clear waters surrounding it.

Captain Cousteau and his CALYPSO crew raved about the diving here. Controversial German film maker Leni Riefenstahl has visited the Island of Youth three times to dive. Especially popular on the island is the Canarreos reef, one of the largest in the world. Canarreos is visible on the surface but the real beauty lies in about 25 to 50 feet. Caverns can be found in depths about 90-150 feet. The reef walls descend down to 1,200 feet.

**Canarreos** is world renowned for its 150 varieties of gorgonians and 600 species of fish, among them morays, barracuda, tarpon, puffers and shark. There is also plenty

here for wreck divers. According to Gaetano Cafiero, Italian diver and author, several interesting wrecks are here sent to the bottom courtesy of the Cuban Navy and Air Force. Cafiero, a regular visitor to Cuba, says the ships were target ships sunk by torpedoes and air-to-sea rockets.

Cuban authorities have apparently discovered environmentalism. They have placed 56 permanent buoys on the reef and enforce a strict look-but-don't-touch policy when diving there. Since the Cubans are very safety conscious when it comes to tourists no cave or technical diving of any kind is permitted. Divers cannot strike out on their own and can dive only as deep as their Cuban dive guide. There is one recompression chamber on the Island of Youth.

In Camaguey province an Italian, Lamberto Ettore, runs SSI/Italia Diving Center out of the Hotel Cuatro Vientos in Playa Santa Lucia. The popular underwater activity here is shark feeding and diving with manatees. The manatees, unlike ones in Florida, are not used to seeing humans and are skittish, and have to be sought out in the underwater wilderness. There is also an 18th century Spanish wreck you can dive, but there is not much left of it although wine bottles are still being found at the wreck site.

There is a dizzying number of other choice dive sites on all coasts of Cuba. **Trinidad**, on the south central coast, between November and February, sees large numbers of whale sharks come in from the deep Cayman Trench that lies not far offshore. **Manzanillo**, on the remote southeast coast, is a popular dive destination and has two hotels that have Canadian run diver operations. **Playa Gerron** and the **Bahia de Cochinos** (The Bay of Pigs), has superb cavern diving and for history buffs there is a museum commemorating the Cuban victory over the American-sponsored invasion of 1961. It is reasonable to assume there are wrecks from the invasion in the shallows offshore, but there are no reliable reports on anyone diving them.

**Varadero**, near Havana, is Cuba's most popular tourist destination. Since it gets nearly 70% of all visitors, overbooking is common, so tour operators like General Tours try to avoid it. The reef diving is considered good in Varadero but visibility does not measure up against the rest of the island, probably because it is too close to heavily populated Havana and the sewage outpour the city creates.



Gaetano N. Cafiero

**Diving Las Anforas (The Amphorae) wreck, Playa Santa Lucia, Camaguey, Cuba.**

**Guadalabaca Beach** on the northeast coast is also a popular destination for reef divers and snorklers. Hotels and dive operations in Guadalabaca are mostly Canadian run and operated.

**Havana**, the capital of Cuba, founded in 1519, was the primary sending point of treasure laden ships back to Spain. Hurricanes alone have claimed over 150 ships in Havana harbor in the years between 1768 and 1794. The worst hurricane disaster in Havana history in 1846 sent 200 ships to the harbor bottom.

**Santa Lucia Beach**, near Camaguey, on the north central coast, also boasts of some of the finest reef diving in the Caribbean. Guadalabaca Beach, on the northeast coast, is also a popular destination for reef divers and snorklers. Hotels and dive operations in Guadalabaca are also mostly Canadian run and operated.

Despite the glamorous, renegade appeal of the island, criminal acts against tourists are rare, and the Cuban Coast Guard is very strict about diving regulations and upkeep on dive boats. Furthermore, the number of passengers on boats cannot exceed the lifejacket count. In Cuban-run dive operations, too, the compressors are said to be in excellent condition. The only hitch, Lawley cautions, is that the rental gear is appalling.

### The Cuban Wreck Connection

Havana and images of Spanish Galleons sail past the mind's eye. For the wreck diver, Cuba is, you'll pardon the expression, a potential goldmine. Potter's *Treasure Guide*

lists no less than 13,000 treasure wrecks. Between 1550 and 1800 ships passed between Cuba and the Florida Keys carrying gold, porcelain, and the King's 20% tax en route to Spain. While Mel Fisher's persistence and research finally yielded him the location of the NUESTRA SENORA DE ATOCHA off Key West, he has not been able to conduct searches around Cuba.

A favorite dive site of the locals is the wreck of the EL RI, a Spanish Galleon sunk in the mid 1700's near Cabo Cruz. Resting in ten to fifteen feet of water are thirty-six cannon and six huge anchors exactly where they sank just a few hundred feet off shore. On a recent dive there by Canadian diver Rivka Buchanan, she described the site as "an incredible place to snorkel where rainbows of fish live among the tangles of cannon and anchors, with a huge porcupine fish who greets the divers." She added, "Our guides were perfectly aware that a fortune in bullion may lie below, but they didn't seem to care. Their joy was showing us the wreck and in displaying the cannonballs which lie covered in algae."

**Do You Really Want To Dive In Cuba?**

For American divers, Cuba continues to have the whiff of intrigue and forbidden fruit. Before making the trip, divers are advised to examine their motives. You have to think through your politics and examine your personal beliefs about this dictatorship. You must also evaluate your own risk tolerance. Also, since current events in any political hot zone change faster than any magazine can publish, you must get the very latest in State Department Advisories and other facts. The various on-line services and the Internet are probably the best place to hear the Cuban jungle drums.

Intrepid divers willing to truck their gear through Canadian and Mexican customs have made it to Cuba and back. Reports describe some of the best reef diving in the Caribbean, exotic nightlife, and the turn-on of exploring a forbidden island where rumor has it even the dictator dives. ■

*General Tours of Toronto, Canada runs package tours to all parts of Cuba with direct flights departing from all major Canadian cities. The high season (the most expensive time) is Christmas and March break. For more information, call (416) 495-0000.*

*For Mexico City departures call Asis Tours at 011-52-5-264-4497.*

*More tourist information on Cuba can be obtained by contacting the Center for Cuban Studies in New York City at (212) 242-0559 or the Cuban Interests Section, an office of the Cuban government at 2630 16th Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.*

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# “I Covered the Doria Sinking for **LIFE**”

A SUB AQUA EXCLUSIVE  
by Jeffrey J. Silverstein

Walter Lord had just put on his pajamas when the disaster hit the wires. Minutes after midnight the **ANDREA DORIA** had been struck by the **STOCKHOLM** and was sinking. He put his socks back on.

Lord's 1955 best seller, *A Night to Remember*, the first and most acclaimed book about the 1912 **TITANIC** tragedy, would surely bring press inquiries his way. NBC called... Dave Garroway wanted his comments on the *Today Show*. Then *LIFE Magazine*. Lord recalled, “I had been on contract with *LIFE* covering the 15th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. When the **ANDREA DORIA** sank, they pulled me off that and the **DORIA** story took three days out of my schedule.” He was to be whisked to Pier 59 on Manhattan's West Side to meet and interview those rescued from the **Italia** luxury liner. Just hours after the **DORIA** plunged to the bottom 65 miles off Nantucket, Lord, diver Peter Gimbel, and a feeding frenzy of reporters converged on the survivors staggering off the rescue liner **ILE DE FRANCE**.

Nearly forty years later, with faded yellow clippings and the *LIFE* cover story to jog his memory, Lord, the world's foremost authority on the **TITANIC**, talked with us about the wreck most divers call the “Mount Everest of Diving” — the **ANDREA DORIA**. To picture Walter Lord's home, imagine a most intriguing movie set for a world famous historian and author of over a dozen books. Decorate like the Explorers Club and add fifty years of artifacts, paintings, books, and



one-of-a-kind rarities only encountered in Sotheby's auctions. Wheelchair bound from almost two decades of Parkinson's, today at 78 Lord's enthusiasm for ocean liners and sea history is undimmed.

Lord was 39 that hot July evening in 1956 when he pressed towards the **DORIA** survivors, notebook in hand and stenographer at his side. Fifty had died, mostly from the collision. Today, Lord remembers the **DORIA** sinking as a “three day writing job,” and while wreck divers consider her a big deal, to him the story pales next to the **TITANIC** —

his story of a lifetime, the unsinkable titan, the combination of negligence and denial which lost 1700 lives.

Together we searched an old oak file cabinet and finally found Lord's file folder marked “**Andrea Doria**.” The contents hadn't been disturbed in almost four decades. The folder contained clippings, notes on the story, steno transcripts of survivor interviews and eyewitness accounts, and a letter on **ANDREA DORIA** letterhead. Transcripts had red circles and underlines and notes scribbled in the margins, which would ultimately be edited into his *LIFE* cover story.

## COVERING THE STORY

“We all piled into a car at 50 Rockefeller Plaza and headed for the waterfront — we still didn't know if the ship had definitely gone down at that point,” Lord recalls. “The driver from the Time-*LIFE* motor pool knew certain magic words to get us on the pier. In this case the name ‘City Councilman Earl Brown’ got us through the gates right in the basement of the pier — where the cargo would be unloaded that evening.”

“The crash happened twelve minutes after midnight — the orchestra was playing *Arrivederci Roma*.” What had actually happened would be clarified later. “The **STOCKHOLM** had come barging into the **ANDREA DORIA**'s best suite. Each ship was turning the wrong way...” “The **ANDREA DORIA**,” it was found in the hearings, “was clearly to blame.”

“It took the **ANDREA DORIA** 8 or 10 hours to sink once she was hit.” “She didn't sink until 1:30 p.m. She sank in broad daylight with Coast Guard planes flying above her.”

“The night after the **DORIA** went down,” Lord recalls, “it was hard to find a more exciting evening for a ship lover. The harbor was electrified as a flotilla of rescue ships and other boats blew their whistles and saluted the returning **ILE DE FRANCE**. The **ILE DE FRANCE** unloaded the survivors and some **ANDREA DORIA** life boats immediately upon landing, with the passengers glad to be on solid ground.” “Reporters were grabbing survivors — sort of *He's mine, he's yours*.”

"When we got up on the pier level I'd never seen such an uproar — but we didn't even then know for sure the ship had actually gone down, though there were rumors. We stood up near the promenade deck of the ILE DE FRANCE and watched them coming, pouring down the gangplank ...I had never seen a more shocked group than those first people."

Lord's interviews and the survivors' stories make up the majority of his August 6, 1956 *LIFE* cover story. The cover shot was taken from the ILE DE FRANCE while the ANDREA DORIA was being abandoned. "She was still afloat, listing heavily." A *LIFE* photographer happened to be on the ILE DE FRANCE on another assignment.

#### PETER GIMBEL

During the assignment Lord met legendary diver Peter Gimbel and the two became good friends. To divers, Gimbel is the Sir Edmund Hillary of the DORIA, the first to dive it. Lord and Gimbel, who was three years older, were both ocean liner buffs, and became "founding fathers of the Ocean Liner Museum." This so-called museum didn't then exist, it was in the talking stage. Today it is a private collection and an embryonic project.

"Peter didn't exactly mention the idea of diving the DORIA as we stood on Pier 59, but he was the best known diver of his day — I saw his interest, and could easily imagine him thinking about diving her." "He took his best diving gear very very soon after. I would say two weeks. There was no problem finding it. Of course it *was* reachable with diving equipment. The TITANIC was only reachable with salvage equipment." Much later, "Gimbel did get the safe — there were about four or five safes on the ship. I don't know how much there was."

The ANDREA DORIA continued to be big news for *LIFE*. The September 17, 1956 cover story featured Peter Gimbel with the headline "DARING DIVERS INSIDE 'ANDREA DORIA': THEIR STORY PLUS COLOR PHOTOS."

#### COMPARING THE TITANIC

As an historian and aficionado of sea disasters, Lord holds the TITANIC in first place. "These were two very different events. I never had the same kind of interest in the ANDREA DORIA, even though I covered the story." But to Lord, it's the differences between the disasters that make for the wrecks' relative places in sea history. Though the DORIA holds importance to divers, the TITANIC forever represents the greatest sea disaster.

"The DORIA wasn't as elegant as the TITANIC," Lord said, probably revealing his preference for Edwardian opulence over 50's Italian Moderne. "Also, the DORIA was on her 3rd or 4th year of service, so she wasn't all that brand new — with the TITANIC it was her maiden voyage."

Another difference is that the TITANIC was "lost." The ANDREA DORIA was never lost. She sank in broad daylight and the coordinates weren't at issue. It took from 1912 to 1985 before the TITANIC was found, using state of the art equipment and explorer Bob Ballard's persistence and teamwork. The DORIA, on the other hand, was reached using conventional scuba, scant weeks after she went down.

Has any other disaster captured the imagination the way the TITANIC did? "No. That's it," says Lord. "The TITANIC was an ordeal." The ANDREA DORIA didn't have the same tragic proportions as the TITANIC — no boats ignoring distress rockets, no icebergs, no questions of competence, no shortage of lifeboats — no pride in her unsinkability. "The TITANIC was such an awful tragedy. Almost all the people on the ANDREA DORIA were picked up out of the sea or on boats." Coincidentally, the 705 TITANIC survivors were brought back by THE CARPATHIA to Pier 54 just blocks from where DORIA survivors landed.

From Lord's perspective, compared with the TITANIC, "The sinking of the ANDREA DORIA was more or less just a modern ocean tragedy."

#### THE LOST DORIA LETTER

We discovered a curious letter, buried in the file cabinet, which tied together the TITANIC, the ANDREA DORIA, and Walter Lord. Lord recognized the yellowing ANDREA DORIA letterhead; and began to remember the letter — forgotten for 40 years: "This letter was from my mother's sister. It appears to have been written and mailed to me from the ship in May of 1956."

Andrea Doria May 16 - 1956

"Dear Walter -

On board there is a Mr. & Mrs. Brown who live in Honolulu - Last Thursday when we had the "boat drill" we happened to be next to them and afterwards had tea together - In the course of conversation "that book about the Titanic" was mentioned & I immediately claimed you - they were most interested..."

*A Night to Remember* was a best seller that summer. Although Lord couldn't be sure, he suspected there were more than a few DORIA passengers that July who had been enjoying his book about the TITANIC. The letter shows that as DORIA passengers went through life boat drills, just months before she sank, the TITANIC was on their minds.

Has Walter Lord seen substantial interest in the ANDREA DORIA outside the scuba diving community? "A little bit. But nothing at all on the scale of the interest in the TITANIC. Divers are interested in the ANDREA DORIA *because they can dive it*, thousands of parts and artifacts have been salvaged — they like the name."

Today the Lord and Gimbel *LIFE* issues are prized collectibles. We found ours in a rare and out-of-print shop. Smelling a bit of age as they do, they are a nostalgic reminder that once upon a time the cover of *LIFE* was the biggest story in America that week. ■



J. Silverstein

# Steve Bielenda: Godfather of the Doria

An Exclusive Interview by Jeffrey J. Silverstein

You'll have some boat captains hoisting their battle flags over that claim. "Sez who?" Fact is, Steve Bielenda wasn't the first guy to dive the ANDREA DORIA. He doesn't have the most personal dives on it. Though his collection of artifacts is primo, he certainly doesn't have the biggest. So what makes this affable, crusty and charismatic 60 year old dive boat captain the "Godfather?" Steve's boat, the internationally famous WAHOO, has undisputedly taken more divers to and from the "Mount Everest" of wreck diving than any other in history. He's been the mentor, coach, confidante, and repository of expertise for the cream of the world class DORIA divers. When the men and women who want to do it right are ready for the DORIA, Bielenda's WAHOO, with Captain Janet Bieser, is more often than not the way to go.

**When did you first hear about the DORIA?** When I first started diving in 1959. It sank in 1956, the year I got married. To be honest, it meant nothing to me, I don't even remember anything about it at all. But in 1959 it seemed the first thing that any diver ever mentioned was the ANDREA DORIA. Peter Gimbel and his partner Joseph Fox in '56 only made 5 minute dives. They were diving double hose regulators. If you look at the pictures in the 1956 LIFE magazine I don't think they actually ever got to the hull. I think they have one shot of the wing bridge.

Right now if you dive that wreck, the port side of the hull, cause she's laying on her side, is at 170 feet. When the wreck sank, she was 20 feet higher; the port side was only about 150 feet deep. And probably only about 140 feet to the boat davits. Over time the ship slowly settled into the bottom. Just like when you go to the beach — you stand where the wave action is and your feet start to sink into the bottom.

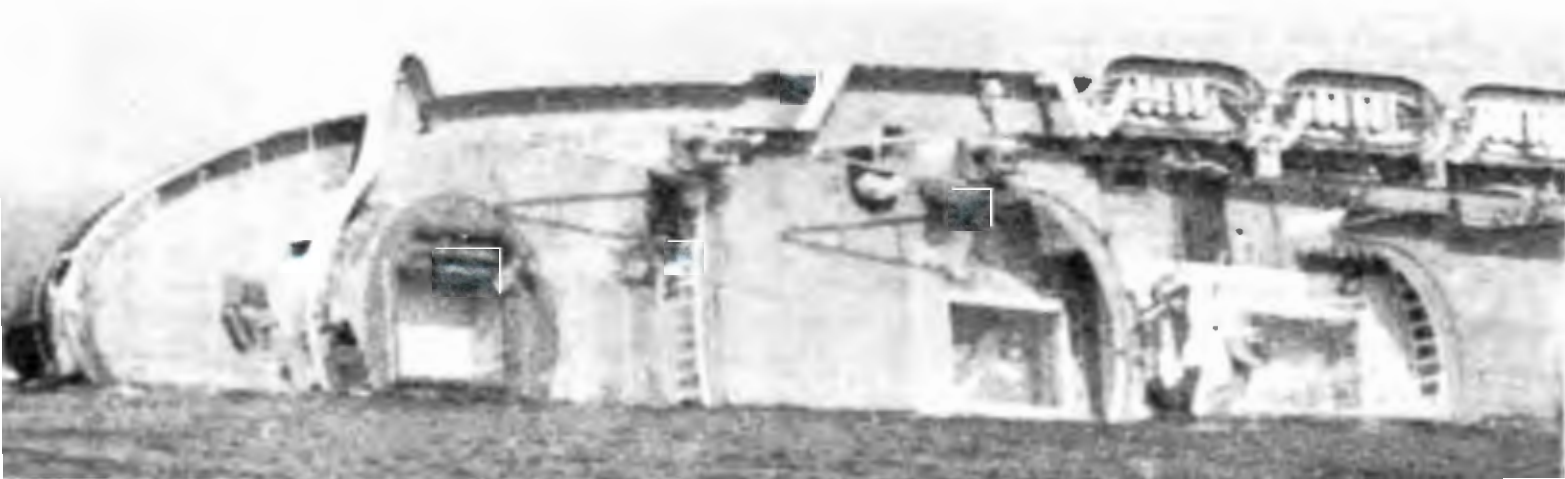
**Did Gimbel originally dive the DORIA for commercial reasons?** Peter was a good sport diver and he was an adventurer. He went there to dive and snap a couple of pictures and that was it. He didn't at first go out there for any commercial expedition at all. Gimbel went out on his first full expedition in 1976 with IUC, International Underwater Contractors, to assess why the ship sank. IUC was there for a 30 day expedition and they really came back with nothing. Gimbel had sold the rights to the story to Channel 7, the New

York City ABC-TV station. They wound up with really poor footage of fish and nets, and it fell on its face on television.

**The Italia Line never sent anybody down?** They weren't even interested in it. The insurance company had paid off their claim. There were at least 3 or 4 different commercial entities that got involved who wanted to raise the ANDREA DORIA, but nobody actually went out and did too much. One was a plastics company which wanted to pump ping-pong balls down to it and raise the ship.

**When did sport divers start to dive the DORIA?** It became a real lure in the '60s. In 1967 a trip was put together with divers like Frank Scalli, Winston Chee, George Hoffman, Evelyn Bartram [Dudas] and the late John Dudas on Paul Forsburg's boat, the VIKING STAR, out of Montauk. On that '67 expedition John Dudas got into the bridge and recovered the compass and the binnacle cover. By the time Gimbel went back out in '76, the bridge had completely fallen off.

**Did Gimbel ever get the safe?** He got one safe out of the wreck in 1981. There was a TV show and the *National Enquirer* was involved. They opened the safe on live TV and there was a couple hundred dollars in there in American money and some other small items — nothing really spectacular. Remember, it took the DORIA almost twelve hours to sink — there was plenty of time for the pursers to empty the safes.





**Steve, when was your first time?** My first time was in 1981. I was supposed to be on the trip in '67, but I couldn't afford the 200 bucks. I was scheduled to go there a bunch of times before '81 with friends of mine. But it seemed that every time the trip was supposed to go either the weather blew out or they didn't have enough guys who wanted to go cod and pollack fishing out there.

I made my first trip out there in 1981 on the WAHOO. Bill Campbell from Rhode Island had commissioned a 12 pound bronze plaque commemorating its 25th year and wanted to place it on the wreck. Billy asked me to take the plaque down so he could shoot a picture of it. We got down on to the wreck, on the hull right above the promenade deck. I had the plaque and Campbell snapped off a bunch of pictures of me and then motioned for me to discard the plaque on the wreck — so I laid my goodie bag out and I just threw the plaque. I don't know *how* it did, but it landed on my bag. I wrapped it up, I finished my dive, and I came up. When I came up, John Lachenmeyer, obviously planning to recover it, asked me "Where did they throw the plaque?" And I said, patting my bag, "I got it right here."

**Over the 40 years, how many different divers have been on the wreck?** Fewer than 500. It's really been a very small group of people. We have run over thirty-five expeditions to the ANDREA DORIA over the last fifteen years. Not more than 100 to 120 people get to dive it each year.

**What keeps the number so small?** The distance, the time, and the depth. The ANDREA DORIA is 65 miles offshore from Nantucket. The WAHOO leaves from Captree, Long Island, which is 160 miles away. Most people are just not up to a 10-18 hour boat ride, sometimes in rough seas. Then you need to stay on the wreck for 2-3 days to get any kind of diving done. Most people end up spending about 5 days preparing, going, diving and coming home from a DORIA trip.

Then we have the depth. The DORIA sank in 250 feet of water and then settled into another 20 feet of sand. The highest point of the wreck is the hand rail from the promenade deck — this can be reached at about

170 feet, when you can position the boat at that point and your tie-in diver can put you there. Although this depth seems to be 40 feet deeper than deep sport diving there are a number of other factors that come into play. The average dive is in 200-210 feet. Any interior exploration is extremely dangerous due to deterioration and the fact that the ship lies on its side. Orientation can be difficult at times even for the experienced diver.

**Aren't there divers who go just for the day?**

There are a few guys who run out of Nantucket on fast boats for day runs. These are usually the sport fishing boats who have been to the wreck before. They are able to get a big price from a handful of divers who just want to go out for the day. I refer to them as "Yuppie Divers" — divers who would like to do the dive, have a lot of money to buy equipment, and charter a boat for the day. They are just going to do a bounce dive. Most doing it this way do it without any real prior deep diving experience.

**How many divers have died on the DORIA?**

Unfortunately, six. The first was John Barnett in 1981, then John Ormsby in 1985, and in 1988, Joe Drozd. In 1992 there were two deaths, both within two weeks of each other — Matthew Lawrence and Mike Scofield. '92 was a rough season all around, not only on the DORIA but other wrecks. The last death occurred during the summer of 1994 — a young man named Bob Santulli.



**Why is the ANDREA DORIA called the Mount Everest of dives?**

It just sort of came about as divers started talking about the "touchable" dives. At one time scuba diving to 150 feet was a very big deal. Although people *talked* about it as being 250, no one had actually been to the sand until recently. So when you talked to divers about diving the DORIA they always talked about the water depth, not to where the top of the wreck was.

**Who's been to the bottom and looked up?**

There's probably only been 10 divers that have dove the bottom. Gary Gentile has been there as well as Gary Gilligan, John Moyer, Steve Gatto, Tom Packer, Bill Nagle, and Hank Garvin. There were a few divers who





**John Moyer recovers a Gambone ceramic panel from ANDREA DORIA in July 1993 as R/V WAHOO crew awaits topside.**

were on the bottom during John Moyer's 1994 expedition when they were looking for the bell. The guy who did the most exploration at the bottom was Capt. Billy Deans — he did a 30 minute mixed gas dive circumnavigating the wreck using his big scooter while running video — a spectacular dive.

**Is any other wreck a contender for being the Mount Everest?** No, none of them are as famous. For people who want to recover artifacts it is the most "accessible-inaccessible" wreck around. Not a day goes by where I don't get a phone call from someone who just got certified who asks, "How much do I need to know to dive the ANDREA DORIA — I hear that's a real good dive."

**How do you answer that question?** To do the DORIA safely, I would like to see somebody who had at least 200 wreck dives with at least 100 of them in 100 feet, and another 50 - 75 of them deeper than 170 feet. The diver also needs to be an avid diver, someone who feels comfortable diving anywhere. You don't have to be a technical diver, you don't have to have been diving forever — you just have to be comfortable in the underwater environment. You have to know how to manage your gas supply, which is just air for most DORIA dives. We had a group of divers come over from Italy in 1994, all ages, all but one in wet suits, all on air — they did 180 foot dives for 15 minutes or so and they

did not get ambitious. We had a woman last year, a real good diver — she just wanted to go to the promenade deck and look around — three days on the boat, she only did one dive. she had nothing to prove to anyone. All of these divers were comfortable with themselves and their diving abilities.

**Tell us about Gimbel's Hole.** On the 1981 WAHOO expedition we left a marker buoy tied to the promenade stanchion rail. On a subsequent Gimbel trip Jack McKinney went down our yellow polypropylene line and came up and said, this is a good tie-in place. That was right where the first class loading doors were. They then dropped the cutting torches down, smashed the port lights out of the doors, put a lifting cable through it and then they burned the hinges off. And that became Gimbel's Hole.

**When did John Moyer get involved?** John started diving the DORIA in the '80s, — he developed an absolute fascination with the wreck — he became his own historian. He did an enormous amount of research on the building of the ship, he spoke with crew members and some survivors. Not only did he recover artifacts personally, but was able to purchase one of the original ship's models. He has a unique collection of ANDREA DORIA memorabilia. But most of all he wanted to recover the bell... In 1993 he petitioned and won in federal court an admi-

rality arrest of the wreck to make sure that whatever he found on the DORIA would be his — especially the bell.

**Did he ever get it?** The bow bell has still never been found despite huge efforts. But in 1985, John was involved with a team of divers on the original SEEKER with Bill Nagle, Gary Gentile, Tom Packer, Steve Gatto, big Artie Kirchner and some others and they recovered the stern bell. As far as I know Bill Nagle's wife still has that bell.

**What other artifacts have been recovered?** There was the 750 pound life-sized bronze statue of Admiral Andrea Doria from the first class lounge. And also the artwork that was brought up on the 1993 Moyer expedition. While the main thrust of the '93 expedition was to locate and recover the bow bell, another project had also taken place. In 1982 Gary Gilligan had come across some large ceramic panels — probably five by six feet in size, buried under some rubble in the Winter Garden, too big to recover. Apparently in '91 or '92 when Moyer and Billy Deans were doing research dives for the bell project they came across the panels once again. These panels were basically architectural dividers. They were unique, all hand sculpted by Gambone, an Italian artist, depicting mythical images of people, fish and animals. We recovered two complete panels weighing over 700 pounds each.

There are also some very beautiful small ceramic panels, about 24 by 18 inches, that lined each side of the the first class bar. It appears from old photographs that there were

Bill Campbell



30 of these scenes created by Romano Rui. Very few of these have ever been recovered completely intact.

**Who has the most Doria artifacts?** In quality — Gary Gentile and John Hulbert probably have the most First Class china. There are so many different pieces, a lot of the small, delicate items came out of the gift shop, statuettes, some personal items. Of the Rui's — only a few people have complete unbroken ones — Gary Gentile has two, Gary Gilligan and Pat Rooney each have one.

In quantity, John Hulbert has hundreds of pieces of First, Second and Third Class china, including the very rare First Class coffee sets with the Venetian gondola scenes painted on them. The differences between the china classes is: First Class is red and gold, Second Class china is blue and gold and Third Class china is just blue.

**Are there any other coveted artifacts?** Divers don't go out there to collect brass, although some have. I don't know of anyone with portholes, although prized items are the first class promenade deck windows. They are about two by four feet, numbered, bronze and glass. When restored and polished they have made very beautiful tables. Also on board was a 1956 Chrysler experimental car developed in Italy — the car has never been recovered.

**Do many women dive the wreck?** The first woman to dive it was Evelyn Bartram Dudas, in 1966 — she's been back many times, and

in fact this summer, she will do her thirtieth anniversary dive. Capt. Janet Bieser was the youngest woman to dive it in 1981 and continues to dive it every year. Sally Wahrman is the woman with the most dives on the DORIA — upwards of 68 dives. Cecilia Connoly, Cathie Cush, Lisa Herrera and other women continue to come out.

**Where do you see diving on this wreck over the next five to ten years?** I expect that it's probably going to accelerate. If you have enough money to afford all the technical equipment, and can learn how to do mixed gas diving, you want to go out there and dive *this* wreck. Just the fact that diving mix gives you a clearer head makes diving the DORIA more accessible.

My fear is that there will be divers who don't have the experience attempting this wreck just because they can dive mix. This is not a wreck for the inexperienced. However, it is still a dive that can be done by many if they don't get too ambitious. Take it slow and stay on the outside.

The other danger is deterioration. Time has taken its toll on the ship; some of the steel walls inside the wreck have deteriorated and many times what is showing on the deck plans just isn't there anymore. Interior navigation can get quite difficult.

Technology in the future *could* allow thousands of people to get out there and explore this wreck, but it's the location and the sea itself that's going to keep those thousands of people from ever going to the DORIA. It's just too inaccessible for everyday diving. ■

**Captain Steve Blelenda supervises hoisting of 700-pound Gambone panels.**



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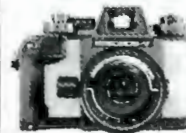
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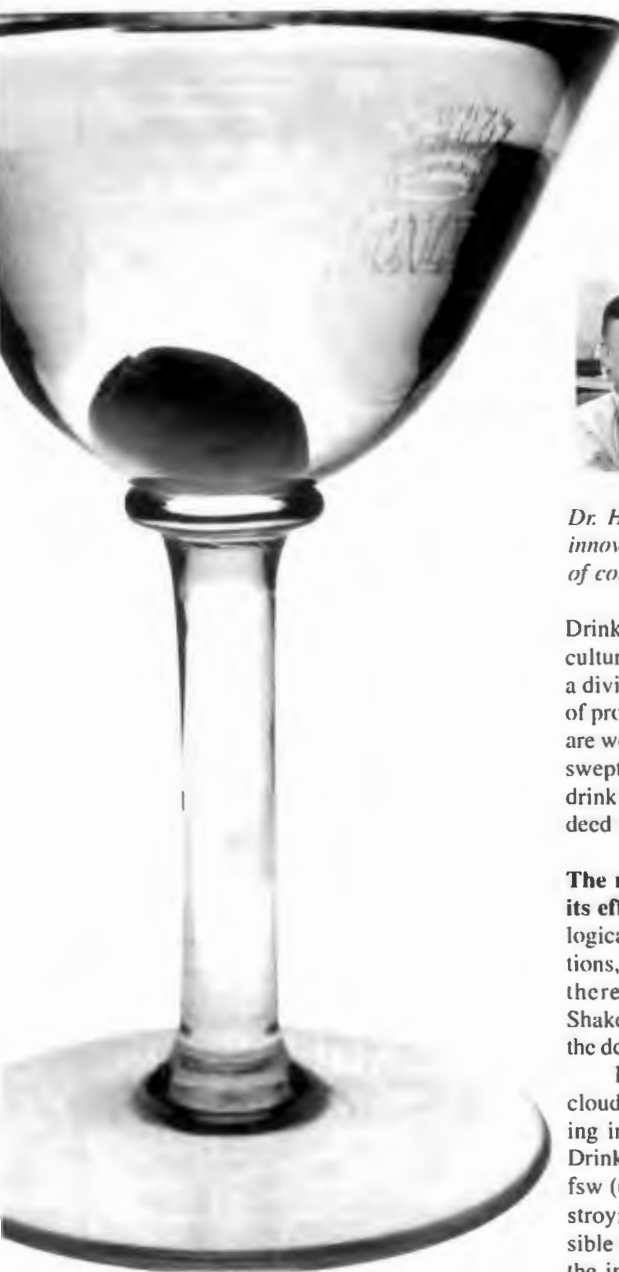
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# Diving into another drink?

## Two experts discuss the DIVING-ALCOHOL CONNECTION

A SUB AQUA EXCLUSIVE



Dr. R.W. Hamilton:  
Dive Physiologist

*Dr. Hamilton is a dive physiologist whose innovations have been pivotal to the progress of commercial and technical diving.*

Drinking, for better or worse, is part of our culture, and certainly it is likely to be part of a diving holiday. Some try to blame all sorts of problems on ethyl alcohol, many of which are well deserved and some of which are just swept along with morality themes. But when drinking exceeds "moderation," there is indeed cause for concern.

**The major hazard of ethanol in diving is its effect on judgement.** From a pharmacological perspective, alcohol removes inhibitions, and the natural drives that have been there all the time are uncovered. As Shakespeare wrote in *Macbeth*, "it provokes the desire but it takes away the performance."

Removal of inhibition and concomitant clouding of judgement can be life threatening in diving. Turn Martini's Law around: Drinking 4 margaritas is like diving to 200 fsw (60 meters) on air when it comes to destroying good sense and making it impossible to deal with a problem. In driving a car the impairment is also to reaction time and

muscular coordination, but far more dangerous is the destruction of good judgement, making the taking of big chances appear to be the thing to do.

**Alcohol and nitrogen narcosis are additive,** so both at the same time are worse than either alone. The scuba community does pretty well on this matter, with alcohol not being a big factor in scuba fatalities. Nearly half the bends cases reported to Divers Alert Network in their 1994 report occurred with divers who had a drink the night before. However, a scientific study proving causality has not been performed to date. Drownings, on the other hand, are most prevalent with young males who have been drinking; these stats come down hard on drinking.

The physiology of alcohol includes a couple of functions that do have another effect on divers. Alcohol tends to cause blood to be shunted to the skin, **giving the user a feeling of warmth** (and perhaps a red nose or face). That may be misleading, since this allows the body to lose heat more rapidly. This is not really a good way to keep warm; it doesn't work.

**Alcohol is a diuretic.** This is complicated by the fact that it may be taken with large amounts of liquid which also contribute to urine flow ("Let's go rent a few beers"), and also by the prominent diuretic effects induced by both immersion and skin cooling. Alcohol's diuretic effect can be detrimental when alcohol is taken in excess on days be-

fore diving when it is allowed to cause dehydration; diving when dehydrated has been shown to increase one's susceptibility to decompression sickness. The hard evidence is not strong here, but rehydration is well known and successful in helping the treatment of DCS. **It is not a good idea to dive with a hangover or when dehydrated.**

Dr. Lee Somers, of the University of Michigan, tells in a Sea Grant publication of a diver who, after several days of drinking, found he could not spit enough to defog his mask, and on the same dive got spinal DCS. It does take a lot of drinking to reach this point, and judicious rehydration will avoid such problems. This is a dilemma, because some people tend to restrict fluid intake in order to avoid the often irresistible urge to dampen the insulation in the dry suit while underwater.

Some restriction of fluid is acceptable as long as urine is light and not dark yellow and is still flowing, but frank dehydration is a no-no when diving at all near decompression limits, whether no-stop or otherwise. Much fun has been made of divers wearing diapers on 2 or 3 hour dives, but this is not a bad idea. If your body processes fluids quickly this may be the best way for you to stay well hydrated *and* manage its disposal. In any case, one should make a sincere effort to rehydrate very well after every dive.

It has been said about martinis, one is not enough, and three is too many. But whatever alcohol one drinks, it is a good idea to be aware of the effects and consider the consequences when it is mixed with diving. ■



**Dr. Jennifer Hunt:**  
**Social**  
**Psychologist**

*Dr. Hunt, an active diver, is a noted social psychologist and psychotherapist who has studied risk in dive injuries.*

**How widespread is alcohol usage and abuse in the diving community?** I think that it is probably more widespread among divers than some other groups.

**Is alcohol use more prevalent in scuba diving than in other challenging sports?** I believe that it is, because diving is not a competitive sport that demands the same level of physical conditioning. Alcohol use varies with the nature of the sport and the age of the participants. In a sport like competitive swimming, alcohol is not much of a problem during the season, at least. There are strong cultural prohibitions against its use because it

interferes with performance. Athletes are concerned with winning. So, when a drug interferes with performance, they think twice. It's not so clear to the diver that drinking the night before may interfere with performance.

**Could you describe different types of divers who drink?** There are at least four types of divers who have a particular relationship with alcohol. First, there are **alcoholics**. Some of these are binge drinkers and some drink every day. Some alcoholics drink the night before and right after a dive, and some manage to avoid drinking while they are doing a lot of diving. A few drink before diving, but I don't think that many.

Second there are **reformed alcoholics** who don't drink at all. Members of the first group may not perceive themselves as alcoholics. Members of the second group know they are and do something about it. There are also the **divers who never drink at all** or have never drank except on a special occasion.

Finally we get to the most common — the **social drinkers**. Some of the latter drink the night before or after diving in relatively moderate amounts. Some like to party and when they are on a recreational diving trip, they can consume quite a lot. Others don't drink during the period in which they are diving, but have a drink at the end of the week. Then there are the partiers, those that set out to dive and drink and party all week long.

**What about social pressures to drink?** There are some social pressures to drink, and some people will respond to them by drinking more than they might otherwise. The kind of pressure depends on the environment and company each diver keeps. Divers who have been on a trip to dive a deep wreck may experience similar feelings as law enforcement officers who have been on a dangerous run, or athletes who have won a major victory. They want something to help relieve the tension, facilitate celebration, increase the camaraderie. They drink. Alcohol may help divers unwind or let go after a period of intense activity in which they had to maintain total mental and physical concentration and control.

Alcoholics like company. When they have a friend who's leaving the fold, they'll try to induce him or her to drink more, which is sad. When people drink, they act differently than they might otherwise. If you don't drink and you look at drunk people, they seem ridiculous. So if you feel you have to be one of the crowd and not an outsider, you drink. You lose friends if you stop drinking. I don't know if I'd call the friends you lose real friends. But certainly you lose them.

**Are there any sub-groups within diving where alcohol and drug usage is more significant?** There's probably a higher percent-

age of people doing higher risk diving, who may have or have had issues with alcohol. They may not drink any longer, but alcohol is more of a social focus, as well as for some, an individual one. Although I'm conjecturing here, there may be something about the personality of people who are compulsively "bitten by the diving bug" who are predisposed to addictive behavior. I think that marijuana and cocaine use, though existent, is strongly discouraged, especially among the technical and advanced divers.

#### **What about drinking the night before?**

One of the difficulties about drinking and diving is that although it's clear that a drunk diver cannot function well underwater, there are no clear studies of the relationship between drinking the night before and diving the next day. Because drinking is so prevalent many divers can't see the potential problems. In my interviews of dive accident victims I did not see a direct relationship between an injury and drinking. None drank immediately before the dive, although many drank the night before. Since they had done this so many times before, it was easy for them to think that it did them no harm.

There is also a strong correlation between alcoholism and depression. The alcoholic diver is probably subject to depressive mood fluctuations, and that may affect their judgement. Alcohol enhances depression.

**How should a diver manage a partner who has been drinking?** The same way he would manage somebody who is drunk and about to drive a car. Be firm, but remember that this is not the time to confront them about alcohol; this is the time to keep them out of the water. If the buddy is unreasonable, inform the boat captain. If somebody is planning to go in the water drunk, there are not many alternatives you are talking about somebody's life.

But if we're talking about somebody who binge drank the night before and appears to be going in sober, then we are describing a whole lot of people. In that instance, unless the diver demonstrates drunken behavior, and has been incapable of making decisions, I don't think you should tell the captain. But if he is obviously drunk, you must do something to save his life. ■

#### **For more information contact:**

*American Council on Alcoholism, Inc.*  
800-527-5344

*Alcohol Abuse - 24 Hour Action Crisis Line*  
800-283-2600

*Alcoholics Anonymous - World Services*  
212-870-3400

*Al-Anon - World Services (for families and friends of alcoholics)* 800-356-9996

# California's Hot Channels

By Patrick Smith



**Diver with sunstar off Northern Channel Islands.**

Dale and Kim Sheckler

On a clear day, within sight of downtown L.A., the Channel Islands off Southern California are perhaps one of the best dive venues available to divers today. Paradoxically, they are one of the least known.

The California Channel Islands consist of eight islands which are sprinkled down the coast in a generally northeast to southwest direction. The closest of these, Anacapa, lies a mere 11 miles from the nearest harbor, while San Nicholas Island, home of bragging-sized lobster, lies a more isolated 60 miles offshore. The islands are usually broken into the Southern Channel Islands, which consist of Santa Barbara, San Nicholas, San Clemente, and the world famous Santa Catalina Island, and the Northern Channel Islands which are made up of lonely San Miguel on the extreme northwest end of the chain followed by Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, and Anacapa. Though all the islands have unique and excellent dive opportunities, my own preference is for the northern group, whose diverse and unsurpassed underwater environment provides the kinds of surprises

that keep even veteran divers from becoming complacent.

## **SAN MIGUEL'S CUBA**

San Miguel, as the northernmost and most exposed island, takes the brunt of what the Pacific deals out. Located just about 25 miles south of Point Conception, which is known as the 'Cape Horn of the Pacific' by sailors, San Miguel diving must be carefully synchronized to catch weather windows of opportunity. But, when they occur, the fortunate diver can indulge in world-class diving that must be experienced to be believed.

Although it is much easier now, years ago when I first tried to dive San Miguel, it was not easy. Navy control of the island — which has since passed to the National Park Service — and the surrounding waters, along with the notoriously rapid changes in weather, created considerable difficulty in experiencing the uniqueness of San Miguel's dive opportunities. Over the course of a 13 month period, nine attempts to reach San Miguel's fabled shipwreck CUBA at Point

Bennett were aborted due to weather, and three due to Navy closure of the area. Several times we were within a mile of the Foul Area where the remains of the CUBA lie — literally within sight — when sea conditions or weather forced us to abandon the quest. But on the 13th trip we made it, and it was more than worth the wait.

The steamer CUBA, a Pacific Mail Steamship Company vessel of 3,000 gross tons and over 300 feet in length, had been built in Hamburg, Germany in 1897 as the COBLENZ. She was purchased by Pacific Mail in 1920, and was placed on a scheduled run between San Francisco and Central and South American ports. In September 1923, the CUBA was northbound with passengers, a cargo of coffee, miscellaneous merchandise and \$2.5 million in silver bullion, when she lost her way in heavy fog and found what is known as the Foul Area just west of Point Bennett on the extreme west end of San Miguel Island. Once she hit, the huge seas dragged the vessel through more than 90° of arc across the reefs, effectively ripping out her bottom, but providing a lee that allowed the safe departure of all crew and passengers, and ultimately, the bullion. After a brief tenure on top of the rocks that killed her, the seas pushed the CUBA into deeper water between the reefs.

A dive on the CUBA is like visiting Eden for a diver. When I have been able to dive the wreck, I've never had less than 100 foot visibility. The CUBA's remains lie in about 35 feet of water in a shallow rocky area between the surrounding reefs. Millennia of wave action has removed all but the heaviest material from the bottom so there is no sediment or sand to be stirred up by the constant surge. Typically the large swells also keep the kelp growth in the area to a minimum, allowing broad vistas of the wreck and surrounding reefs. The vessel has been split open down her keel line and each half of the vessel peeled outward and laid open for inspection. In many areas it is possible to sight along the undulating hull plates and track rows of portholes sitting exposed across the bottom. Toward the centerline of the wreck

areas of the distinctive purple and white pebble-surfaced tile delineate what were once passenger bathrooms aboard the CUBA. Invariably you'll come across one of the ornate, solid bronze, single handled lavatory faucets which usually still operate smoothly, or a cabin toilet which has been flushing continually for the last 70+ years courtesy of the Pacific tides. The CUBA's machinery, still amazingly intact, stands upright on the bottom and at low tide is so immense it nearly breaks the surface.

One of the unique experiences on the CUBA is the ability to swim through the engines. The open crankcase technology of the CUBA's triple-expansion steam engines allows you to examine the old power plants from the inside out. Slalom between the tree-like connecting rods while checking out the pistons overhead and the crankshaft beneath you, then continue aft and follow the propeller shafts to the battered remains of the CUBA's props. Any segment of the entire power train is interesting enough to command your interest for an entire dive (and often does), but you still have the remains of the rest of the CUBA strewn around you to distract your attention at every moment.

In addition to gin-clear water and nearly unlimited bottom time on this world-class shipwreck, the sea life in the area is breathtaking as well. Colorful red, black and white male sheepshead of 30 pounds or more looking like tri-colored submersibles as they sweep back and forth in the surge are quite common in the area. Large kelp bass and ling cod up to 40 pounds also call the wreck home. And since the wreck is within a stone's throw of one of the largest pinniped breeding areas on the Pacific Coast, it is standard operating procedure to have at least one seal or sea lion escort during part or all of any CUBA dive.

#### **Richardson Rock**

Nearby is another dive spot whose character, though completely different from the CUBA experience, is none the less spectacular. Richardson Rock is a stony spire that thrusts out of the Pacific some eight miles northwest of San Miguel. Sitting in open unprotected water, Richardson, though difficult to reach, provides spectacular pinnacle and wall diving. The currents that sweep the area provide the nutrients for the teeming invertebrate life that carpet the area in a riot of dazzling colors. *Corynactis* (a type of colonial anemone) in fluorescent red, pinks, mauve, orange, and white, compete with other anemones and sea stars of nearly every color of the rainbow for space, on this oceanic oasis. Large rock scallops and mussels are also found in abundance and are eagerly sought by both gourmet and gourmand. Fur seals, harbor seals, sea lions, and elephant seals are also commonly seen residents of the Rock. On one dive, while my

buddy and I were working away from a wall, I got the adrenaline kick-start of my life when I looked out into the misty blue open water and saw something very big headed our way.

Out in this area, large "things" that head toward you can be white sharks. In this case it was a huge elephant seal displaying decidedly atypical behavior by swimming by within 10 feet of us, then swiftly disappearing back into the misty blue distance; I didn't need caffeine for a week.

I have heard that blue-water free divers work the area around Richardson and score big tuna and yellowtail, but those folks are a lot more macho than me. Besides, my religion dictates that I never drag bloody fish with me within 25 miles of a known white shark communc, amen.

#### **Santa Rosa's Talcott Shoal**

Just a few miles southeast of San Miguel Island is the second largest of the Northern Channel Islands, Santa Rosa, whose miles of shoreline and offshore areas provide myriad excellent dive opportunities. The island's topography — rocky cliffs with deep canyons — foreshadows what you can expect as underwater structure. Talcott Shoal, an immense kelp forest area on the northwest side of Santa Rosa, is a premiere dive site and shows this terrain to best advantage.

The deepest area you'll find on Talcott is perhaps 80 fsw, but precipitous cliffs, ledges and pinnacles, some coming within 10 feet of the surface, make it an underwater paradise. For the photographer there's a spectrum of colorful invertebrates. For the hunter, large bass, rockfish and ling cod are available all year long, along with abalone and granddaddy-sized lobster in season. A couple of years ago, an early season dive at Talcott with warm water, and 80 foot visibility produced limits for my buddy and me. Total weight for the 14 bugs - 106 pounds. Do the math and you'll understand why everyday Talcott rates as a primo dive spot.

#### **The Aggi**

Talcott has other enticements as well. The AGGI, a 265 foot, steel-hulled square-rigged ship, was built in Scotland in 1894 and spent her career carrying general cargoes to ports around the world. In May 1915, while carrying a cargo of grain from San Francisco for war-torn Europe, she was driven onto Talcott's high spot during a violent storm. Today she provides divers with the added benefit of a spot within a spot. Her remains are scattered over at least an acre of bottom, and coming across a part of her hull or one of her masts while navigating through the beautiful kelp forests of the area is quite a rush. This sight is one of the things that has kept me coming back time after time. That and the fact that the biggest and most cunning of the local lobsters seem to be attracted to the AGGI.

#### **Anacapa's Bomber**

Anacapa is the closest of any of the Channel Islands — only 11 miles from Channel Islands Harbor — and despite the fact that this island is the most heavily visited of the northern islands, it too has excellent and unique diving. The spot, just called THE BOMBER, is the nearly intact remains of a Grumman TBM torpedo bomber. Less than a mile from shore in about 120 fsw, it is a truly spectacular dive. Though this spot has been known to a very small group of local divers, it has never been common knowledge in the local dive community. It was only September '95 when I joined a group in an attempt to locate the TBM. Conditions were nearly perfect: no swell, no wind, warm sunny day and visibility in the 120 foot range. There was about a one knot current sweeping down the island, which we used to assist us with the search, which was conducted via drift dives with a live boat. The first three teams covered their areas with no results except for several very nice lobster. At last it was my turn.

As my buddy and I hit the water we knew that at least there was the potential of a lobster dinner if we didn't locate the plane. To extend our bottom time, we leveled out at about 75 fsw and enjoyed the view as the current carried us down the island. The area is a series of stair-step reefs with sand areas between them. I had just settled in and was marveling at the "blue room" effect that 100 foot plus visibility causes when I glanced to my right. About 80 feet away, in a semicircular sandy area between the reefs, was a dark structure that I at first took to be a small section of reef — but it had such a strange shape. Sort of "L" or boomerang shaped. It took about two heartbeats for me to realize that I was looking at the starboard aft view of an aircraft! As I turned to my buddy, he turned to me. He had seen it too.

Coming up on the WW II vintage war-plane I could see that the main structure of the Grumman was in very good shape. The pilot who set her down years ago had been very skillful. Wings and fuselage were intact, with the landing gear up. The engine which had obviously been attached when the plane made its last landing on the sea bed, had succumbed to corrosion and gravity over time and had fallen to the bottom. Now, each of the 18 cylinders on the old Pratt & Whitney radial engine were home to a plump, firmly ensconced rock scallop. Except for the port horizontal stabilizer and the vertical stabilizer, the Grumman was quite intact — there was even glass in the cockpit canopy.

In spite of the OJ trial, riots, fires and earthquakes, Southern California divers are blessed with some of the finest diving in the world — right in their own backyard. ■

*Patrick Smith has been a certified diver for over 34 years and is co-author of Shipwrecks of Southern California.*

# Diving with the Right Whales of Patagonia



By Bob Cranston



We were on assignment to capture whales. On film, that is, for the CBS television special, *Dolphins, Whales and Us*. To find our prey, cinematographers Howard Hall, Marty Snyderman and I had to go to the ends of the earth. There *is* a real Patagonia, though many people still think it's only a brand of outdoor clothing. We traveled to southern Argentina, and the special lagoon where right whales mate and give birth. In waters where Magellan sailed centuries earlier, it took quite some time for the whales to agree to appear on TV.

To get to Patagonia, near the bottom tip of South America, we flew first to Buenos Aires. After flying to Trelew the next day, we took a bus to the town of Puerto Madryn,

in the Valdez Peninsula. Then a two-hour bus ride over a bumpy dirt road. We stayed at the hotel run by the Auto Club of Argentina. There is one restaurant there, and one gas station at the lagoons. We did not have electricity 24 hours a day, so we brought plenty of batteries for slow recharging. Finally we arrived at the lagoon, and as we looked out in anticipation, we became excited at the number of whales we could see.

Whales lolled in the rolling surf near shore, and even more wrestled together out in the whitecaps. Other whales poked their tails high out of the water, and sailed along, propelled by the wind. We expected it would only be a short time before we could get up close to them. That was wishful thinking.

These magnificent mammals were named "right whales" because they were considered the *right whale* for old-time whale hunters to pursue. Supposedly they were friendly and curious and actually approached whaling ships. Also, right whales will float when dead, which is convenient for harvesting. Right whales were hunted almost to extinction until they became protected by international treaty.

Working from past experience, we tried our usual strategy of dropping some distance ahead in the path of swimming whales. But this time it didn't work. With a cold wind blowing off the nearby Antarctic ice cap, we spent a fruitless day dunking ourselves repeatedly in the cold water as the alert whales



carefully avoided us, swimming easily around and away. If you want to try this, be prepared for major drysuit diving - the water averaged 47 degrees and the Antarctic winds were constant at 15-20 knots.

After several chilly days of diving, we thought we saw a spark of hope. It seemed that the whales hesitated just for a few moments before they left us in their wake. Were they taking a quick glance at us? We hoped their curiosity was finally awakening. One afternoon we came across a mother and baby cruising along at the surface. We maneuvered the boat well up-wind of the pair, and slipped into the cold blue water. Our tactic was to stay at the surface and allow the wind to blow us towards the whales.

As we drifted closer, we noticed that the calf was trying to sneak under its mother to come towards us. But Mama would have none of this. She carefully kept her body between the baby and us. But the curious baby persisted in taking quick peeks, looking under its mother's belly at the strange new creatures.

We rolled film. Fortunately the mother whale relented and allowed her disobedient calf to approach us. Very quickly we became more afraid of this baby whale than it was of us. It moved much faster than the adult, and was playfully reckless. As it zipped close by Marty, it gave the camera a little spank with its tail. Although Marty got the shot, he also got the bruises. The excited calf frolicked back and forth, making us all nervous but happy to finally have a cooperative TV star. We also kept an eye on Mom, who stayed close. This daredevil encounter lasted until we ran out of compressed air — and then we snorkeled with the enormous juvenile delinquent until the daylight faded.

The next day had a promising beginning. Only a few minutes of motoring brought us to another young whale also idling at the surface. We slipped quietly into the choppy water, swam down to the bottom, then began to move in the direction of the whale. This time, not only was this whale unafraid, it began to move towards us. Howard was obliged to walk backwards on the slippery, muddy bottom to avoid a collision. Not one to miss a shot, he kept his camera pointed and rolled film, but he was finally forced to step aside. The whale's long face passed Howard, who kept filming as more of the whale moved by. At last Howard looked up from his eyepiece, glanced sideways, and saw the whale's large pectoral fin gliding up to him. A chill overtook Howard, who remembered being knocked unconscious by the tail of a gray whale near California years ago. Just as the powerful fin neared him, the whale easily and smoothly swept it back against its side, then brought the fin back out after it had passed. A close one.

I swam over to the young whale, and got close to where its long mouth curved into

a smile around the eye. The whale was black, with dead gray skin sloughing off. The eye was a soft brown color. I gently reached a gloved hand out to touch the whale, and scratched around its eye. The whale must have liked this, because it instantly stopped its forward motion. As I scratched more vigorously, the large eye rolled back and forth, considering me. The body of the whale was jiggly; it was easy to imagine the layers of blubber underneath the black skin. These whales have rough white growths on their heads, called callosities, and a fantastically shaped mouth. The line of the mouth curves around like a jigsaw puzzle piece; you have to study it from all angles, to get the complete picture.

We burned a lot of film and air with this agreeable whale. I was reluctant to leave the whale when my air got low; I hurried as fast as safely possible back to the boat. While I was swimming at the surface, I felt my fins strike someone. I turned to look for Howard or Marty, but instead, there was my whale friend. It actually followed me back to the boat. Incredibly, it waited under the boat while I changed film and tanks. Howard and Marty followed the whale and we all went back down to the bottom as soon as I had retanked. As each of us ran out of air in turn, we found that the whale followed *that* diver back to the boat.

We scratched that whale until our arms were tired and our thick cold-water gloves wore thin. After we used up all our film, we stowed our cameras on the boat. Just then the mother and calf we had encountered the day before showed up. By this time we were keeping near the surface because of low air, and soon we all switched over to snorkeling. Then two more whales showed up, to

get in line for the free massages.

The baby whale, enthusiastic as ever, freely jostled and bullied for a scratch. This made us puny, squishable humans happy but nervous. Marty was particularly vulnerable at one point, literally arm's length between two whales for some tense moments. I will never forget looking up and seeing Marty's silhouette at the surface between two giant whales, arms outstretched, one on each whale, like a giant Samson. I think it was the fat girth of the whales bumping that prevented Marty from getting squeezed into toothpaste inside his drysuit.

I was scratching the baby whale, both of us floating at the surface, when it began to roll over. Perhaps it wanted to have its belly scratched. Suddenly I saw the pectoral fin rising up under me. I didn't really think it could happen. But it did. This small whale picked me up and threw me over with its fin, as it rolled over. I distinctly remember the look on the boat tender's face when we caught sight of each other, as I was tossed over the whale. I splashed down on the other side of the whale, then looked back at it. It was now upside down, and innocently waving its pectoral fins in the air. The little teaser was trying to tempt me close again, pretending to ask for a belly scratch.

Playing with the world's biggest babies was a not-to-be-forgotten experience. They were charismatic TV stars. And though their size and power made for a considerable danger to humans in their Patagonian playground, I really do miss the little guys. ■

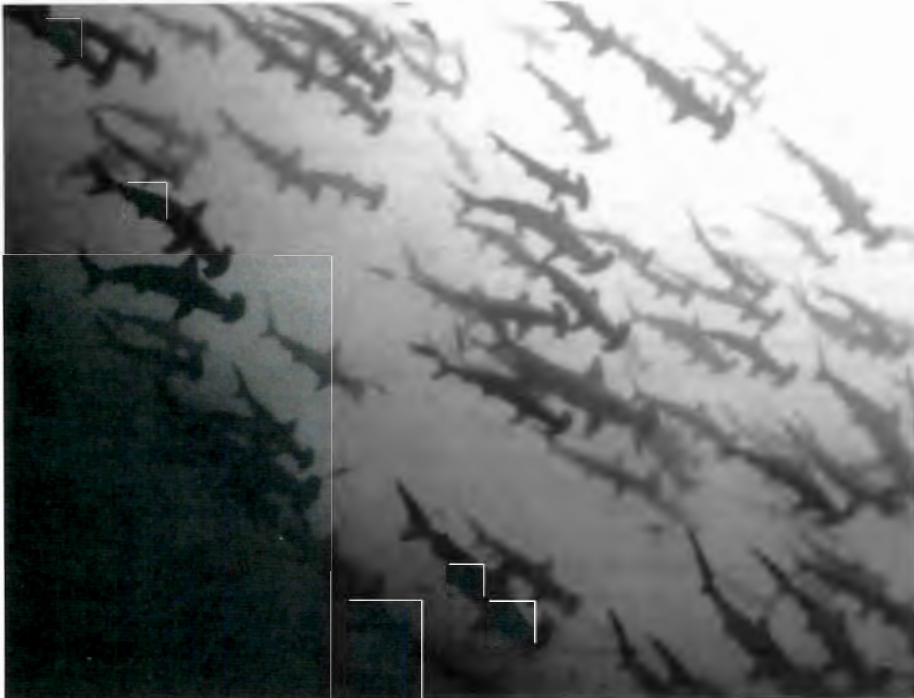
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# Colombia's Wild Creatures



By Bret Gilliam



Diving underwater through a large cavern, I have just witnessed hundreds of black tip sharks swim by. Looking up, I see another mammoth congregation of sharks directly overhead. Packed together so closely that I can barely distinguish individuals from each other, the wildly surging silhouettes race to join the main hammerhead congregation. Flying along in a four knot current with about 500 psi left in our tanks leaves me little alternative: I'm going to have to ascend through the shark school!

The islands of Malpelo and Gorgona, where I encountered the hammerheads, are located off the coast of Colombia. Located between the Galapagos to the south and Cocos to the north, they make up the "Pacific Triangle" of diving destinations. I'd been tempted for some time to travel there, and was lucky enough to find a commercial operation that serviced such a remote destination. Spending nine days there, and traveling over 800 miles of Pacific sea, I found

that the scattered reports of unique marine life I had heard about were really true.

My support facility was the 100 foot live-aboard TROPIC SURVEYOR, operated by Cruceros de Colombia. My host, Diego Hurtado, is a managing partner and the on-board Director of Operations. In operation for just over five years, the TROPIC SURVEYOR can accommodate up to 32 divers and schedules cruises approximately twice a month to Malpelo and Gorgona. With less than 500 divers a year visiting these areas, they have remained largely untouched and still incompletely explored.

My adventure began when I flew to Cali, a city on the edge of the Andes in western Colombia. Following a transfer over the Andes by bus, I boarded the ship with my diving mates in the coastal village of Buenaventura, and got underway for Gorgona that night.

We arrived at Gorgona (3 degrees latitude) the morning of the following day. The

island is a densely forested jungle island covered in rain forest growth, that looks like the setting for *Jurassic Park*. Until 1985 the island was a maximum security prison for Colombia's worst criminals, but now it has been resurrected as a natural park with very limited visitation. During the prison era, exotic wild animals including species of tigers and jaguars were introduced to discourage escape, and are still something to beware.

After exploring the south end of the island, and viewing the old prison cells which look like zoo cages, we return to the ship and get underway for the north tip to dive an area called el Horno or "the oven." This area was named by the prisoners for the warm water and large shark populations; they considered it the "hot spot." This consists of a series of rock pinnacles thrust out of the water from depths of 120 to 175 feet.

After I swim with the giant mantas for over fifteen minutes, two other smaller mantas join us and we swim around with the three animals. On a later dive, one manta allowed two female divers to ride it for nearly ten minutes.

That evening, we sailed toward Malpelo (4 degrees latitude) some 220 miles west northwest of Gorgona. After a little over a day, Malpelo looms out of the early dawn as a desolate granite island with sheer vertical cliffs rising from the calm sea. We were greeted by a two man delegation from the Colombian army security force, encamped in a tiny three-room hut. I wondered just exactly how bad you had to screw up in boot camp to get assigned to this remote outpost.

On our first dive, our visibility exceeds 80 feet and we see free-swimming morays everywhere. Even when not swimming, these eels merely lay about on the bottom and rarely seek shelter in the rocky reef structure. Clouds of snapper and jack patrol the cliff edge which plummets directly to the steep drop-off.

As we complete our inspection of the east side of the island and surface, I spot a pod of dolphins approaching in the calm water. A quick scramble, and I dive overboard to intercept them. They immediately

swim up, making inquisitive whistles and squeaks. Since I'm the only diver in the water, they are not threatened and take delight in making close passes for my camera. They seem particularly delighted when I free-dive down forty feet or so and slowly ascend through the school. Now they come within touching distance, although I avoid contact since most wild dolphins will spook if handled. After 15 minutes I'm out of film and out of breath.

During the surface interval, I visit the soldier's camp, and then set off with the other divers in an inflatable to a group of soaring pinnacles on the north end of the island where "the cathedral" awaits. Three towering rock formations known as the "Three Musketeers" provide a varied marinescape rising like jagged fingers from the sea floor depths. An underwater cavern is formed in one rock beginning at 30 feet. This "cathedral" extends to a sandy bottom nearly 100 feet deep and is densely filled with schools of silversides, snapper and jack.

As we enter the cavern gradually, the thousands of fish part to allow us passage and reveal a distant ambient light almost 200 feet away. The fish school closes behind us.

We disturb three large white tip sharks that are cruising in from the other side; they pass overhead and disappear into the gloom. The walls of the cavern are alive with color, and scores of morays either swimming freely in the water column or hugging the sheer rock come into view. Some measure up to six feet in length. As the clear sunlight is revealed at the exit, we see a 12 foot manta gliding in the surge to greet us.

We circumnavigate two of the pinnacles and are amazed at the prolific marine life. Clouds of small tuna and other schooling pelagics weave around the drop-off wall formed by the rock's sudden protrusion into the atmosphere. Mini-caves and crevices are home to myriad species of colorful Pacific angelfish, golden puffers, and the ever present morays that are stacked up like jets over an airport. One overhang hosts over a hundred spiny lobster sharing their habitat with snappers the size of a man. It's a panorama difficult to fully digest as we drift by in the gentle current, and the remoteness of Malpelo has preserved it beyond description.

Morning dawns to a blustery wind. A rough wet ride in swells up to eight feet finally rewards us with a slight lee at the base of La Gringa, another pinnacle that attracts legendary schools of hammerhead sharks. We tumble into the foaming sea, and shown the way by the guide, I enter the relative calm of the dark cavern.

Within seconds I see the first hammerhead. Then four hammerheads, then ten, and finally the ocean is alive with an endless parade of the fearsome looking but graceful predators. I drop beneath them to 120 feet and hug the rock wall, briefly holding my

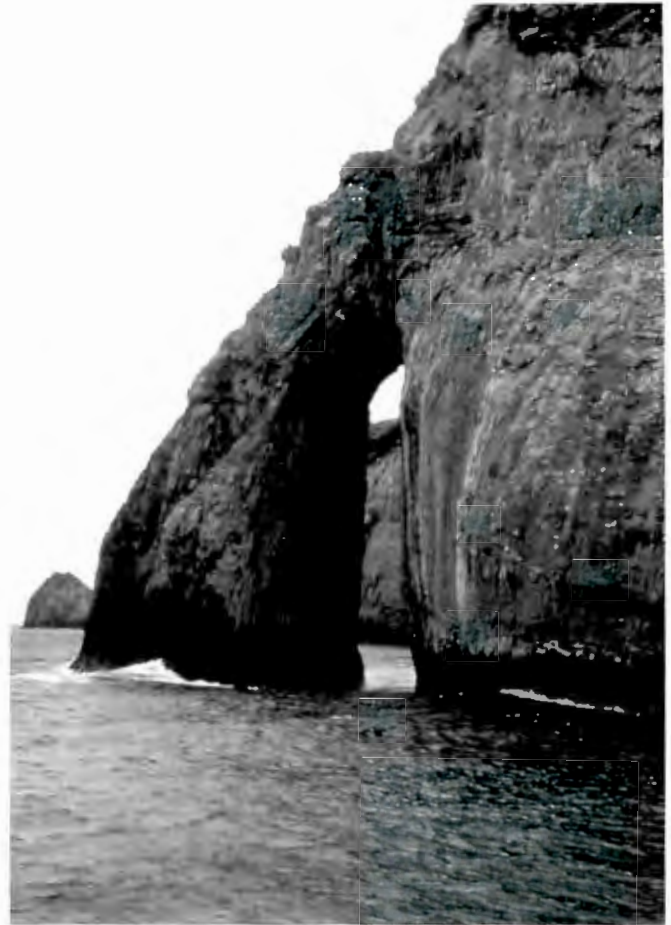
breath so the stream from my bubbles doesn't frighten them away. Some 50 sharks angle effortlessly into the stiff current only a few feet away from my mask, ranging in size from eight to over fourteen feet in length. Their slate gray flanks reflect the morning light creating a mesmerizing vista.

When I exhale, the school fades away into the blue to avoid the burst of bubbles that disrupts their tranquility. I duck back into the cavern for a minute or so and the sharks quickly return. Taking a deep breath, I swim into the midst of the school and begin a rapid fire sequence of photos. Sharks twice my size ignore my intrusion and continue a close formation, accepting me as a new member. Finally, my lungs burning, I exhale again and my swimming partners leave me suddenly alone.

Two days later, I and three other adventurers are off to nearby La Gringa and the Three Kings to pursue the sharks again. A 45 minute drenching ride delivers us to the "David" pinnacle, a slender spire only about 50 feet in diameter jutting about four stories into the air. The current screams around it and the two other adjacent rocks (Saul and Solomon) create a boiling slipstream. We drop in upstream of David and power to the bottom seeking a lee in the tumble of boulders strewn haphazardly on the slope. The drop to 90 feet is over in seconds and we count heads to ensure that everyone made it before being swept away. I spy Ted Mutch and the others clinging to fingerholds or sheltered behind the rocks. Ted points into the blue void. Where there were 50 hammerheads at La Gringa two days ago, there are now literally hundreds.

They approach us in the current, this time with no apparent aversion to our wildly streaming bubbles. Remaining motionless, we are transfixed by the wonder of such a parade. There is no end to the spectacle. Occasionally, a large sentry will break off from the main school to inspect us, only to rejoin his mates.

The scene is at once thrilling and terrifying. I've never seen this many sharks in one place in my thirty-some years of diving.



The sharks seem to occupy every square foot of ocean, and since we are running out of air and need to surface, there is no doubt that our paths will inevitably intersect. Determined to get the ultimate shark photo, I career into the chaos of wildly swinging heads and tails that slap at me as I penetrate the first layer of the school.

The sharks actually collide with each other as they make way for me to surface. The last 15 feet are a blur of boiling foam and swirling current before I finally burst into the sunlight. I'm swept at breakneck speed by the maelstrom of whirlpooling ocean. As the Zodiac maneuvers to pick me up, I take a hasty inventory to determine that cameras and body parts are more or less intact. Suddenly I find myself physically and psychologically exhausted.

Two hours later, though, I'm ready for another dive into Malpelo's mystical lure, knowing that I am a privileged observer to a unique and fragile outpost of wilderness. ■

**Contact:** Cruceros de Colombia, 4995 NW 72nd Ave., Suite 307, Miami, FL 33166, 305-592-5888.

*Bret Gilliam is an international writer and photographer living on an island off Maine. He is a regular contributor to SUB AQUA.*

# Ultra Freeze and Barracuda Sushi?



By Dan Berg

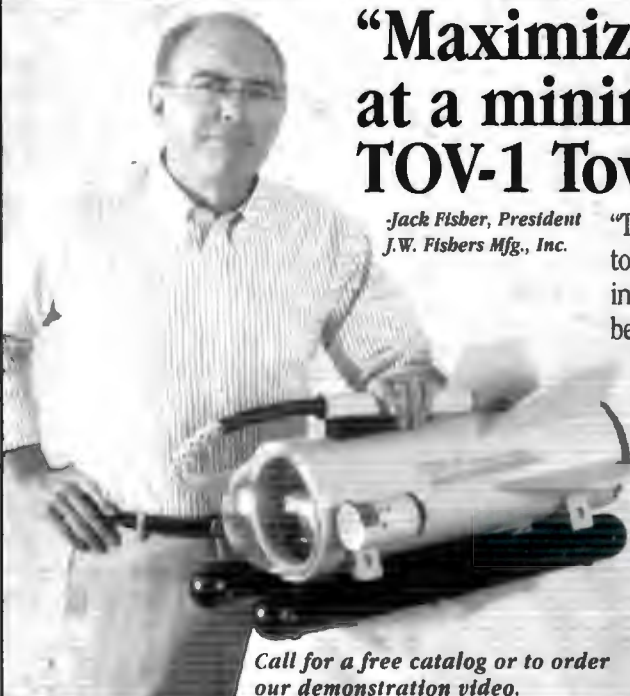
A few years back, vacationing in Cancun, I decided to go diving. Big surprise. However, I wanted shipwrecks rather than the usual reef dives most tourists rave about. My first stop, the hotel operated dive shop. English was definitely not spoken fluently here. I slowly explained that I wanted to dive on a wreck. The dive master replied that they had "many, many rocks to dive on." "No. You don't understand. Wreck, not rock." I tried again this time using my cupped hands to demonstrate a boat. "Oh yes sir, we have a dive boat." This routine from a bad movie was repeated several times at a few different dive shops. But the reply was always the same. The operations here cater to the tourist trade and run reef dives, not wreck dives.

Despondently, I explained my dilemma to a cab driver who turned out to speak pretty good English. The next day the driver found me relaxing by the hotel pool. His friend Alberto Friscove had a boat and would take me to a shipwreck. Finally.

Early the next gorgeous Cancun morning, I arrived at the dock to find a 10 ft rowboat with a 10 hp outboard engine. And Alberto. On the trip out Alberto said the wreck was sitting in 100 feet of water a few miles off the north point of Women Island. He said I would be the first tourist ever to dive the site. Did I believe him? Why not. He couldn't be sure but thought the wreck went down in 1983 and was named ULTRA FREEZE. Two hours later we were over the

wreck site. Since Loran was not available on the ten footer, Alberto found the wreck using land bearings. He then jumped in with a snorkel carrying the boat's anchor - a novel technique to tie in 100 feet below.

Not knowing what to expect, I rolled over into the warm, transparent water. From the surface I could see a stunning sight — the entire shipwreck. Giant rays and five foot barracuda hovered over the site. Schools of jacks and large groupers were so abundant they almost camouflaged the wreck. A huge turtle gracefully swam by. The variety and quantity of marine life, including two small sharks, was amazing. The wreck itself was about 200 feet long. She sat upright. Depth to the top of her deck was only 90 feet. Her



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two giant cargo bays were open and allowed easy access to the wreck's interior. Her huge three bladed propeller would have made a nice photograph, but of course I had no camera. The wreck was surprisingly devoid of artifacts. It appeared that she had been salvaged, converted into a barge, or had been possibly stripped before being scuttled. I spent my dive exploring the wreck and watching the marine life that thrived there. Alberto spent his dive with a spear gun. His take was two five foot barracuda.

During the boat ride home, Alberto cut up the barracuda into small chunks. Somehow I knew what was coming. You have to understand that I am one New Yorker who is *not* a sushi lover. I silently hoped Alberto wouldn't force me to eat raw fish. He then chopped up some peppers and several onions. He popped the ingredients into a Tupperware bowl. He enthusiastically squeezed fresh ripe lemons and their juice ran down over the whole mixture, which he allowed to sit for a while. The fish was cooked not by heat but by the acid of the lemon juice. It took more than a few minutes before I worked up the courage to attempt a taste of what I thought would be foul tasting raw fish. Hunger soon forced my hand. A tiny bite. I closed my mouth not sure whether the morsel would soon be flying over the side. Not bad. Not bad at all. After a couple of cold beers during the long chug to port, Alberto's homemade sushi was downright delicious. Back in New York my yuppie gourmet friends were quick to tell me "Danny, that's not sushi — what you ate was ceviche." I didn't care what it was called, it was some experience.

Years later, during research on my book *Florida Shipwrecks*, I found that the vessel ULTRA FREEZE is actually sunk off Florida. I called my friend Bill Schell, a noted marine historian and marine surveyor. By checking his records he found that a sister ship called the DEEP FREEZE could have been the wreck I explored. The DEEP FREEZE was built in Germany in 1959. She was originally named the MARIE HORN. The DEEP FREEZE was 231'8" long, had a 33'6" beam and displaced 1138 gross tons. On January 4, 1972 an explosion and fire caused severe damage. The burned out hulk sat at dock for over two years. In 1974 she was to be towed to the Everglades. Although we know she left South America on December 19th, there is no record that she ever reached her destination.

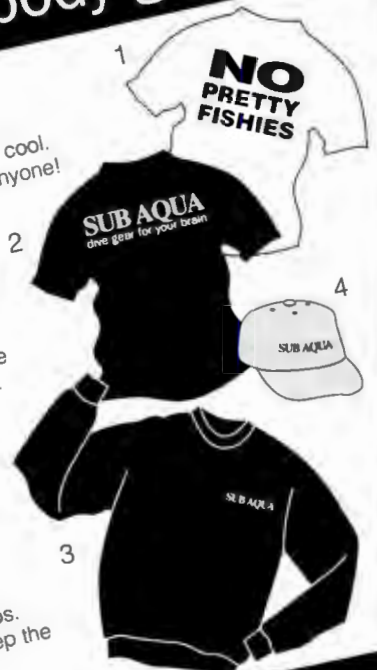
Could this be the wreck I explored off Cancun? Only time will tell. Some lucky diver will return, perhaps surfacing with an artifact to help identify or confirm our speculation. This wreck was not deep, dark or dangerous, and held no significant artifacts, yet it is one of my most memorable wreck dives. I strongly recommend it. And though you still won't see me at a sushi bar, Alberto's barracuda ceviche was pretty darn good. ■



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# The Tech Report

## The 1996 tek Conference

By Dean Mullaney

More than 2,000 technical divers, wreckers, physiologists, military personnel, underwater photographers, and manufacturers congregated in New Orleans between January 12-16 for the fourth annual tek Conference. The '96 Diving Technologies Conference and Exhibition was a one-stop shopping and educational seminar that brought together the leading figures in the field.

In nearly 100 booths, manufacturers showed off the latest generations of rebreathers, wireless communication, gas blending systems, portable recompression chambers, and nitrox computers. The training agencies were also out in full force. PADI unveiled its new enriched air nitrox program at the show. More than 100 speakers gave presentations from deep cave exploration, wreck diving, and taking underwater photos, to managing decompression illness, the dangers of oxygen toxicity, and how governmental regulations may affect the future of technical diving.

"It was a gathering of all the experience that's available," said Billy Deans, considered by many to be the world's leading technical diver and instructor. "The conference allowed people who want to gain experience to listen to the people who do it," he added. "If you pick up even one small piece of information to improve your safety — it's worth going to."

Deans taught a sold-out seminar on improving technical diving safety and performance. "I stayed an extra three hours just to answer people's specific questions," he said. "The attendees ran the complete range of experience, from the head of Naval Salvage and the head of the Canadian Experimental Diving Unit, to newly-certified nitrox divers." "I was in awe sitting on the sofa at the cafe between Jim Bowden and Oliver Isler," said decompression physiologist R.W. (Bill) Hamilton, who organized the decompression seminars.

Recreational divers could, in one location, take courses in nitrox, rebreathers, deep air, and gas blending from such training agencies as ANDI, IANTD, and TDI.

The '96 tek Conference didn't so much

boast breakthrough technologies and equipment as verify that technical diving has seasoned and leveled off at a new plateau.

"Technical diving has matured into a well-defined field," said Hamilton. "It's terribly important to keep the information flowing. One thing I've been preaching is that this kind of diving is complicated and challenging and stressful. You need to do it in an organized way. You need support in getting you there, in completing the task, and in getting rescued if you need it."

What we're seeing now, according to most attendees, is more planning and team organization to make the diving safer and more effective. The day of the so-called *cowboys* is fading. The recent EDMUND FITZGERALD [see SUB AQUA Jan '96], TRANSPAC, and LUSITANIA [see SUB AQUA Nov '94], expeditions were examples of well-planned and organized wreck dives. "Look at the Woodsville Karst Plain Project," added Hamilton. "They put together a cave diving team whose achievements are incredible. They have so much redundancy. It's still risky. However, they planned and rehearsed and rehearsed."

Billy Deans couldn't agree more that the field is evolving. "We're now seeing emerging community standards. Everyone wants to see it done the right way," he says. Deans and others are currently putting together a 200-page manual based on the 1992 *Blueprint for Survival* he and Michael Menduno compiled, with input from many leaders in technical diving.

Another indication that the field has matured is the introduction of nitrox courses from PADI. The worldwide training agency has high hopes for the future. CEO John Cronin was quoted late last year that nitrox may be 25% of PADI's business in five years.

"Enriched air nitrox is not going to replace air," added PADI's VP, Karl Shreeves. "Yet, it's growing in the same way that dry suits are growing. Where it's needed, it's a wonderful thing. It expands the opportunities for the diver. If you're running into a no-deco wall, just like with a computer, you can increase your no-stop time."

Seminars and presentations were an integral part of the tek Conference. Wreck dives were particularly well represented. Emory Kristof gave presentations on the EDMUND FITZGERALD. Bill Charlton gave a presentation on Byzantine-era wrecks in the Mediterranean, and the U.S.S. MONITOR was discussed by NOAA's John Broadwater and photographer Rod Farb. Erika Leigh Haley reported on the first expedition to the TRANSPAC, with its stern down at 300 feet and its bow at 120 feet off the frigid Canadian coast. Her team of ten divers spent seven months in preparation for what turned out to be a model expedition in November, 1995. Cave diving was also a big aspect of the program and provided most of the controversy, mainly between competing exploration teams diving in Mexico and Florida.

Women technical divers had the chance to get together and discuss their experiences, and begin to deal with some equipment problems unique to women.

The most fun was seeing and touching the latest equipment in the exhibition hall. "The tek conference has always been a place to come to find out what some of the leading edge technologies and methodologies are," said Shreeves. Attendees could dive more than a handful of different rebreathers in two-day pool sessions, with a choice of closed-circuit units from Dräger/UWATEC, Cis-Lunar, Divex, Cochran, and Bio-Marine.

Technical diving has come a long way since the term was first popularized in the early '90s. Then, the field was the domain of divers who had an enormous amount of experience and were willing to put much money into training and experience, forging their own way and learning as they went. Six years later, the vanguard has become more mainstream, and much of the training and equipment is off the shelf.

With *aquaCORPS* and the tek Conference attempting refinancing as we go to press, the shape of future tek events remains uncertain. However, conference participants eagerly look forward to future gatherings to share experiences, adventures and to touch the state of the art. ■

## Five Key Trends at tek

### REBREATHERS

Rebreathers still top the list of new equipment. Despite all the hype, however, only two consumer rebreathers are actually on the market: the Atlantis I from Dräger/UWATEC and the Fieno from Grand Blue, although the latter is not yet for sale outside of Japan. Cost is an inhibiting factor; most manufacturers have list prices upwards of \$6,000.

### GAS BLENDING SYSTEMS

Innovations in gas blending systems promise to give more dive shops the capability to deliver mixed gases to their customers, and could change how existing mixed gas shops make their mix. When EAN first dawned in tech diving, the dive shop owner had to educate himself and build his own system. Now that commercial blending systems are readily available, any shop can buy a ready-made unit that is easy to use.

The liability reduction that comes with manufacturer warranties may be of great benefit to shop owners. The ANX electronically-controlled partial pressure unit and DNAX's permeable membrane system appear to be two leaders. Price: \$3,000 to \$10,000.

### COMPUTERS

Electronics have contributed a great deal to diving, and they're going to add even more in the future. More programs like *Abyss*, that give you the ability to download a particular dive plan to a PC to arrange for contingencies, may be commonplace in the near future. Downloading to PCs also allows divers to keep their logs more organized.

### WIRELESS COMMUNICATION

Wireless technologies promise to be the next innovation in diving. Divers will be able to communicate with the surface without a hose, so the support personnel can monitor the amount of air left, the diver's deco status, and actual location.

### PORTABLE CHAMBERS

No one disputes the safety advantages of having an on-board portable recompression chamber. However, technical diving operations do not generally include chambers in their gear plans. About a half a dozen portable chambers are now available for under \$20,000. Although still too expensive for the average tekkie, group buys or rental options may change that.

*Dean Mullaney was Managing Editor of the aquaCORPS Journal and was on the tek Conference staff.*

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# Deans on Diving

## Getting There, and Getting Back



By Billy Deans

**How far in advance do you prepare for an out of town dive expedition?** There are two avenues of approach. One is where you know you're going and you can plan for months in advance. Then there's the trip that just pops up and we need to be there with a team of divers in 48 hours to dive in two hundred feet of water. We try to keep as much of our equipment always packed and ready to go — modularized.

We have a checklist, and boxes, and each box has specific gear in it. We have personal gear and regulators, spare equipment, hardware, computers, safety equipment. We have the portable gas mixing panel with all the hardware and hoses in its own crate. Not only do we work off the master checklist, but each box, bag or crate has its own checklist inside so anybody can do the job even if they are new to the team.

When you have the spare time, run a master list of equipment, everything from soup to nuts; that way you know exactly what you need and you won't forget anything. Because if you have to pick up and leave real quick for that once-in-a-lifetime dive, you've got it and you don't leave anything to memory. Major expeditions are fun, they're incredibly intense, but they're so demanding. What I like about planning in advance is making things real simple, really, really, simple.

**What about when you travel just for fun?**

For fun diving there is not that much equipment to take. I phone ahead to see what kind of cylinders they have there and what gas is available. But I will pack real light, just as if I were on a day run. I take my back plate and wings, regulators, a couple of computers, mask, fins, flashlights and chargers. I use my daily checklist for this. I can put everything in two little duffel bags and away we go. That's one of the beauties of actually traveling for a fun dive, traveling light. If it's a fun trip I'll take an exact duplicate regulator set, and if I'm diving in dry suit country I take two dry suits with two sets of underwear. I also don't have to pack a lot of clothes.

**Do you travel with rechargeable lights?** I like using rechargeable lights. I always make sure I have two gel cell batteries with me and I also carry spare bulbs, and reflectors. I carry all of these in a hard container.

**Have you found any really cool travel accessories?** One thing that goes with me everywhere I go is my tool bag — it's a belt pouch system that I put on once I walk into the shop or on the boat and don't take off till I am ready to dive. In my tool bag I carry all the small tools, small parts, O-rings, tape, cable ties, plugs, pens, pencils, a calculator, surgical tubing and a knife. With what's in that pouch (which only weighs in at a few pounds) I can repair most any regulator, I can fix damn near any boat, fix just about anything, because I have everything I need.

**How do you manage the contents of the kit?** Every now and then I go through it, throw out what has worked its way into it that doesn't belong, clean the tools, replace the parts, eliminate what I haven't used — I keep it current. But I'll tell you when I put that thing on and get on board the boat, I don't have to run here and grab this, or run there and get that, I can just sit down and fix it.

**Have you found jet lag to be a problem?**

I've never had jet lag per se. I find myself so motivated that I don't get jet lag when I get there, although I'm probably going to pay for that statement in spades when I go to Bikini later this year. What I do is drink a lot of water and try to keep my stress level down. I believe that you get jet lag when you start coming home because when you're going over you're so motivated you're running on nervous energy, and the big crash comes when you come home.

**What's your feeling about drinking and diving?** I don't drink. There's so many factors in the environment when you dive that you can't change, that the ones that you can change or modify, you should take to the nth degree. One of them is alcohol consump-

tion. Especially if you're doing multiple day, repetitive and/or deep diving, because that stuff adds up. My recommendation is not to drink, period. Some say that one glass of wine, one beer is okay, but I personally don't drink. There's too much to lose as opposed to what you can gain from the consumption of it, so my recommendation is don't.

**You like a good cigar. What about smoking cigars on diving vacations?** When I went to Mexico, I was there for fourteen days — I allowed myself three cigars — I cut them in half, so I smoked six half cigars. It's a habit I picked up over the past year — a lot of people can't believe I smoke cigars, but I enjoy them.

**How about traveling by air?** I carry all my electronics, especially my dive computers, on board. I have to add a little extra time because of this since they need to be hand checked. I will also carry one full regulator set on board with me — just in case. Everything else is sent through as checked baggage in hard cases.

**What's the worst part about travel for you?** God, the day before, running around trying to get everything done. The worst part is not being smart enough to budget time when you come home to decompress, so to speak. One thing that is a real problem is coming back from a trip on a Sunday night and going to work on Monday morning. Now, I always budget in at least one day to come home, play with my dog, change gears a little bit, and reflect on what I've done, who I've met and what I've seen.

**How do you deal with fatigue and different stresses of travel?** I try to get as much sleep as possible — it's difficult to do when you're really motivated, but you've got to get at least seven hours of sleep, especially if you're working really hard. Sleep and drinking a lot of water is critical. I try to make sure I keep my hands clean and have proper hygiene, especially when going into remote areas, especially diving in a fresh-



## Billy, exactly what's in those pouches?

The pouch I use is made by L.L. Bean — it is a modular system — a center pouch with an add-on on each side. It goes on in the morning and comes off for diving and at the end of the day.

Titanium Buck Knife in its own holster.  
Super Leatherman Tool in its own holster.  
Cellular phone clipped onto the belt.

### Main pouch

2 - 9-in-1 hex key sets one in metric, the other for standard sizes  
4 tappet wrenches sizes 3/8 x 7/16, 1/2 x 9/16,  
5/8 x 11/16, 3/4 x 7/8.

(The open face and thin wall characteristics of the tappet wrenches make them ideal for working in confined areas)

1 metric tappet wrench 13mm x 11mm for Poseidon hoses  
1 adjustable 8 inch wrench  
1 5/16 nut driver for hose clamps  
1 needle nose Vise Grip  
1 7 inch stainless steel Vise Grip  
12 nylon tie wraps  
1 metric allen key to fit the OMS din to yoke and screw adapter.

### Secondary pouch in main pouch

1 hemostat  
1 stainless steel pick  
1 bronze flat bladed O ring extractor  
1 stainless steel suture removal scissors  
1 Swagelok caliper  
1 small tube of Christo-Lube oxygen compatible lubricant  
1 small pad of coarse scrubbing material  
1 battery removal tool from Cochran and battery polisher

### Secondary pouch right side first pocket

Assorted Sharpie indelible pens — regular and fine point  
1 white paint stick  
1 certification card  
1 \$20 bill  
1 #1 pen with the Little Mermaid™ wraparound  
(easier to grasp in cold water).  
Spare set of stainless steel nuts and caps for the surface supplied oxygen system.

### Secondary pouch right side second pocket

1 calculator  
1 small notebook  
1 Sunto M2 compass  
1 roll of 3M black electrical tape (Don't use the cheap stuff)  
12 inch piece of black surgical tubing  
1 8 by 12 inch sheet of waterproof paper

### Secondary pouch left side first pocket

Suntan lotion  
1 roll of teflon tape  
1 roll of 3M green electrical tape  
1 container of mask defogger  
1 12 inch piece of nylon cord

### Secondary pouch left side second pocket

Assortment of adaptors, low and high pressure plugs, wing nuts, flat washers etc.

During normal dive operations a stainless steel ring attached to the belt is used to clip on stage bottle rigging.

water area. You got to make sure that you take along some type of disinfectant for your cars, such as Swimmers Ear. There is nothing worse than going to a place and then getting sick, or having a problem, and you sit around for two or three days wanting to die and you're supposed to be out having the time of your life.

**Who was the best dive traveler you were ever with?** I like traveling with my girlfriend, Velora Peacock. Not only do we get to share incredible, intense moments as friends and lovers, but also in the water. When you get to go where few people go, there is nothing better than sharing an intense experience with someone you care for.

**Tell us about the worst dive traveler you've ever been with.** This guy was a whiner. Whine, whine, whine, whine, whine, always constantly complaining. "Nothing's good enough, the food is terrible, it was better here," and I wanted to say, "Why don't you just go stick your head in the sand and leave us alone." Diving is an adventure so if you're having a good time, great, and, if it's not so good, try to make the best of it.

### How do you mentally prepare for a trip?

I have to make sure that my desk is clean, that's my standard for travel. If my desk is absolutely clean, I have all the paperwork off, everything that's on my desk has been taken care of and it's bare, then I can leave home. There's nothing worse than leaving and having a desk piled full of papers 'cause when you come back it's going to be ten times as deep. If I can leave and my desk is clear, then I have no problem traveling — my house has to be in order.

### What sums up Billy's philosophy on travel?

Make sure you enjoy the whole process of traveling. Go with the mindset that you're going to have a good time regardless of what happens. If you get blown out or something else happens it's all part of an adventure, that's the name of the game. Don't go with great expectations. Go with the idea that — well, gee, it would be great to do these dives, but if I can't do them for one reason or another, then hey, it's part of the adventure. I always try to find the good in traveling. I know I will always learn something and meet new people. With *that* attitude you won't get let down.

### Anything special that you do after you come back from a trip?

I try to keep my logbook up to date every day. Every day I do that, write everything down when it's fresh in my memory. Any photographs I've shot, as soon as they are developed I go through with a pencil and I'll label them. Then I'll stick them off to the side. Once that is done then I know I've categorized the dive. I also make sure that anybody that's helped me or has gone out of their way to help me gets a letter, saying hey, this was great, thanks a lot, 'cause it's always good to give credit where credit's due.

### What's the best part of dive travel?

The best part of dive travel is when you first get there out on the boat, and you get in the water. It's not necessarily seeing the wreck, it's going down the line, at about 30-50 feet, and you realize that man, you're in the water, you're going down, and now you've actually come to the realization that hey man we're here, we're doing it and we're about to have a great adventure that so few people will ever get to do in their lifetime. That's the part I like — travel is part of life's daring adventure. ■

# Handicapping Your Dive Trip?

## Don't let poor planning disable your vacation.



By Hugh Fletcher



Kathy Weydig

You may not consider yourself as disabled as you'd think I am. I need to get around in a wheelchair, so scuba diving becomes substantially more challenging. But don't skip this article just because you get around on foot. Instead of using the words *handicap* or *disability*, substitute the words *special needs*. You don't have special needs? Are you nearsighted? Allergic? Diabetic? Hearing impaired? Hypersensitive to DCI? Prone to seasickness? Extra finicky about your food? Fill in your own special need, and you *do* have at least one. Odds are either you or someone you're traveling with needs particularly special attention. And odds are if you pay attention to those special needs, whatever they may be, you'll have a safer and more enjoyable adventure.

My first exotic destination trip was several years ago. Having already done Bonaire and Grand Cayman, I felt the need to expand my horizons and try something different. I met the owner of a Honduran inn while attending a dive show. The brochure made the island look like something out of the musical *South Pacific*. White coral beaches, tropical plantings, a hacienda-like mansion set against a mountainous hillside. He repeatedly told me that he had previous guests that were in wheelchairs and they had enjoyed their dive vacations. I attempted to make certain in writing that the arrangements were made for our trip, and I booked myself and

twelve other divers at the inn.

After five airports and four airplanes, we arrived at our destination. It was beautiful. The beaches sparkled, the plantings were in full bloom, and the birds in the trees emitted strange jungle-like sounds. And then we saw the stairs. A whole flight leading to the inner courtyard, two stories above us. And the two steps to the bedroom. A cramped bedroom that made me a captive in my wheelchair. We then met the inn's manager and dive master who had never been told of my arrival. They were as confused and upset as we were. Despite that, they refused to let me dive because I hadn't gotten my C-card yet — although my buddy was an award winning instructor. After three tense days of shouting, debating and cajoling, I finally was allowed to dive. Friends and employees carried me and my chair up and down the stairs, with a crowd of fellow travelers waving to me as if I were Neptune returning to the sea.

Although my vacation wasn't as relaxing as I would have liked, it taught me a tremendous lesson. I realized that as a diver who is disabled there was more to travel than choosing a destination and getting on an airplane. It meant future trips required more research, planning, confirmations and recommendations from other divers.

To prevent yourself from suffering the same fate I once did, consider following these suggestions:

**Research, Research, Research.** Given the number of dive magazines, on-line bulletin boards and chat rooms, specialized travel agencies, dive shops and certifying agencies, there isn't an excuse not to try any or all of these in your first attempt to learn more about a destination. You'll be surprised at the number of responses you'll receive to an inquiry. Keep them all, and begin to work up a file.

**Resort/Destination Selection.** After you've narrowed down the area you want to dive, find out what kind of diving the location(s) offer. Will it be drift, wall, cold water, reef or wreck? Determine if your diving interests and skills match them. Know the time of year you've chosen and whether it will make the sea conditions rough or calm. Choose several contenders from the file you've started. Write to them and ask for a detailed description of their hotel and its accessibility — the room dimensions, bathrooms, and the surrounding grounds. Ask about boat access, crew, and divemaster experience with the disabled. What are their certification requirements, and which agencies are acceptable? Most importantly, ask for references from other divers with disabilities. Call them and spend time getting to know your destination and its suitability for you.

**Traveling Arrangements.** Simplicity is crucial. Advance book your reservations. Get bulkhead seating whenever possible. Arrive early and notify the airline of any special needs. Pay attention to the time between flights and how long you'll need to get from one to the other. If applicable, check your wheelchair after you arrive at your destination and before you leave the airport report any problems immediately. Pack light to assist any travel companions helping you.

**Preparation.** Relearn any rusty skills in as many pool sessions or local open water dives as you feel you need. Practice your buddy work and hand signals. Assemble and test your gear. Make sure that you are more familiar with your particular diving needs than anyone else.

**Equipment Selection.** Decide if the vacation will dictate new or different gear. Become familiar with everything you own, make certain you can use it properly and easily, and learn simple maintenance tasks. Bring backups and spares. If you are someone like myself who uses a smaller than average tank, know if the destination has your size or if you need to bring your own.

**Medical Necessities.** Be certain to pack your medications in your carry-on and include the doctor's 's'cripts. If necessary, find a local physician at the destination to refer to if you encounter problems while on vacation. Bring copies of your insurance and your employee benefits ID cards, along with copies of any necessary medical history. Be certain your buddy knows of any unusual medical needs in case of emergencies.

**The payoff.** In response to the problems encountered while on vacation, I've educated myself on how to travel. As a result, I've found new and unique areas to dive, places I might have previously only imagined. I've fed and petted stingrays, swam with tarpon and sea turtles beside Grand Cayman. I've been face to fin with orange scahorses on the reefs of Bonaire. I've done wreck dives at night off Tortola with squid, barracuda and clouds of bait fish. I've spent a week in a villa in Cozumel and drifted along contentedly looking for pelagics. Time well spent doing my homework *enabled* me to experience these things. Doing your own research, paying attention to details, and planning will open up another dimension to yourself in areas you always wanted to dive. ■

**For further information, contact:**

**The Handicapped Scuba Association**  
phone/fax 704-498-6128  
<http://www.realm.com/~hsahdq/index.html>  
email: [hsahdq@realm.net](mailto:hsahdq@realm.net)

**Society for the Advancement of Travel for the Handicapped** phone: 212-447-SATH

**Red Sail Sports - Grand Cayman**  
phone: 809-947-5965 fax: 809-947-5808

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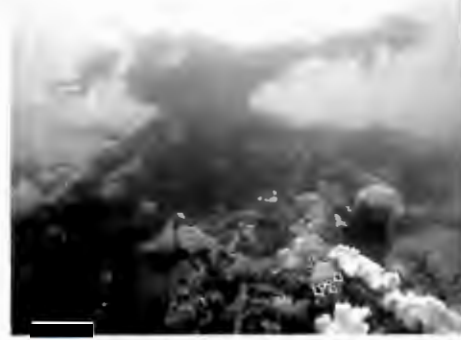
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# Great Dive Bars of the World



By Joe Weatherby



J. Silverstein

One of my dictionaries, I don't know which damn one, says:

## **DIVE: (n)**

**A run-down or disreputable bar or night club.**

*The dive* was in the slang of prizefighters and drinkers way before you ever heard of a surface interval. In *On the Waterfront* Jersey hoods and wharf rats hang out in a

skeevy pool dive and mix it up with a palooka who "coulda been a contender." Except he took a dive.

"I been thrown outa better dives than this," you've often wished you'd said as you spit on the floor, tossed a few bucks on the bar, and staggered out, self-satisfied.

Lately there's a new use for the word dive. To those yuppie types a dive bar is chic. Seedy by design. We actual divers, however, have long known that a dive bar needn't be a dive, nor is every dive a dive bar. I've tended bar in quite a few. Bummed drinks in

quite a few more. And in telling dive stories - always the truth, and nothing but the truth.

It all started when the first diver finished his day and said "I ain't ready to go home yet." He dragged his buddies to the publick house nearest to the dock, and they took turns inventing more and more impressive stories while unwinding from the tensions of the day.

Wanna hear about my favorite? It's a short walk from where your dive boat docks. Drinks are cheap. All sorts of sea artifacts are hanging on the wall, and some sea arti-

facts are sitting on the stools. The bartender is a character. His name usually starts with "Big." He has a tattoo that he shows you and one that he doesn't. Beer's his drink and he knows the little breweries like he knows the wrenches for his Harley. He remembers the names of everyone who's ever been to a wreck, and what they brought back. He knows more about the conditions out there than any boat captain or dive store owner.

Big Jake sure knows how to mix drinks. He invents new ones. He ain't sparing with the tequila. He smokes his own bar sausages in a smoker in his backyard. But he won't let you drive if he sees you've had too much. Jake is too big to argue with on that point. And if he sees you're on the Program — it's Diet Coke and nachos for you. The kitchen is good. Crab cakes. Burgers. Chips and Big Jake's super jalapeno salsa.

He'll show you the very table where some treasure hunter first laid out the coordinates for their money wreck. And if it looks like a fight is starting he'll hoist himself over the bar, land on the wooden floor with all 325 pounds and get in between. If there's still some fighting to be done he'll drag you to the video games so you can take out your aggressions in *Mortal Kombat*. Jake'll kick the freeloaders off the front stools and carefully place the best looking women there. He might even put the good looking guys there — Jake's easy that way.

Instructors love bringing their classes over to Jake's. "Rubbing shoulders is part of the training." The old timers love telling the same stories over and over again. "You're too young to remember double hose regulators..." The ego guys get to puff themselves up. "My wreck's bigger than yours, and it was virgin, and I was first on her." And archaeologists sit right alongside artifact takers, though they often eye their duffles with suspicion. Techies prop their laptops up on the bar running their profiles, while newbies carry their fresh Open Water I books. And then there's that environmental woman who keeps giving the grilled tuna customers guilt-provoking looks.

Best of all, Jake loves to talk diving. He doesn't care if you've just seen your first fishie or are hiring ALVIN to do the Trench. He'll listen to you like you're Jacques Cousteau. Spearfishing? Yeah, Big Jake has his stories. Artifacts? Yeah, he's seen 'em all — but your dish is really one of the better ones he's seen. Sad stories? Jake's old partner bought it on that deep one. The insurance money was OK but he sure misses him. "But let's talk about diving, all right?"

Where exactly is Big Jake's Dive Bar? It doesn't make any difference. Some people find him on a tiny island. Sometimes he's on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Some folks are still looking for *their* great dive bar. You've never been to Big Jake's? Ask around. ■

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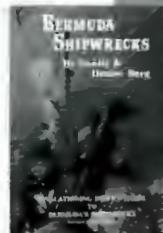


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2. Tell someone.
3. Monitor your changes.
4. Call for help.

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- Don't let anyone minimize your symptoms.
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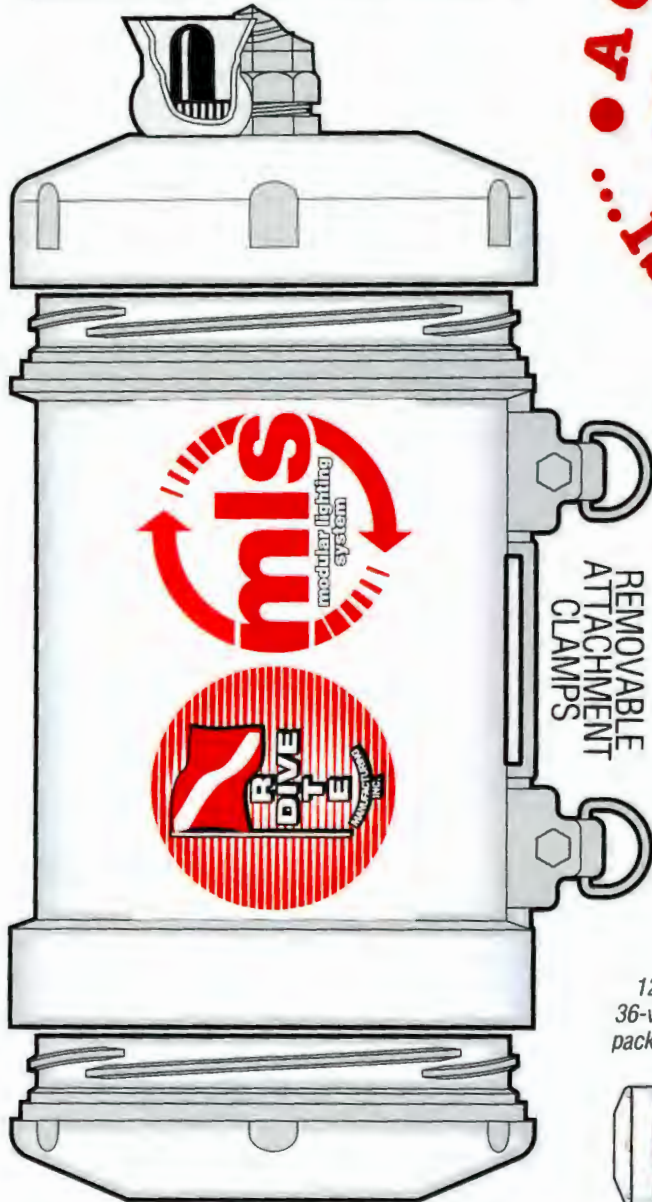
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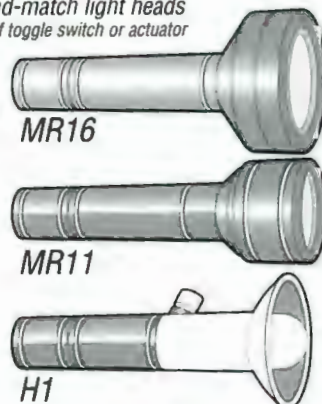
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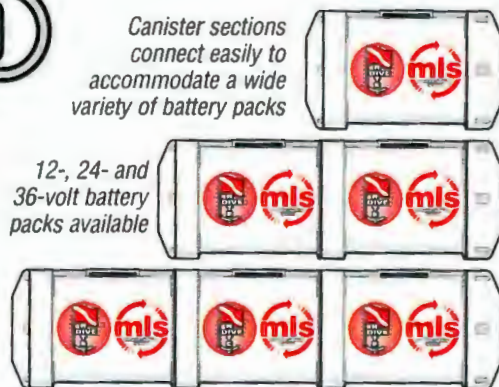


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