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# A Long Time Ago on a Coral Reef Far, Far Away

**Greetings**, in this first, of what will be many, letters from the editor. For some reason they told me that this part of the magazine was my responsibility, they must be under the assumption that I am a writer of some sort. Being what it may, in their somewhat forceful "request" for my column there was a lack of direction conveyed. So I have taken it upon my rather confused self to enlighten you, the reader, on whatever it is that I happen to be pondering over with my morning coffee. With that being said grab a chair, sit back with your coffee and when I'm done you can send me an email telling me how full of it I actually am.

It's been about ten years since I jumped in the water on my first open water check out dive. The water was crystal blue, I grew up on the Florida Gulf waters fishing with my grandfather but I had never seen such an amazing sight as the clear water and coral reefs at John Pennekamp State Park in Key Largo. It was late summer and true to Florida fashion we had a hot breeze and smooth seas. Shane (my instructor) was the first one in the water to wait for the rest of us. As I moved to the edge of the boat to take that first step of a life changing adventure I remember looking at Shane floating on the tag line. He was slightly rolled on his back as if sitting in his living room easy chair. I could see the smallest of smiles start to form from behind his reg. I was up! Giant stride in, one good solid fin kick and signal the boat "all OK". As I waited on the line preparing to descend, something happened that I never saw coming. I was looking at the sky and the waves surrounding me reflecting on how small I was in this great body of water when Shane removed his regulator from his mouth just long enough to say "look down."

"Pause" In every person's life there is defining moments that shape us into who we will become. It is the moments of truth and enlightenment that we experience in this world that directs the path that we walk, this was mine. It was actually a tarpon that would rival any trophy catch in Boca Grande Pass but beyond the tarpon was the most beautiful sight of nature my eyes would ever behold; my first glimpse of a coral reef.

In the world of diving we sometimes get caught up going deeper, diving longer or getting farther. We forget that scuba diving in itself is filled with "firsts," your first eel, your first arrow crab and your first big trip overseas. In a society of "been there done that" we are the privileged few that can honestly say on almost every dive "that was the first time I ever saw one of those." We are the ones who brave the elements in search of adventure, battle the waves and surf the surge. We are explorers, as noble as all those who came before us and blazing the trail for those who will follow. As I swam around on that first of many dives I remember a sense of freedom wash

over me, a feeling that I was where I was meant to be in a place that my heart belonged. As I returned to the boat I left behind a part of me that I will never carry on dry land again, instead it waits for me just below the surface of the water where the white caps form.

In my travels I have talked with thousands of divers and we all have two things in common, our love for the water and the memory of our first dive. We make plans for bigger and better adventures. We continue our training which allows us to travel to more exotic depths. Telling friends, relatives and anyone who will listen about all the wonderful places we've been and all the amazing sights that we've seen. But in all of our tales of splendor and beauty let us not lose sight of that one special moment when we started our journey beneath the waves on that "first" dive into our Underwater Planet. ■

*Charlie G.*  
Charlie G.

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## Gear Check by Sterner Editorial Services

### DUI extends comfort zone

Diving Unlimited International added another option to fine tuning personal comfort in drysuit diving with the introduction of the Xm250 under suit. The jumpsuit-style garment is a lighter weight version of the Xm450 suit that DUI introduced last year. It is intended be worn while diving in warmer waters or during dives of shorter duration in the 50- to 65 F range. Thinsulate 200 Type BZ provides the insulation. It's a hydrophobic material that retains more than 70 percent of its warmth protection even when fully soaked, so a diver could stay fairly warm during a decompression stop even after having a suit failure. Polartec Powerstretch panels are incorporated into suit at the armpits, mid-back, waist, knees, sides of the legs and wrists to maintain warmth yet provide freedom of motion. AEGIS Microbe Shield fleece lines the suit. Keys or other items can be stored in two zippered hand-warmer pockets or the zippered chest pocket. Thumb and ankle stirrups keep the suit in place while donning the drysuit. The unisex suit is available in six sizes from XS to XL and comes with a DUI DiveWear tote bag. [www.dui-online.com](http://www.dui-online.com).



### Tusa mask takes in broad view

Tusa had freedivers and spearfishers in mind when it designed its new M-210QB Panthes diving mask. The ultra-low-volume mask broadens the field of vision while minimizing the air volume in the mask. The two-window design of the Panthes is said by Tusa to provide 1.5 times the vision compared with others' two-window masks. The flexible skirt molds snugly to the face, preventing water from entering. The skirt is mounted to a Quick-Adjust buckle system that allows for automatic depth compensation. The nose pocket is wide enough to allow divers wearing 5 millimeter Neoprene gloves to equalize as they descend. The mask is held in place with a 3-D strap to optimize the anatomical fit. [www.tusa.com](http://www.tusa.com).



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## Olympus has stealth SLR

Divers who want digital single lens reflex features and quality but don't want the bulkiness of a DSLR may want to check out Olympus' new PEN E-PL1. The 12-megapixel camera is as compact as a point-and-shoot model, yet it accepts a range of lenses made by Olympus and other manufacturers ranging from ultra-wide angle to telephoto, including many zoom lens options. Image stabilization is built into the camera body, so it is effective no matter what lens is being used. Subjects can remain in focus while being tracked by using its Continuous Autofocus Tracking function. Color tones can be adjusted to add warmth in blue waters as well as for special effects such as sepia toning. Images can be saved as raw RGBs or compressed as JPEGs. It can shoot individual shots, bursts or even high-definition motion pictures with stereo sound. Sequential photos can be stitched together to create broad panoramic images. Shutter speeds range from two seconds to 1/2000th of a second and ISO sensitivity is from 100 to 3,200 ASA. The built-in flash has a guide number of 10 at 200 ASA and can wirelessly trigger an optional external strobe. The optional PT-EP01 polycarbonate underwater housing is depth rated to 130 feet and is roomy enough to see the entire back monitor or peer through an optional electronic viewfinder. Two flash connectors allow for fiber-optic cables to power multi-strobe setups. The non-removable port accommodates a variety of lenses. [www.olympus.com](http://www.olympus.com).



## Deep Outdoors goes lightly

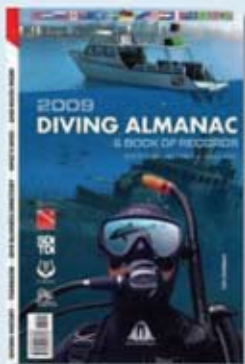
For those planning long dives in dark places Deep Outdoors' Cold Fusion lighting system may be just the ticket for safety. The array of light-emitting diode bulbs can deliver up to five hours of burn time at the low-beam setting or 3.5 hours on high. It also has a beacon setting to signal the boat after a dive. And if that's not long enough, the battery unit is equipped with three-pin wet connectors, so the rechargeable lithium ion battery pack can be switched underwater with a fully charged backup. The light head is fitted with a Goodman handle, which leaves fingers free for gripping. The system is shipped with a battery charger that works with 100- to 240-volt input with a universal switch allowing it to be used anywhere in the world with the appropriate adapter. Charging time is five to seven hours. The rugged machined aluminum system weighs less than three pounds on land, but only a half-pound in the water. It is depth rated to 500 feet and the lamps have a life of 100,000 hours. Cold Fusion lights are shipped with a carry / storage bag. [www.deepoutdoors.com](http://www.deepoutdoors.com)



# Book Log

Compiled by Sterner Editorial Services

## Face up to book bargain



The biggest compendium of diving facts has become the best deal too. Jeffrey Gallant has moved his "Diving Almanac" to Facebook, the social networking Web site. More than 3,000 indexed articles, 500 records, 600 who's who profiles, 1,200 businesses and centuries of diving history are available free of charge. All readers have to do is click through to the Facebook page and establish a password to gain access to regular updates and the archive of facts and figures. What's more they can exchange ideas with other readers around the world through the networking site. For those who like the feel of paper books, the 2009 almanac can still be ordered on-line as well. This 694-page soft cover from Porbeagle Press is a handy reference for settling discussions at dive club meetings and for quick reads in moments between tasks. It is the definitive toilet-tank topper for the complete diver. Soft cover ISBN: 978-0-9781078-2-6. [www.divingalmanac.com](http://www.divingalmanac.com).

## 'Hammerhead' nails shark facts



Of all the sharks in the sea, hammerheads have to be the strangest with their unique wide snouts. Learn why scientists feel the creatures developed this hammer formation and a myriad of facts about the species in "Hammerhead Sharks" by Alessandro de Maddalena and Alex "The Sharkman" Buttigieg. The 128-page book from Ireco Press is filled with color photos and black and white drawings of hammerheads that the authors have produced over decades of studying sharks. De Maddalena is president of the Italian Ichthyological Society and a member of the Mediterranean Shark Research Group. The book is a compendium of centuries of shark research by scientists around the world. Although the authors present information in scientific terms, they explain everything in laymen language that is easy to read yet highly informative. The text is bilingual (Italian and English.) The foreword was written by Ron and Valerie Taylor, the Australian shark experts who helped produce classic films such as "Jaws" and "Blue Water, White Death". The book can be ordered directly from the publisher, which is accessible through the author's Web site. ISBN: 978-88-86253-34-5. [www.alesandro-de-maddalena.webs.com](http://www.alesandro-de-maddalena.webs.com).

## Take your kid to 'Scuba School'



If your young guppies are becoming interested in scuba diving, consider getting "Scuba School". The 50-page soft cover from Hameray is one of a series of books Elizabeth Cook wrote to draw interest to the sport among the younger generation. Its six chapters introduce readers to the Underwater Zoo of creatures and plants. They then progress through Classroom, Learning About Gear, More Things to Learn, First Open Water Dive and Earning the C-Card. The book closes with appendices on protecting the planet, fun facts, a glossary and an index. Cook says the text is aimed at third-through eighth-graders, although it seemed more fitting to the youngest readers of that age spread. She covers scuba basics, the fun and the hazards without getting too technical or scary. The layout is breezy, lending a fun mood to the contents. Adding to its sense of excitement are color images of underwater photographer Robert Yin. ISBN: 978-1-60559-097-4. [www.hameraypublishing.net/underwater~encounters1](http://www.hameraypublishing.net/underwater~encounters1).

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# DIVING HOME

## No Passport Required

By Tracy Tirrell

In today's economy many of us are having trouble meeting day to day expenses, let alone be able to foot the bill for a dive vacation. But who says that diving has to be expensive? Who says you have to travel anywhere?

I know that when most of us think of diving we think of warm crystal clear tropical waters covered in coral reefs with an abundance of marine life. But what we often forget; is that we have some pretty cool dive locations right here, and you don't need a passport to get to any of them.

For those of us lucky enough to live in Florida, especially southern Florida, we have numerous locations to choose from anywhere from Pensacola to the Keys and just about anywhere in between. But even though I am fortunate enough to live only a couple of hours from John Pennekamp State Park in Key Largo; my most memorable dives have been right in my own back yard.

The gulf coast of Florida is not necessary known for its diving. But I can not tell you how many times I've gone out with Capt. Jeff of Scuba Marco and been eye to eye with not one, but several goliath groupers. I can recall how rapidly my heart pounded as I knelt motionless on the sandy gulf bottom next to my brother in the middle of about 8 "Volkswagen bug size" goliaths! How even more excited I got from feeling the sound of them "barking" as divers not as familiar with the local marine life startled one of these underwater giants. Or the exhilaration I felt when we visited "the hole" and for

the first time saw my depth gauge read 100 ft, yes you can reach a depth of 100 ft in the Gulf of Mexico! All this cost me was the cost of dive. No airfare, no hotel bill, no restaurant tab.

You don't even have to live in Florida, or even on either of our vast coastlines to be able to take advantage of our wonderful sport. For those of you in Utah, where else can you go crater diving? Homestead crater is a natural hot springs cavern inside a large rock dome, accessed by tunnel and offers diving in 96 degree water. Or how about staying in the foot of the Ozark Mountains and diving in the historical Bonne Terre Mine? You live in the deserts of New Mexico? Don't let that stop you from enjoying some underwater time, visit the "blue hole" of Santa Rosa. The blue hole is a geological phenomenon. The natural, bell-shaped pool is 80 feet deep and has astonishing clarity and a constant water temperature of 64 degrees. The Great Lakes of Michigan offer some of the best diving in the upper Midwest.

So the next time you feel land locked and are dreaming of some quiet time under the water, or if your just "jonesing" to go diving, don't think you need to book the next flight to Cancun. Just open your local phonebook or do a quick Google search and see what your local dive shop has to offer. I bet you'll be surprised at how good the diving is right in your own back yard. Quite literally, with the multitude of lakes, quarries, mines, and even craters; the good ole' U.S of A. offers diving from sea to shining sea. No passport required. ■

# *Immersing You in Nature*

By Greg Grivetto



If you enjoy being on or in the water, California's Channel Islands offers some of the best natural beauty the world has to offer. It's life source, cool Pacific Ocean water.

Sunlight filtered by the canopy becomes an array of thin green-yellow splinters illuminating kelp fronds and fish immediately below. Juvenile calico bass and small kelpfish are well-camouflaged between brown kelp stripes and tangled blades. Small groups of sardines, almost invisible against the blue sky above, dart inches beneath the surface where the canopy clears. Slight surge gently rocks the entire forest gently back and forth.

Dominating the scene are columns of giant kelp and rocky reefs and walls carpeted in short palm frond kelp and clusters of red algae and speckled with sponges, anemones, gorgonian and deep-water hydrocoral. Dropping down only halfway to the "reefy" bottom below you can navigate to shore, suspended quietly among the towering plants.

Bright individual garibaldi and scattered schools of blacksmith, perch and bass swim busily over the reefs, while a few nocturnal lobster and horn sharks are still seeking shelter for the day in the form of holes and ledges. Occasional open sand areas within the kelp bed, accompanied by clearings in the canopy above, seem like huge well-lit rooms in an immense shadowy building and



attract large swirling schools of jack mackerel, sunbathing sea lions and the occasional Pacific barracuda.

Sound good? This describes some of the finest diving in the world! The California kelp beds, vibrant with life, offer a multitude of water based opportunity and Horizon Charters Dive and Eco Adventures wants to "Immerse You in Nature!" We look forward to seeing you aboard MV Horizon. ■

Greg Grivetto

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# Welcome to the Waters of Boynton Beach

By Kevin Metz

Sunbeams dance over diverse and lush corals, painting them with a vibrant palette. A warm gentle current carries you effortlessly along a magnificent ledge carpeted with swirling schools of fish. The reef bustles with activity. A golden tailed moray and his hunting entourage dart from a brain coral over to one of the many giant barrel sponges on the top of the ledge, while a loggerhead turtle nestles into one of the deep undercuts below, preparing for a nap. Welcome to the waters of Boynton Beach, Florida.

Diving Boynton is a lot of fun, and I mean a lot of fun. There are many factors that come together in Boynton to make it a perfect storm of diving "fun-ness." Its

warm, it's clear, it's easy, but above all else... there is tons of stuff just waiting to be noticed, or better yet - photographed by some passing diver. You can expect to find sea turtles, nurse sharks, moray eels, goliath groupers, more angelfish than anyone can imagine, and hordes of other types of reef fish.

I don't know what density and diversity means to you; but here's what it has meant to me. I have had 400 pound goliath groupers share some very tight quarters with me, come eye-ball to eye-ball with a ten foot bull shark, discovered some freaky unknown worm (and some other kind of bizarre snot-like creature that none of the scientists down at the university could figure out), and have



had numerous male, and one female, loggerhead turtles become enamored with me. I've watched two sailfish work a bait ball from ten feet away and had others come down and circle me on the reef. Mola-molas; I've swam with three of them. I've also swam with manatees, manta rays, and had a pod of spotted dolphins play with me until I was too exhausted to swim anymore and had to get back on the boat. The list could go on and on, but all of it happened in the waters off of Boynton Beach.

Perched on the Atlantic coast of Florida, just south of its easternmost point, Boynton Beach's location is what makes it the best warm water diving on the continent. Bathed in the clear warm waters of the gulf stream current, its long north to south running, medium depth reefs, are what drift diving is all about. The majority of the reefs have a max depth of about 65 feet, though some are as shallow as 45 feet, and others are as deep as 110'. Nitrox 36 is probably the most popular gas to breathe, though air can certainly be used safely without sacrificing much bottom time. Boynton also offers three diver prepared artificial reefs in the recreational diving range, the Captain Tony (max depth 85 feet), the Budweiser (max depth 95 feet) and the MV Castor (max depth 115 feet). Technical trips can be arranged to the Skye Cliffe (max depth 204 feet).

The Castor is probably Boynton Beach's premier diving attraction, due to the dozen or so goliath groupers that inhabit the wreck year round. In late August through September, groupers form mating aggregations and I have seen as many as fifty different groupers milling about this wreck, jamming into any hiding place that they can squeeze into (you'll be amazed at the places these massive fish can fit!). They also school up into gigantic grouper balls and hang off to the side of the wreck this time of year. As if dozens of cow sized fish aren't impressive enough, unbelievable activity ensues whenever there are large schools of bait (and their predators) in the area. This has also helped to make the Castor my number one pick for Boynton Beach. If you can keep the commotion in the water to a minimum, and have a bit of patience, you'll find out that these fish are not shy. In fact, they're quite curious.

Water temperatures in the summer time reach the mid eighties, and in winter drop to the low seventies, so diving in Boynton happens year round. Diving in 86 degree water is pretty darn nice, I have to say, but even when the water is 72, the diving is still great (I like it best, in fact). I will qualify this statement though... be properly equipped. Now, the right exposure protection is sort of a subjective thing. Some divers will dive in shorts and a tee shirt year round and

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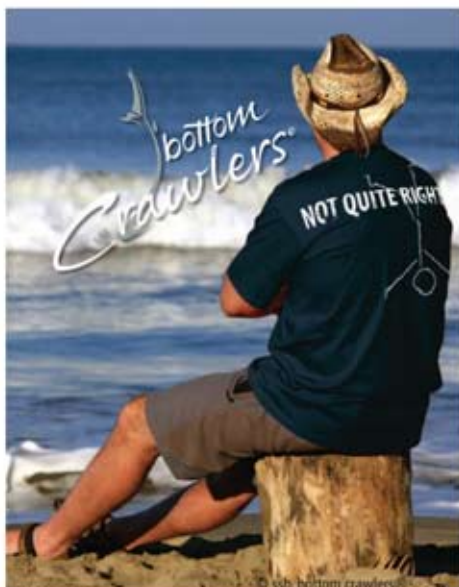


they're happy as a clam like that. Others will dive in a drysuit year round. Most people are comfortable in at least a 3mm full suit with a quality hood or hooded vest from January through the beginning of April, but if you have a 5mm or 7mm, bring it. For the rest of the year, a 3mm or less should do nicely. One more note on exposure protection. In the winter time, even in south Florida, the air out on the water can be somewhat chilly. A long jacket to wear over your wetsuit that breaks the wind is nice to have on the interval and on the trip back to the dock.

Boynton Beach diving is breathtaking, inexpensive and easy to get to. No customs, currency exchanges, no hassle. The bottom drops off fairly quickly from Boynton Beach, so all of our reefs and wrecks are located roughly less than a mile from the beach. Transit times from the marina to dive sites is 45 minutes or less, and generally closer to a half hour. Charter fares range from \$60.00 to \$80.00 and there are plenty of seats on the nine charter boats that service the area. Accommodations range from \$50.00 to \$300.00+ per night, so there are choices to suit everyone's tastes and budgets. Come dive Boynton Beach and find out why it has earned the reputation as scuba diving's best kept secret! ■

*Kevin is a dive master that has been diving since 1987 and has logged more than 4200 dives in the Boynton Beach area. He is the owner/operator of Underwater Explorers, a dive charter offering reef and wreck excursions in Boynton Beach, and most recently Dive Chronicles 2009 Dive master of the Year!*

Kevin can be reached at [www.DiveBoyntonBeach.com](http://www.DiveBoyntonBeach.com)



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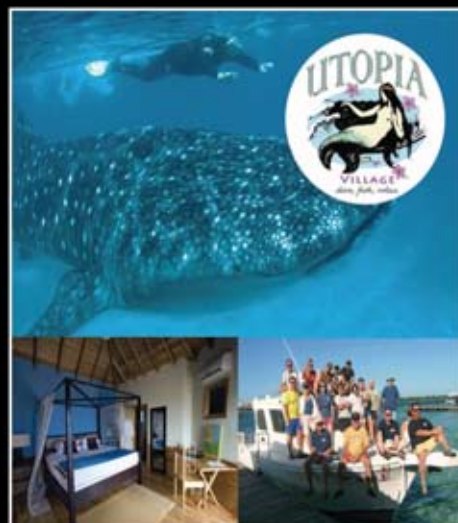
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# Questions & Answers

In each issue we will take questions submitted by our readers and find experts in that field to provide you with the best possible answers! Questions can be submitted by email to [Articles@DiversOnly.com](mailto:Articles@DiversOnly.com) and please put "UP Q & A" in the subject line.

### Gold Ring vs. Silver Ring

*I have the older version Legend LX that has the gold ring on the front and the newer ones have a silver ring on them. What are the differences between the two regulators? What upgrades have been made? Is my regulator now obsolete?*

When the Legend LX made its debut several years back it had a gold ring. At that time, there was also a coldwater version that sported a silver ring. A couple years ago, the gold went away and both versions shipped with the silver ring. There were no changes made to the regulator, it was purely a cosmetic change. The coldwater version is now distinguished with a laser-etched snowflake on top of the second stage.

Tom Phillipp,  
Product Manager - Pro Dive Division  
Aqua Lung America  
2340 Cousteau Court, Vista, CA 92081  
(760) 597-5035 • [www.aqualung.com](http://www.aqualung.com)



### ERDI Training

*I am interested in taking courses from ERDI in hopes of becoming a stronger*

*diver but I have been told that for me to take ERDI certification classes I need to be in the public safety industry. Is this true and if so why?*

There is no requirement to "be in the PSD industry" as a prerequisite for an ERDI course. Many PSD teams are staffed by volunteers who have careers outside Public Safety Diving. The only requirements for enrolling in an ERDI I diver program are certification as an OW diver and a willingness to work through a challenging program!

Steve Lewis,  
Director Marketing & Corporate Communications  
SDI, TDI and ERDI  
[Steve.Lewis@tdisdi.com](mailto:Steve.Lewis@tdisdi.com)  
(888) 778-9073 • [www.tdisdi.com](http://www.tdisdi.com)

### Rebreather Questions

*I am an underwater photographer and have been interested in getting certified for rebreather to not only eliminate bubbles but also reduce the amount of air tanks that I need. I have asked around and have heard I few points that concern me and would like clarification. 1) Closed-Circuit rebreathers require constant attention to gauges that would affect concentrating on pictures where as Semi-Closed are more worry free. 2) All rebreathers are meant for diving deeper than a typical reef where I would be for photography. 3) Any rebreather will be extremely "Technical" and will be overkill for picture taking. I am just*

*looking for the facts to be able to make an educated decision.*

Let me answer these in the order they were asked.

1) Closed-Circuit rebreathers require constant attention to gauges that would affect concentrating on pictures where as Semi-Closed are more worry free.

CCRs need to be monitored every few minutes, more often if changing depth dramatically or working hard. I also shoot pictures, and have never found it to be problematic. Plus, with a HUD (heads up display,) all it takes is a glance to the lower corner of your mask to check status.

Semi-closed are actually worse. No indication of status, and MUCH more prone to large fluctuations. Almost all mixed gas CCRs are better than semi-closed. Plus, semi-closed is harder to support in the field, and have bubbles.

2) All rebreathers are meant for diving deeper than a typical reef where I would be for photography.

Most benefits from CCRs are in the 50-100 ft depth. That is also where most people shoot pics. Other advantages of CCRs is on vacation.... you can spend twice as long underwater without deco, and can actually do your surface interval while underwater! Lots more time for photography!

3) Any rebreather will be extremely "Technical" and will be overkill for picture taking. I am just looking for the facts to be able to make an educated decision.

Some are more "technical" than others. All require more pre-dive prep, and post-dive cleanup. This amounts to about 30 minutes per day in the AM, and 15 minutes extra at night.

That being said, when you are new it will take longer. Just like when you were new to scuba, it took longer to get ready. You just need to be aware of that.

Jeffrey Bozanic, Ph.D.

Author: "Mastering Rebreathers"

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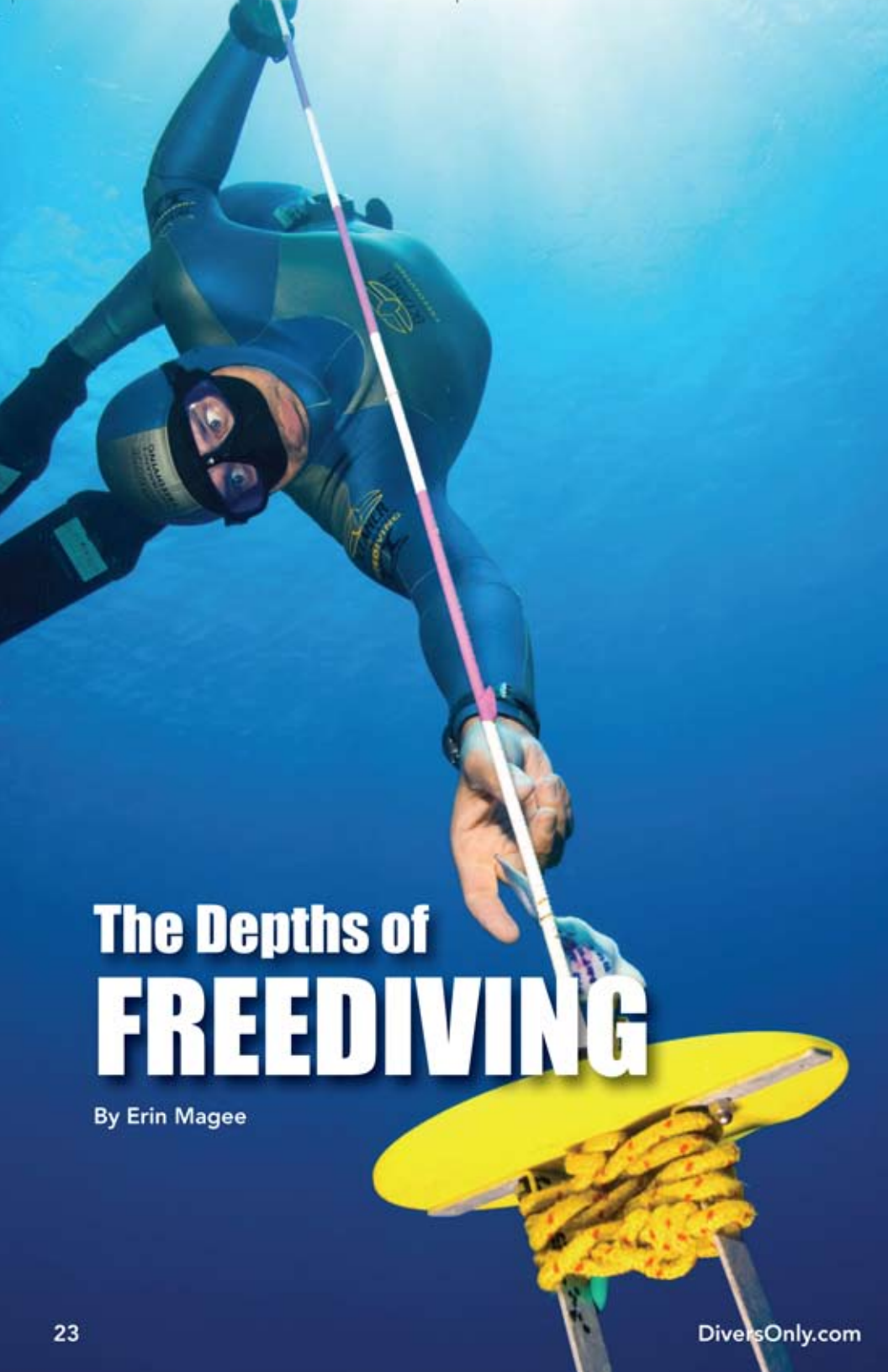
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# The Depths of **FREEDIVING**

By Erin Magee



## Apnea. Freediving.

**Skin diving.** Whatever you call it, it's a sport that's growing larger every year. It may have changed drastically since its origins thousands of years ago, but the freediving fundamentals forever remain the same. Competitive freedivers may use the whale tail-like monofin, spear fishermen may use band-loaded guns and a Japanese Ama pearl diver may use almost no equipment at all, but no matter how we do it or what we wear, all of us freedivers are united in one thing: that single breath we use for the journey underwater.

So why do it? That's a question every freediver has heard many times. Why hold your breath when you could easily strap on a scuba tank?

That answer is unique to each individual freediver. Some may like the challenge of breath holding. Others might prefer the convenience of avoiding scuba tanks. Some do it for sustenance, while many simply feel that freediving provides a unique connection to the nature of the underwater world.

But for me freediving is mostly about the self discovery that comes with using your innate human potential to push the limits of what we used to think possible.

Every single human being on this planet has the potential for incredible freediving depths. Every person has hidden diving reflexes that change their body's physiology whenever they enter the water. These changes, though temporary, actually adapt the human body to become an aquatic animal.

Whenever you jump into the water or even just stand in it, one or more of these diving reflexes may go into effect, slowing your heart rate, bringing blood from your



Safety first.

extremities to your core, and much more. The only difference between an experienced freediver and someone who's never stuck one toe into a pool is this: the freediver has used and felt those reflexes. But the great thing is, even if you've never used them, they're still there for you, under the surface, waiting for you to take advantage of them.

And I'll tell you from personal experience, those reflexes will allow you to reach depths you'd never think possible.

Before I got into freediving, I used to think that it was only for svelte men and women in peak physical condition who practice every single day to adapt their bodies to the water. Maybe that's true of the most elite freedivers in the world, but not for the majority of us.

For example, before I'd had any formal training, I practiced a bit of freediving on my own and after a couple of years I was able to get my breath-hold up to 2:45. I thought that was the absolute longest breath-hold I could do and was shocked when I heard of people doing four or even five minutes.

Well, after taking a four-day freediving class and learning about a few simple freediving techniques, I held my breath for more than four minutes. I was astonished

that I could use techniques my instructors taught to drastically increase that ability without months and months of training. Now I teach freediving courses and our instructors regularly help students hold their breath for more than four minutes during that four-day course. Many of those students have never gone further than a minute or so. And no, we're not holding anyone's heads in the water! Either we're really amazing instructors or we're getting some help from human physiology. (I like to think it's both!)

So imagine that you've just finished taking a freediving class and that you can hold your breath for more than four minutes. What would you use it for? Spearfishing? Just think how a breath-hold like that could improve your spearfishing. You'd be able to lie on the bottom on and wait for the fish to come to you.

Or if you're more the photographer type, picture yourself diving down to the sand, relaxing long enough for the fish that have scattered to come back and surround you. There are no bubbles to disturb or run them off and you still have minutes of primo photo-taking time left.

There's really no end to the in-water benefits of freediving. Many scuba divers actually report that freediving helps them lower their air consumption rate, allowing them more bottom time even when they're on scuba!

But let's address the really big question about freediving that everyone wants to know. Is it safe?

As with any in-water sport, it's dangerous if you're careless about safety, which unfortunately too many freedivers still are. Freediving is a safe sport only when practiced with proper safety precautions in place.

Consider scuba diving when it was in its infancy. Before certification agencies arose and safety protocols were created scuba diving was an extremely dangerous sport. There was no one to tell you not to hold your breath! Now, since scuba diving education is a requirement for the sport, its safety record has drastically improved and it's considered a very safe sport.

There's no requirement for freediving certification, but the education opportunities are out there. Professional freediving courses are designed to not only increase your



performance ability, but also to increase the safety of your diving.

For example, we teach buddy freediving in our courses. One freediver in the buddy team dives at a time, while the other stays at the surface supervising. The idea is that one person is always breathing up and ready to assist in the event that the diving buddy runs into trouble. We even employ this when we're diving in a pool.

All recreational scuba divers know that you are required to have a buddy 100 percent of the time. The simplest reason is that your buddy could save you and get you to the surface if you run out of air. In freediving, we start our dive without that reserve tank on our backs, so it's even more important to have a buddy for each and every dive.

All in all, the greatest thing about freediving is that it's a sport anyone can do. I've had students of all ages, shapes and sizes come through and every one of them amazes themselves with what they accomplish in just one class. I've seen students that start class having never put their heads underwater diving to 20 feet on day two. I've had students that had never been past 15 feet prior to the class diving to over 100 feet on day four. And the funniest thing is that even though I know what these folks are capable of, I'm never any less excited when one of my students reaches a new personal best.

And even if you've never put your head underwater, keep in mind that you've still got the same exact diving reflexes as spear fishermen, world record holding freedivers and freediving instructors. So even if you didn't already know it, you're already part freediver. ■

*Erin Magee is an instructor for Performance Freediving International, a freediving certification agency that has been in existence since 2000. For more information on freediving visit [www.performancefreediving.com](http://www.performancefreediving.com) or email [erin.magee@performancefreediving.com](mailto:erin.magee@performancefreediving.com).*



"Many scuba divers actually report that freediving helps them lower their air consumption rate, allowing them more bottom time even when they're on scuba!"



# Spearfishing Tournaments

FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY



When many people think of spearfishing they think of "Rambo" underwater, and these days nothing could be farther from the truth. I have found spearfishermen or "spearos" as they are often called, to be some of the most considerate divers in the water.

On several occasions when I have been on a dive that did include others planning to spearfish, I have always found them to be quite conscientious of other divers. Keenly aware of where others are in relation to where they are "hunting," perhaps even more so than most "recreational" divers. Many times I have had recreational divers, paying little or no attention to those around them, stir up the bottom and ruin that perfect photo I had been sitting waiting so patiently to take. Or scare off marine life others had not yet gotten the opportunity to see.

It has been my experience that spearfishermen, for the safety of all, understand the necessity of knowing the location of others in the water and simply do not intrude on other divers. For this reason, I think spearfishing has gained a wider audience and greater acceptance; allowing for greater popularity. As spearfishing becomes increasing popular, so does the diversity of those that participate in the sport. Men, women and even teens are now enjoying the sport and competition of spearfishing.

In fact, some tournaments, like the Florida Keys Open, are including categories for individual women's and junior's (ages 12-17) winners as well. In the team competition they give additional "bonus" points if the team is a mix to include women and/or juniors. Making spearfishing tournaments much more family friendly;



John Petracco on the hunt.

especially when more families are pursuing diving as a family activity.

For those of you new to the spearfishing tournament world, we should probably give you a bit of background on the set up of the typical tournament. There are two main types, aggregate and big fish. An aggregate tournament is designed to determine the best all around tournament competitor also known as a "shooter," because the winner is determined by a point total of all fish weighed in, with each fish ranging in value from 1 to 20 points on a predetermined scale, and usually from multiple categories. A big fish tournament is just as its name implies and simply is measured by weight.

Tournaments are typically a weekend event. Many have awards dinners and programs that can provide a fun filled evening out after the event for all family members of participating teams. This way organizers can offer something for even non-diving family members to look forward to, and provides an opportunity for everyone to be involved.



Members of the Southwest Florida Spearfishing Club, Carl, Frank, Steve, and JP, at the Key Largo Open

Organizers have also been making tournaments easier to participate in by doing a bit of restructuring to the standard format. For instance, many are no longer making Friday evening "captain's meetings" a requirement. Although these meetings can be quite helpful and informative, especially if last minute changes to the tournament are required, organizers have found that time constraints for many have led them to not enter a tournament if a Friday evening

meeting is mandatory. Secondly, several tournaments have gone to a format where teams can hunt in the familiarity of their home waters with the weigh in the following day, so participants only need to make one trip to the tournament site.

Although tournaments can be found year around, the majority of tournaments are in a season typically running from March through September. Some of the more popular Florida tournaments are; the Florida Winter Invitational in April, The Southwest Florida Open in late April/early May, and the Hell Divers Rodeo, Key West Open, and World Cup Invitational in June.



More information on the Southwest Florida Open, April 30-May 2, can be obtained by visiting [www.swflspearfishing.org](http://www.swflspearfishing.org) or by contacting Mr. Frank McCallister at [fmccallister@gmail.com](mailto:fmccallister@gmail.com) and additional information on the World Cup Invitational, June 21-25, can found at [www.20fathoms.com/meet\\_info.aspx](http://www.20fathoms.com/meet_info.aspx) or by contacting Dennis Haussler at [dennis@20fathoms.com](mailto:dennis@20fathoms.com). ■

(Left) Frank McCallister with a 96 pound Carbo.



*Southwest Florida Spearfishing Club*

Presents:

# Southwest Florida Open

2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Spearfishing Tournament

**April 30 - May 2, 2010**

## Schedule of Events

**April 30, 2010 5:30pm - 7:30pm**

Last minute registrations and Captains Meeting  
Big Game Bar & Grill

**May 1, 2010 6:00am - 9:00pm**

Shooting Day

**May 2, 2010 9:00am - 3:00pm**

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**[www.swflspearfishing.org](http://www.swflspearfishing.org)**

Frank McCallister (239) 565-1569

Brent Argabright (239) 489-0500

John Biggs (239) 218-4311



## Tonight's Catch

One of the best parts of diving whether you're spearfishing or traveling to exotic destinations is the endless supply of fresh seafood. Every issue Underwater Planet will bring you some of the most delicious and mouth watering recipes we can find. These are meant to appeal to you taste buds while we also appeal to your love of diving.

---

**Parchment Paper Fish** is a very easy dish to make and you can use any firm white fish you have caught. It makes for a great presentation at the table as the fish is actually served in the parchment.



### **Parchment Paper Fish**

- 2 lbs. firm white fish filets
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 stalks celery, julienne
- 1 c. sliced mushroom
- 1 carrot, julienne
- 1/2 onion, sliced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 lg. rectangular parchment papers

Fold the rectangle in half. Cut from folded side like a question mark. Open the heart shape and place the ingredients on one side. (One portion for one heart shape paper.) Fold the edge, overlapping the fold as you go along. Fold the tip of the papillote a few times to secure the closing. Bake at 400° for 10 minutes.

Serves 4.



# Adventure Divers, Inc.

## Minot, North Dakota

Adventure Divers, Inc. was opened in 1998 by owners Aaron and Sonya Faken to service Minot, North Dakota and the surrounding area. Adventure Divers, Inc. is a PADI, NAUI, and DAN training center offering a full range of scuba diving and snorkeling equipment and service.

In addition to their numerous commercial diving services such as Dive and ROV inspections and surveys, underwater construction, salvage, potable water services, emergency response services, Haz-Mat diving, dredging, tug boat and barge support, and consulting for issues or on upcoming projects; Adventure Divers also offers some unique classes and recreational diving.

Each winter they offer classes in ice diving. Being able to dive several local lakes;

visibility can reach 75ft in the icy blue waters. The ice thickness will range anywhere from 3 to 4 feet! Definitely bring your drysuit for that one! This is certainly one for the log book!

They also offer drift diving in the reservoir near Garrison dam and visibility can be anywhere up to 40ft. Here they typically see large sturgeon and paddlefish. North Dakota law allows for spearfishing of the local game fish. So be sure to try your hand shooting a pike or walleye to enjoy for your evening feast.

So the next time you're near Minot North Dakota be sure to contact Adventure Divers, Inc. at 701-839-9476 or you can email any questions to [dive@minot.com](mailto:dive@minot.com). Come see all the North Dakota diving has to offer. ■

### Ice Diving in the Garrison Dam reservoir.

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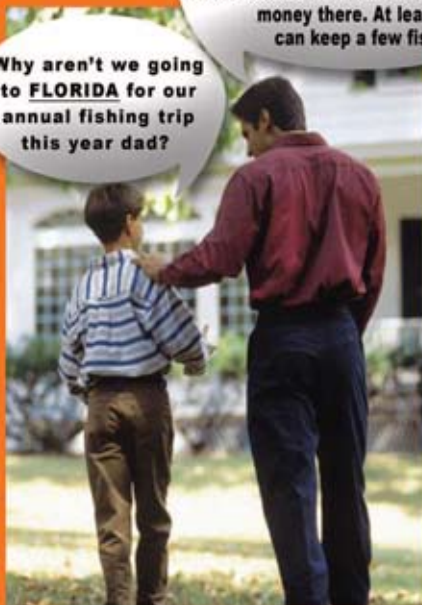
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## Privateer Divers

A company born from a passion for diving and the understanding of how to equip it.

If you're looking for technical dive hardware and accessories, or custom made harnesses, then you need to give Eric and Richard Simon a call. Eric and Richard, the CEO and President of Privateer Divers, are avid cave and wreck divers with over 50 years combined diving experience.

Highseas Millwork, a subsidiary of Privateer Divers, manufactures a top quality, reasonably priced line of dive equipment. Their equipment includes, but is not limited to: The Joe McGrath

Signature Series™ of dive harness hardware, harness hardware for rebreathers, clips, rings, knives and various other dive products.

The Joe McGrath Signature Series™ was originally designed and produced by Joe McGrath out of his shop in Massachusetts. The Joe McGrath Signature Series™ allows divers to customize their own harness or to have a harness built the way they have always dreamed.

In the summer of 2008, Eric and Richard Simon had been introduced to Joe shortly



## Highseas Millwork By Privateer Divers, LLC



after he sold his company Highland Millworks to XS Scuba. Since XS Scuba did not want to pick up his whole product line, in Joe's shop in Massachusetts, Highseas Millwork was born. They started with 5 products and soon expanded to over 80 products.

Eric knew they were on to something special after speaking with divers at the 2009 "Beneath the Sea" dive show. "There is nothing I like more than talking to divers and getting feedback. Everything just clicked at the show. People liked what we were doing" said Eric.

Eric Simon's love of the ocean began watching Jacques Cousteau and Sea Hunt as a kid. Then in 1972, at the impressionable age of 15, he enrolled in a YMCA scuba course and became scuba certified. From then on he was hooked, continuing his education at the Florida Institute of Technology and enrolling in underwater technology where he received a two-year college degree in commercial diving; and worked as a commercial diver both in the U.S. and abroad. Eric continues to explore the underwater world whether on his rebreather deep inside a cave, or technical wreck diving off the United States East Coast. Later, he would pass this passion for the open water on to his son Rick.

Rick Simon recalls growing up around the ocean and boats, spending time with his father. It was only a matter of time before he too began diving, having strapped the first tank upon his back at the tender age of 6. Richard is currently a junior at Eastern Connecticut State University and is pursuing a degree in business. He is also a Boston Sea Rovers' Frank Scalli Internship winner, and a

PADI and a TDI dive instructor holding both recreational and technical ratings. Richard has been running Privateer Divers since it formed in 2007. Rick is an avid diver; especially enjoying diving deep caves on his rebreather and wrecks off the U.S. East Coast.

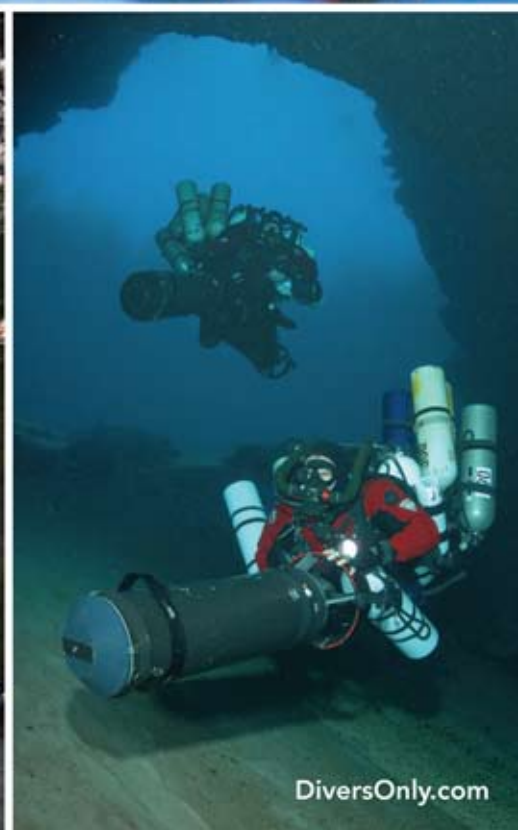
It is this passion and experience in diving that truly sets Highseas Millwork and Privateer Divers apart. "We are divers" says Rick. "We were tired of having gear breaking on us and stuff wearing out to fast. So we made an agreement that we would never sacrifice the quality of our products. We feel that the quality of our products speak for themselves and is the foundation of Highseas Millwork. We make most of the products ourselves, so it is easy to change something or rework it to fit your needs."

Being a small company Privateer Divers can cater to your needs the way other companies do not. When you call, you get us either Eric or Rick on the phone. When you have an issue you talk to them directly, not some one who knows nothing about the product you just purchased. They are also able to customize products to fit your needs, in a way other major manufacturers cannot.

So the next time you're in the market for quality custom equipment don't automatically look to the large manufacturers. You might be surprised what this family owned, operated, and produced product line can do for you. Eric or Rick can be reached at (860) 742-2699 or on the web at [www.PrivateerDivers.com](http://www.PrivateerDivers.com). ■

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# Local Conservation Group Recognized by Governor's Cabinet

The Woodville Karst Plain is a hydrogeologic zone located in northern Florida that includes a vast network of water-filled caves carrying billions of gallons of water per day to some of the world's largest freshwater springs. Fascination with these caves, as well as with their broader environmental significance, has compelled members of the Woodville Karst Plain Project (WKPP) to dedicate themselves for nearly three decades to the organized exploration, survey, and documentation of these underwater labyrinths.

The group's dedication received special recognition by the Florida Government in March of 2009. During the regularly scheduled Florida Cabinet Meeting at the Capital, the WKPP was presented with a resolution in recognition of exceptional volunteer service to the State of Florida. Sponsoring the resolution was Florida Chief Financial Officer Alex Sink; Governor Charlie Crist, Attorney General Bill McCollum and Agriculture Commissioner Charles Bronson unanimously passed the motion.

In addition to the resolution, it was made clear that WKPP contributions have been instrumental in furthering the understanding, and ultimately the protection, of the cave systems beneath the Woodville Karst Plain including Wakulla Springs. Exploration, survey and scientific support in addition to first hand observation, photos, video and testimony have been the basis for policy decisions and multi-million dollar land purchases covering large tracts of land above and adjacent to Florida cave systems. Direct support of various research initiatives including dye-tracing efforts have proven extremely valuable towards protecting Wakulla Springs from nitrate pollution. In fact, these efforts have encouraged the City of Tallahassee to invest at least \$220 million dollars in order to upgrade water treatment facilities. As a result the City of Tallahassee along with Wakulla County and Leon County signed a ground breaking agreement pledging a coordinated effort to protect ground water supplies including Wakulla Springs.

The long-range, deep cave dives conducted by WKPP divers involve a





dedicated support team of volunteers; these individuals have proved critical to the record breaking underwater cave exploration of the WKPP. The team is led by explorers Jarrod Jablonski and Casey McKinlay, Gainesville residents, long-time friends and dive buddies for nearly 20 years.

Casey and Jarrod routinely carry out dives lasting more than 24 hours. Some



of that time is devoted to exploring the miles and miles of passageway and some is spent carrying out obligated decompression – but all of it is underwater.

The team's most recent accomplishment required a dive to 25,000 ft in an unexplored, underwater cave at a depth of approximately 300 ft—a dive that could take nearly 30 hours to complete. The goal was to connect two of the world's longest caves, Wakulla Springs and Leon Sinks. The discovery linked a total of 28 miles of explored passageway, establishing the system as the longest underwater cave system in North America.

Both Jarrod and Casey are quick to point out the entire project wouldn't be possible without the remarkable group of divers that make up the WKPP. "There is no question that these accomplishments are team accomplishments – in my opinion this is a team of the very finest individuals ever assembled," says Jarrod. Team contribution is entirely voluntary, resulting in thousands of hours, and dollars.

Dives of that magnitude require gear specifically designed to handle such long exposure. The Halcyon Rebreather



The team's most recent accomplishment required a dive to 25,000 ft in an unexplored, underwater cave at a depth of approximately 300 ft.



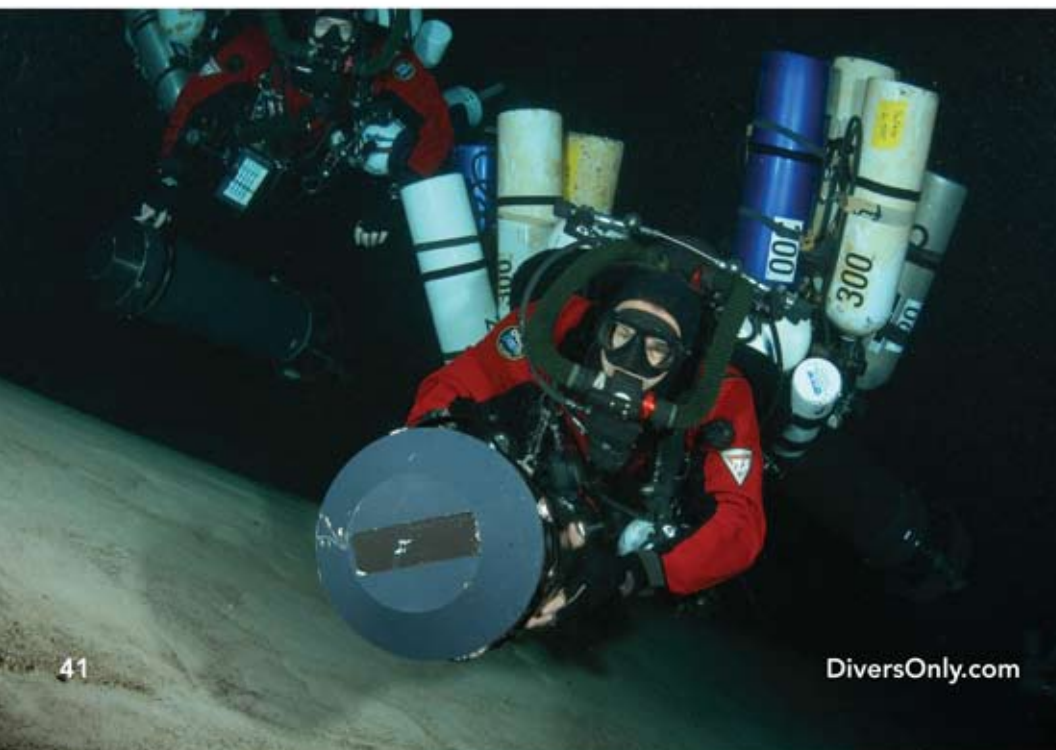
provides the primary source of gas for the divers, although they also carry additional bottles for safety. In order to travel quickly they utilize underwater scooters, and because the battery will not last the entire dive, they must tow extras. Prior to the dive, a setup team also places additional stage bottles and scooters for safety precautions.

The consequent preparation is reminiscent of a large-scale, scientific expedition deep within the arctic. Most people would rightly imagine that world record accomplishments require significant preparation. When the world records involve highly technical dives designed to support a broad conservation and research agenda, the scale of preparation increases exponentially. Extreme Exposure in High Springs sponsors the team and their efforts. The devoted staff regularly takes on the task of preparing dozens of divers for the most elaborate dives ever conducted. For example, the staff are

regularly tasked with filling hundreds of tanks, knotting thousands of feet of guide line, testing and installing prototype equipment, rebuilding dozens of regulators, repairing a wide range of equipment and making custom modifications and repairs to team dry suits; of course these tasks are in addition to their daily routine of operating one of North Florida's most vibrant adventure centers.

The WKPP is a non-profit affiliate of Global Underwater Explorers (GUE), headquartered in High Springs. For the past 10 years the WKPP has partnered with GUE to increase public awareness of the intimate connection among dozens of surface streams, sinkholes and cave systems, which is vital toward the protection of these critical resources. ■

*Content provided and copyrighted by Global Underwater Explorers with contributions from Corey Jablonski, Jarrod Jablonski, Todd Kincaid and Casey McKinlay. Photos by David Rhea, Anthony Rue, and Sonya Tittle.*





**Suggested Links:**

Woodville Karst Plain Project  
[www.wkpp.org](http://www.wkpp.org)

Global Underwater Explorers  
[www.gue.com](http://www.gue.com)

Extreme Exposure  
[www.extreme-exposure.com](http://www.extreme-exposure.com)

Halcyon Manufacturing  
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## Tales from the Deep

Here's your chance to brag. As divers, most of us love to talk about the places we've been and the wonderfully unique things we've seen or experienced. Well we want to hear all about it. In each issue we will be featuring stories submitted by our readers. So if you've been dying to tell someone about the really cool night dive you went on in Aruba, or how exhilarating it was to come face to face with your first goliath grouper, write it down and send it to us. Submit your stories to [Articles@DiversOnly.com](mailto:Articles@DiversOnly.com) and put "UP Tales from the Deep" in the subject line; you just might find your underwater experience featured in a future issue!



# Running with the Bulls

By Walter Wilt

I'll never forget Saturday, April 29, 2006.

We divided into two groups to make sure Jim's boat, the Irish Wake, was adequately manned at all times. Rich, Tracy and Carissa were in one group, while Jim, Dario and I were in the other. Arriving at the area near South Jack Wreck, about 10 - 15 miles off shore Bradenton Florida on the Gulf coast, we dropped anchor and prepared to hit the water. Since Jim, Dario and I had set up our gear before we left the dock, we were designated as the first group to dive this wreck in 65 feet of water.

After finding the wreck on the depth finder, we dropped a marker to give us a visual reference on the surface. After dropping anchor, we came to rest about 50 yards north of the marker. This should be a nice easy swim to the wreck.

I splashed first, followed quickly by Dario and Jim. While waiting for them to arrive, I looked around this beautiful blue water; we had about 80 feet of visibility. Right below me, near the bottom, swimming slowly to the north was a bull shark I estimate to be about 8-10 feet in length. All three of us got a pretty good look at this magnificent creature as it reversed direction a couple times, finally going north as we moved south toward the wreck.

After swimming for way too long, we finally decided we'd missed the wreck. I kept checking in all directions hoping to see some evidence of the wreck, but only saw one small chunk of metal. We saw a couple large barracuda, 3 - 4 ft range, and lots of bait fish, but no further sign of the bull. We closed up and

signaled an ascent to eyeball the Irish Wake and see if we could determine our position relative to the wreck. Just before we began our ascent, we saw the same bull shark, or one very similar, right below us. It circled for a short time, way down below us, then it left.

Reaching the surface, Dario announced it was his first shark. We figured we were directly east of the wreck, signaled OK to the boat and dropped down for our westward swim. As we dropped, we discovered we had not one, but two large bull sharks with us. They were no longer swimming slowly and gracefully. They were moving quickly with jerky movements. These bulls were charging, turning away as they came close, circling and criss-crossing around us at a depth of 15 - 20 feet.

I flashed OK signals at both Dario and Jim, they both returned them. My thoughts at the time were that the sharks were too close and too aggressive, but we were probably ok for now, but unless they left us, we needed to leave the water.

We started our westward trek accompanied by the bulls that were still too close for comfort. We circled a bit to keep them in sight and swam toward them when they got too close. They backed off and before long disappeared into the blue. We continued west alone for a few minutes with no shark coming within sight. All three of us continued to scan in all directions as we swam.

It was time for another position check, so we surfaced to check our location. Looking below, I saw the bulls closing in

again. Ok, this is too much, time to get out of the water, so I waved the distress signal to the boat and immediately dropped under to meet the approach of the sharks. Dario and Jim followed pretty quickly. We backed them off as we moved in the general direction of the boat. Again we were able to seemingly get them to leave, but after their history, I wasn't about to trust they'd actually left.

Rising to the surface for a quick check to see how close the boat had come, I was surprised to see not only was it not moving, they weren't even pulling the anchor. I couldn't understand why as I was sure they had seen my signal. Jim and I were agreeing to forget about a pick up when I heard Dario very calmly say "shark's coming."

Ducking my head under, I, to my horror, saw one of the bulls heading right at Jim and Dario, closing in rapidly from the rear in a 45° angle ascent. I began an immediate head first descent, swimming as quickly as I could right at the bull. I felt helpless as this big bull was a couple of seconds away from Jim and I was not close enough to block. I yelled "NO!!!!!!!" while continuing to charge the bull. The shark was within 5 feet of Jim's back when it turned 180° and swam away. I don't know why, but one of the clearest images that remains in my mind, is a scar I could clearly see in the shark's tail as it swam away.

We coordinated our swim to the boat with no signals. Dario and I stayed below to watch for sharks and keep them away while Jim stayed at the surface and kept us headed the right direction. We did not see the bulls return after the aborted charge.

Why didn't we get picked up after giving the distress signal? It seems Dario saw

that Jim and I were calm and apparently unconcerned about the sharks, so he didn't feel threatened. Right after I signaled distress, Tracy held up an OK sign for confirmation, but I'd already dropped under to meet the sharks. Dario, being unaware I'd signaled for a pick up and not aware of the seriousness of the situation, signaled OK. The guys on the boat were confused by the conflicting signals and were unsure of what to do. They were also confused by us surfacing and immediately descending.

There are certainly some excellent lessons to be learned from this dive and I hope I've learned them all.

*First mistake* - The bull changed direction right after I entered the water indicating a clear interest in me. I should have exited the water immediately.

*Second mistake* - After seeing the bull return, we surfaced. Never surface unless you are exiting the water immediately with big sharks in the area.

*Third mistake* - We delayed in acting aggressively towards the bulls in reaction to their aggressive behavior.

*Fourth mistake* - After the aggressive bulls left the first time, we continued our dive. We should have headed for the boat.

*Fifth mistake* - We surfaced a second time.

*Sixth mistake* - I didn't listen for the boat engine and notice the boat was not moving.

*Seventh mistake* - We surfaced a third time. ■

In each issue we're going to give all of you aspiring underwater photographers an assignment, a "deep sea dweller" to locate and photograph. So send your photos, and a brief description of the dive you were on when you took the photograph, to [Articles@DiversOnly.com](mailto:Articles@DiversOnly.com) and reference "UP Deep Sea Dwellers" in the subject line. We will pick the best photo/story combination to be featured in the next issue of Underwater Planet. This time around we're looking for the juvenile spotted drum. Here's a description and photo of what to look for, and waters you can find it in. Happy Hunting!

# The Spotted Drum

By Meaghan Hummel-Uzzi

The flashy spotted drum (*Equetus punctatus*) is a relatively small reef-dwelling fish (not exceeding nine inches in length) belonging to the Scaenidae family, commonly known as drums. All drums belong to the order Perciformes, or perch-like fishes. They are named for the croaking or drumming sound they produce by vibrating the muscles around their swim bladder. Members of the Scaenidae family, which includes the spotted drum, all share some similar characteristics. They have a distinctive long dorsal fin, tend to be drab in color, and have down-turned mouths specialized for bottom-feeding. The most recognizable member of the drum family is probably the high-hat, which is very popular in the aquarium trade.

The spotted drum is unique in that it can be found dwelling in coral reefs around Florida and the Caribbean region, whereas most members of Scaenidae tend to avoid clear, open waters, opting for the relative safety of the estuaries, mud flats, and river banks. Typically active at night, the spotted drum can be found during the day between a depth of

ten to one hundred feet hiding beneath rock and coral ledges or at the mouths of small caves. They are a benthic species, adapted to feeding near the sea bed.

Adult and juvenile spotted drum fish bear striking black and white patterning, and both exhibit similar feeding behavior and repetitive swimming patterns. They can be distinguished in several ways. The juvenile spotted drum lacks the namesake spotting on the upper body that is present in the adult, their black and white striping is more defined, and their dorsal fin appears longer. Due to their distinctive appearance, the experienced observer should not have much difficulty identifying a spotted drum. ■



# Digital Memories

By Chris Kovaz

Many times we ask ourselves should I shoot DSLR or should I shoot point and shoot for my underwater photography. Both have advantages and disadvantages, in this issue I will discuss both the pros and cons of each option.

Let's take point and shoot as your first option. This is the most economic and simplest route to follow. Point shoot offers the least amount of set up to start shooting underwater images, no external lenses, filters, or focus rings. Housings for point and shoot cameras are generally cheaper than the housings for DSLR cameras. Another great thing point and shoot cameras offer is the recent ability to be able to shoot in raw camera format. Before, that was a huge advantage DSLR had over point shoot cameras. Raw provides you with additional editing tools and will provide you with the most information to use when entering the editing process of developing your images. The very large LCD screen that a lot of shooters will use as their viewfinder is also often seen as an advantage of the



point and shoot. It can be a great tool while underwater to review your images, as it is harder to view your images on your LCD screen underwater than it is while shooting topside. As for the cons of point and shoot cameras. The first is the amount of controls you have access to with your housing. Generally you will have a lot less control options to manipulate your settings on a point and shoot compared to a DSLR.

As for DSLR, it is the optimum choice for the professional photographer. They offer the largest size of mega pixels in comparison to point and shoot cameras. While they are contracted by the lens length, their lenses produce the most amount of detail that can't be rivaled by the lenses of point and shoot cameras. Another advantage of DSLR cameras is the amount of controls they possess on both the camera body and the housings. The body and housings on the DSLR are much more accessible than that of the point and shoot cameras. You have

everything at your disposal; ISO, shutter speed, f-stop, shooting modes, and white balance. A DSLR for underwater also has the ability to pick up the

tiniest macro subjects with





wet diopters. Furthermore, DSLR has the ability to use a rapid burst mode combined with sync strobes to shoot multiple shots in an instant. This is extremely effective when on shark feeds or any other fast moving subject. Now for the cons of DSLR; the first is obviously cost. Because of the multiple lenses and other accessories you must have to properly shoot in certain situations. It can be a very large investment when jumping into shooting a DSLR especially when it comes to under water photography. The next thing is the amount

of care and maintenance that DSLR requires keeping that sensor clean. When using underwater housings you will have a lot of o-rings to deal with. It is vitally important to pay special attention to these to avoid flooding. The final set back is the amount of space when traveling you has access to when shooting a DSLR. With the amount of ports lenses and accessories you need for your DSLR, set ups can be difficult when traveling especially in today's world with the airline companies. ■

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# Dive Mauritius

By Tracy Tirrell

Mauritius is located in the southwest Indian Ocean just off the African coast and about 500 miles east of Madagascar. It's an island nation that sits in warm turquoise waters, composed of luscious tropical landscapes, rugged mountain terrain and beautiful white sand beaches.

The island offers a diverse range of diving sites from coral reefs abounding in life that are encompassed by landscapes of arches, tunnels and mysterious caves, to shipwrecks that conceal unsuspected "treasures."

The island is surrounded by a coral reef system that breaks in several places; this is where some of the most incredible diving is found. The more shallow reefs sights are comfortable for beginning divers and are teeming with marine life.

Often sighted are turtles, eagle rays, barracudas, and sharks. Even the short trips to and from dive locations and surface intervals are interesting as four different types of whales can be encountered in the waters near Mauritius.

For more experienced divers the list of sights includes: walls, rock formations, caverns, and wrecks.

Anyone considering diving on the island should definitely get in touch with the MUG (Mauritius Underwater Group), they're the local club. They have been considered to be a "diverse, interesting, generous, and friendly group" who welcome traveling divers with open arms. It is a non-profit club run by its members and caters to all with an interest in the sport. Their dive sights



are often more interesting and they tend to travel to lesser or unknown locations that many of the hotel dive centers do not. If you have questions regarding diving, or learning to dive, in Mauritius you can contact them at [info@mug.mu](mailto:info@mug.mu).

As with any foreign dive travel, it is important to research reputable dive centers for the best (and safest) experience. There are 23 dive centers registered with the Mauritius Scuba Diving Association. Many are based in hotels and there are independent operators dotted all over the island. Some of the less reputable centers have been known to be relaxed on requiring proper certification for diving, **NEVER DIVE BEYOND YOUR ABILITY!** Although it may be tempting to book your first cave or wreck dive, do not unless you have the proper training.



Cedric and the staff at the Ocean Spirit Dive Center, located on the northern tip of the island, are prompt, professional and courteous. It holds a Padi certification and also offers diving certification courses. The Ocean Spirit Dive Center has a number of dive sights in its repertoire, many with only a 15 minute or less commute time to the dive site! They can be contacted by email at [info@osdiving.org](mailto:info@osdiving.org) or visit their website [www.osdiving.org](http://www.osdiving.org)



Although diving can be done year around, dive season is thought of as November through March. This is when the water is the warmest with the best visibility. However, be aware that these warm summer months, in the southern hemisphere, run through their "hurricane season" with the possibility of tropical storms particularly in February or March.

The island is divided into geographical "diving zones" with each zone known for different and unique features.

The Southwest coast near Flic and Flac is known mostly for its marine life and beautiful underwater architecture. Two of the most popular sites are the Cathedral and the Rempart Serpent. The Cathedral is a combination of cavities, caves and arches, whereas the Rempart Serpent is more notable for the abundance of scorpion fishes, stone fishes, lion fishes, moray eels and beautiful fauna.





The North coast is where most of the wreck diving takes place. Here the numerous shipwrecks that have become attractions for divers are: the Hassen Mian, Stella Maru, Silver Star, Amar, Star Hope, Water Lily and Emily.

The East coast is not for the beginning diver. Only advanced divers are encouraged to check out the magnificent lagoon that borders the coast and is scattered with many channels that allow easy access to the open sea. It is in these plankton rich channels divers are most likely to encounter

whales or sharks. The channel of Belle Mare is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful places of the island, though diving is difficult due to swift currents. Last but not least the remnants of the historical wreckage of the Sirius can be found to the South. This British ship had sunk in 1810 during the naval battle of Grand Port, which opposed the French to the British. Unfortunately, there's not much left and visibility in the area is poor. Nevertheless, the discovery of cannons, cannonballs and the debris of the two-centuries-old hull can be quite exciting.

So what ever you choose to explore, know that Mauritius does have something to offer nearly every diver in nearly any skill level from novice to the expert adventure seeker. Just be sure to plan ahead, know and respect your limitations, and do a bit of foot work in seeking out qualified and experienced guides. This will make your trip to Mauritius one you will never forget. ■





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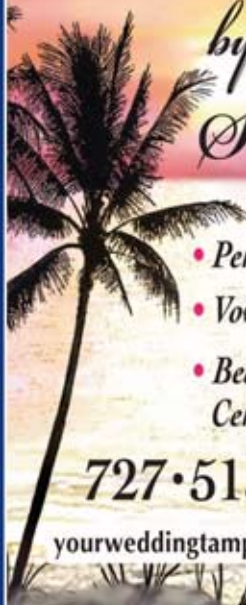
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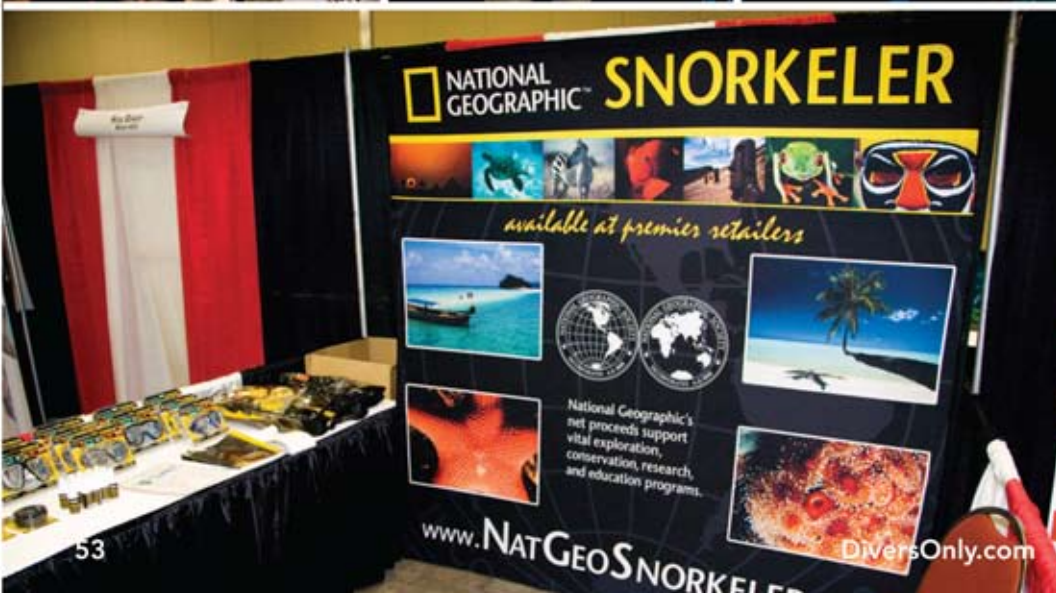
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# TRADE SHOWS

## Not just for professionals

I know when many of us think of trade shows or expos we think of DEMA or industry shows where companies can showcase new products for dive shops or dive professionals to purchase. For these types of shows the general public can not even make it through the front door, let alone purchase anything, but this is not always the case.

There are several excellent consumer trade shows where the entire diving community is not only welcomed but encouraged to attend. These types of shows can provide divers with a wealth of information on everything from the latest in gear to travel to continuing education. Many shows even offer seminars, classes, workshops and guest speakers.

All of us at Underwater Planet encourage everyone to take advantage of this truly valuable resource because we feel that well informed divers are safe divers. We also feel that trade shows are a great way to connect with the rest of the diving community and an even better way to introduce others to our sport.

We, like so many of these expos, have a strong desire to keep advancing the sport of scuba diving as well as to bring

knowledge of the sport to as many people as possible. It is something we are passionate about. We want to invest in diving's future; this is why you can find us at many consumer trade shows offering free memberships to DiversOnly.com with subscriptions to Underwater Planet.

A couple of the places you might find us are: the dive travel expo 2010 in Tacoma WA from May 21-23 or the Colorado dive show in Denver on September 24th and 25th. Both of these shows are excellent examples of expos offering a variety of exhibits, workshops, seminars, and even children's programs.

Here is a short list of upcoming events you are welcomed to attend as well as websites where you can find additional information on what is being offered and local accommodations. ■

### Beneath the Sea

Secaucus, NJ • March 26-28  
[www.beneaththesea.org](http://www.beneaththesea.org)

### Bay Area Dive Show

Santa Clara, CA • April 30 - May 1  
[www.divechronicles.com/Bay](http://www.divechronicles.com/Bay)

### Long Beach Dive Show

Long Beach, CA • May 15 & 16  
[www.scubashow.com](http://www.scubashow.com)

### Colorado Dive Show

Denver, CO • Sept 24 & 25  
[www.divechronicles.com/Coloradodiveshow](http://www.divechronicles.com/Coloradodiveshow)

### Dive Travel Expo 2010

Tacoma, WA • May 21-23  
[www.divenewsnetwork.com/expo](http://www.divenewsnetwork.com/expo)





# The Sinking of the VANDENBERG

By Chris Norwood

In May of 1999, I quit my job in the family business and moved to Key West to be a charter boat captain. Upon arriving, I began attending the Florida Keys Community College's (FKCC) diving program as an advanced open water diving student, made dive master and bought a six pack charter boat, the Lucky Dog. During this process, I became the president of the FKCC Dive Club. We were putting on great events; underwater pumpkin carving, frozen fins dives in the Keys, under water Easter egg hunts etc.

Then my life drastically changed. JoEllen Sullenger, secretary of the dive club, told me she wanted to introduce me to someone whom she thought I would enjoy meeting, Joe Weatherby. Weatherby had been working to scuttle a 524 foot WWII era troop transport ship the "General Hoyt S Vandenberg," whose illustrious career had included stints as not only a troop transport and a refugee rescue transport ship, but also a cold war missile tracker, and the backdrop for the major motion picture, Virus. Weatherby wanted to sink her off the Key West coast as a world-class scuba dive tourism destination. I signed on as the "Chief of Porthole Carrying Operations" for Artificial Reef

of the Keys (A.R.K.), the non-profit organization dedicated to sinking the Vandenberg. About a year later, Weatherby resigned to start Reef makers, a private company, to handle the logistics for projects of this significant magnitude. I then became the president of A.R.K. and led a group of people singularly dedicated to the success of this project. Sheri Lohr, Bob Smith, JoEllen Sullenger and I made up the core of this group.

When I first laid my eyes on the USNS Vandenberg, in June of 2002, she was in the James River. I pulled over my rent a ride into Fort Eustis Virginia, and found the MARAD fleet office. After the check in and some introductions, I was taken to a launch and was off to the "Ghost Fleet" moored out in the river. She was rafted up with four other ships. One of note was the USS Hunley, a submarine tender. Our guides were from the crew that monitors the fleets' bilges and water lines so that the ships don't sink in the river. They were familiar with the ship so we proceeded across the deck of the Hunley to our target. Flashlights, hardhats and steel-toed boots were required for this mission into the bowels of Vandenberg; not the wreck reels,



computers, and mixed gases that I use these days. After 3 hours of exploration of the shaft alley, engine room, tank rooms, Russian spaces, and auxiliary machine room, just to name a few, we arrived on the main weather deck and I was hooked. I knew at that point the Vandenberg would create the artificial reef we dreamed it would become.

It took another eight years, and I logged thousands of miles and hundreds of meetings with government agencies in search of the funds to "Sink the Vandenberg," before all of our hard work became a reality.

The Lucky Dog was the shuttle boat for the crew of about 30 salvage guys who had come in to do the final sink preparations—cutting the vent holes in the hull and between the decks, pressing all the tanks full of water, removing all the doors and hatches, rig, setting the anchors for the five, eight-ton anchors, and welding anything and everything in place that might try to leave the ship prematurely before she hit the bottom. The final duty of the General Hoyt S Vandenberg: an artificial reef, classroom, laboratory and tourist attraction off Key West, FL.

I pulled alongside her for the last time to pick up the last two people on the ship. Then Tom Dhowd, the master blaster, scrambled down the boarding ladder on to the Lucky Dog while

Weatherby yelled "look out below" as he tossed down the last case of water, a trash bag, and finally the life ring. Weatherby then started down and stopped for a picture as the last man to walk her decks. I pushed us off to become the last man to touch her before she sank.

I watched a whole decade's work sink in one minute and forty-four seconds. It was quite a journey from carrying the first porthole to hearing the charges go off from my ringside seat. Afterward, I was lucky enough to be apart of one of the many clearance dives that checked the structural integrity of the sunken ship. We did these dives, about 2 hours after the ship sank, to confirm that all the pieces were still on the ship and that all the cutting charges went off. The visibility was about 60 feet, which was good considering, and the bubbles over the ship were like a Jacuzzi, with only a lone barracuda on patrol.

It sounds almost anti-climatic, but afterwards we went home, ate some McDonald's, and took a nap. Sinking a ship is hard work.

Now the ship is once again teaming with life; algae, urchins, wahoo, snappers, groupers and divers—the whole food chain.

The Vandenberg is certainly an awesome sight and what I would consider to be the "Best Wreck Dive on the Planet!" ■



# The Last Word

## Diver for Life By Joe Acuni

In this, and future, Diver for life columns I will try to amuse, inform, annoy, compare, and complain, (with vigor) about whatever tickles my fancy, which I highly recommend doing whenever possible...usually with a friend. That being said, I thought a little history about the writer was in order; just in case this is to be both my inaugural and last article in Charlie Goehle's new dive magazine.

I've been diving with my best friend/buddy and wife since 1989. Traveling both locally and to some of this hemisphere's best diving destinations, like Cozumel, Little Cayman and Bonaire and of course the Florida Keys.

But like many people I am sometimes a little selfish about sharing special personal underwater moments or unique observations; instead, preferring rather to hold them firmly inside; kind of like a precious pear. Now I feel is a good time to shuck this ugly little bivalve, eat its big slippery gray resident, and show off the shiny prize inside, before I break a tooth on it.

A year and a half ago some of our best friends invited us to travel with them once again to the beautiful island of Bonaire in the Netherlands Antilles.

This was not our first trip, and I hope not our last, but it was date specific; and late September to early October was the time to go.

The trip down to the islands was typical modern air travel, but the accommodations were characteristically extra special in the newly built Den Leman condos at Adventure dive and photo near Sand Dollar Resort.

A dozen great dives into the trip, and not long after another perfect sunset, we began a highly anticipated night dive. Earlier in the day we had read the schedule on the bulletin board and it said to look for some action from the star corals around 8:30. Still being able to follow some simple directions while on vacation, we kept an eye on the star corals down under.

Armed with only digital cameras, lights and adrenaline, we stalked the not so elusive corals... gliding slowly among them so as not to startle or alarm our quarry or their sleeping neighbors.

Looking closely at the individual polyps we could see that something was not normal as each had what looked like a swollen and translucent "pearl" in its center.

Patience was the key as we hovered nearby and took pictures of the night life all around. Then suddenly a silent explosion of small reddish globs of coral essence shot from the polyps into the water. At first they hung close to their source near the "stars," then slowly rose into the water column and gently drifted

away in the current to join millions of other spawn under the full moon.

Fortunately for us, the show was not over, as other corals (and some starfish,) began their reproductive mission. My wife later described a starfish that stood on its "finger tips" and expelled bright red BB sized spheres as she watched. Meanwhile, I hovered over a large round orange-ish unnamed coral as it continued to shoot out stream after stream of fine dusty looking spawn that wafted around and made it look like it was quietly smoking cigarettes. We took pictures as the clouds drifted slowly away.

This larger than life show went on up and down the reef for about forty minutes and then ended as abruptly as it started; we were both thrilled and moved by the experience.

Others we spoke to later said they saw nothing; while some (the lucky ones)

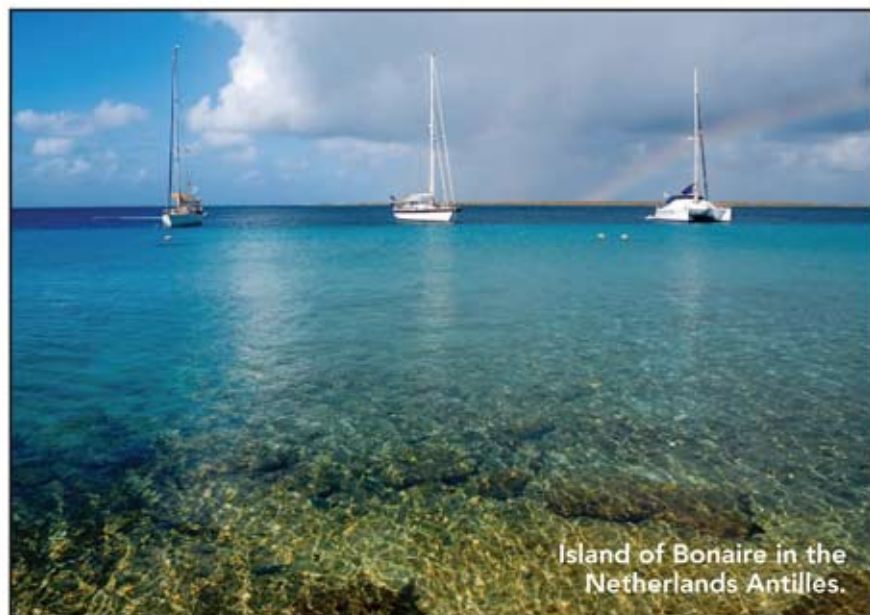
had their own special encounters, and a few of us had some fair digital pictures to enhance the story telling.

Thankfully it only took twenty years of diving for us to be in just the right place, at the right time, to see this mystery. Yet, it was absolutely worth the wait.

We believe, that it's because the very nature of our sport seems to be screaming out to us, "Come here look! I've got something you have never seen before and you won't believe your own eyes."

So even if we were forced above that gloriously interwoven, chaotic and very wet environment for awhile, I'm sure whatever special things we see next time we're down, will be worth the wait. Thank you for your time,

Joe Arcuni  
*Diver for Life*



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Photo by Warren Lo

*Until The Next Dive*

Photo by Chris Kovaz



We thought you might like to know a few of the things you have to look forward to the next time you dive into Underwater Planet.

### **Underwater Physical Therapy**

In this heartwarming story, Stewart Snyder introduces us to the scuba program at the Centrastate's Fitness and Wellness Center in Freehold, New Jersey. This hugely successful pilot program has dive instructors certified both by PADI and the HSA (Handicapped Scuba Association) volunteering their time and resources to offer therapy through scuba diving lessons to patients diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, traumatic brain injuries, amputations, Down syndrome, the blind, and children with autism in an effort to improve their physical stamina and self esteem and giving them a renewed zest for life. A truly inspiring story!

### **Shark Encounter in Roatan**

This article shows how all shark dives are not the same. Here Lew Abahazy recalls a shark dive he was privileged to be on in Roatan, which was more than just kneeling in the safety of a semi-circle on the ocean floor while watching the dive guide feed passing sharks. Far from it, here the passive activity of watching sharks feed was replaced with the opportunity to swim along with them! Exhilarating to read from start to finish.

### **Sea Turtles with Shovels**

Marine biologist Aaron Sprowl recounts a morning filling the roll of a mother sea turtle as he seeks out vulnerable nests to tenderly and expertly relocate to safer ground; all done in an effort to give this endangered species a fighting chance at survival. This one is definitely something to look forward to.

This is just a short listing of what we have in store, be sure to pick up the summer issue of Underwater Planet. It's certainly one you don't want to miss.



*"For all the sea has to teach us and all the fun in learning it."*

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