

Grand Cayman, British West Indies, Part I

-- *The West End, The East End*

If you're one of those who hasn't been to Grand Cayman, you will most likely be delighted when you first visit. Every island claims to have "the friendliest people in the Caribbean," yet Cayman comes closer to that standard than most. It's a civilized island, with high racial integration, low unemployment and a high standard of living for most residents. I've never found a whiff of tension in the air. Yet, the boom of the past ten years has brought the twentieth, no perhaps the twenty-first, century to this island of 18,000 inhabitants, evident during my two visits in the past six months.

Seven Mile Beach is calm and beautiful, but it could just about be a beach anywhere in the world as the condos now creep into the sunset. Diving is easy and accessible from many beaches, but it's becoming tame diving with tame fish. The island is slowly filling with cars and satellite receivers and shopping malls, but then you can always rent a regulator, buy extension tubes, and, on short notice, take lessons in underwater photography; you can always find room on somebody's dive boat and hardly ever miss a day of diving due to bad weather. On the East End, miles away from Seven Mile Beach, Old Cayman remains. One can truly get away from it all, but expensive houses are being built, one by one, as the island gets settled by the English and the Americans and the Canadians who come to work or take advantage of Cayman's 450+ offshore banks and 20,000 or so paper corporations, many of which were organized only to hide money and dodge taxes.

One way for me to get the most from Cayman is to hang out at a favorite little retreat of mine on the quiet East End, the isolated Tortuga Club. I cannot write a typical review of the Club, because I do not travel anonymously here. We all have to get away from work now and then. Nonetheless, I must offer a few words must be because I do find the Club such a delightful

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outpost, with a couple of tennis courts and nothing else to do but a little diving, wait for dinner (which, by Caribbean standards, is excellent) or have a rum with the genial bartender, Jose Kirshman. Diving from the Tortuga Club permits one to reach some of the most spectacular and seldom-dived spots on Cayman.

Chub Hole represents a typical dive, with a lattice work of arches, crannies, caves and beds of sand. It's superb topography, with plenty of varieties of Caribbean fish in good abundance (including 10-15 lb snappers and groupers to make all but the most finicky diver happy as a clam. On one dive, while watching a forty-foot string of blue chromis swim up and over a nearby reef, I spotted the tail of a ray disappear behind a coral head. Off I went, in time to catch him coming back at me and directly below me, but an arm's length away. I was too psyched to go for my camera. The ray trailed a long fishing line from its mouth and later that afternoon I heard a tale from a local about "the big one that got away" just that morning. He was probably right.

I made several wall dives from the Club, once through tunnels to emerge at 80 feet, another time simply over the top. Breathtaking as they are, I still hoped for sights of cruising big fish, especially sharks, but on this trip no such luck. Yet the shallow dives gave me plenty to see, and even a little snorkeling near the Club, over barren bottom, produced a few conch, some nice sea biscuits, and sights of a couple of sizeable sting rays. There's no beach diving here and two tanks a day is the usual limit, but to get away from it all--and to get Cayman's best diving--this is it. Except in the highest of high season, there's seldom more than a dozen other people staying in the Club's 14 rooms and Caymanians usually outnumber the tourists at the bar. That's what makes the Tortuga Club a real special place. Oh yes, I should note that instructor and guide Dale Billman, who has been with the Club for three years, has since departed. I trust that his replacement will be as competent and personable. He should have no problem finding the dive spots, since the boatman does that anyhow.

I suppose the Tortuga Club would be filled year round if it weren't for one factor. Although some days the sea is flat and the air still, on other days the breeze can be so stiff as to be nervewracking. Caymanians come to the Club to get away from the heat, but if the breeze were to blow the full week I came to worship the sun, I would indeed be disturbed. Anyway, I like the place.

Since I can sneak around the rest of the island, let me tell you about diving with Bob Soto's operation and my stay at the Cayman Islander Hotel, which sits across the road from Seven Mile Beach. At 8 AM on the first day of my March stay, a Soto employee knocked on my door to be sure I'd be ready when the truck came by to pick me up at 8:30. My ten-day package included eight morning two-tank dives, gave me the option of one afternoon or night dive, and, if I were to venture the mile or so into Georgetown to Soto's Reef, unlimited beach diving (for a \$100 tank deposit).

As we motored into the Holiday Inn, I was pleased that only 17 divers (plus two divemasters) would be sharing the ample space aboard the double-decker "Bare-

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foot Diver." Because Saturday is a departure and arrival day, it's usually the lightest. Some of the weekday dives left a lot less elbow room on board so the divemasters would split us into groups and send us into the water ten minutes apart to minimize crowding on deck. It was also possible to hang back out of the way until the rush was over to find a weight belt and tank, but then hesitation would make it difficult to get a full tank on the first try--some tank fills were just plain stingy. The divemasters (an international crew from the States, Britain, Australia, Canada and Italy) were a personable bunch with a no-nonsense attitude toward their jobs. Pre-dive briefings were always thorough and sometimes entertaining.

My first dive was Hepp's Pipeline, a mini wall with an 80-foot profile that runs parallel to the beach near the Turtle Farm on the north end of Seven Mile Beach. The dive was an unguided buddy-team dive, and the divemasters made sure that everyone had a buddy, and that everyone knew where we were going. They warned us of the fair current running, which picked up strength after we were all in the water. Before making each of the wall dives that week, the divemasters would check for a current by hanging tanks down on a line. Several times we moved to a different site because the current was too strong.

While Hepp's Pipeline offered a great variety of corals and sponges, there was little fish life. At our second dive site, fish were abundant, but much of the coral, especially the staghorn, was broken and dead. Although some claim that parrotfish, which feed on coral, may be partly to blame, clumsy divers are responsible for more than their share of damage--this kind of coral death is seldom evident on the East End. The divemasters repeatedly asked us to be careful of the marine life and not to take anything living or dead. They reminded us of the \$30,000 fine for taking black coral--10% of which goes to the divemaster who turns in the poacher. We were also asked not to cut urchins to feed the fish. The spiny critters were wiped out in a plague a few years ago and are just now coming back to the waters around Cayman.

Throughout the week there was a sameness to our second dives. All were unguided buddy team dives on shallow but interesting finger reefs, usually on a 10 or 15 minute boat ride back to the Holiday Inn. At these sites--Spanish Anchor, Governor's Reef, Three Trees, Hammerhead Hole, the Aquarium--the profiles are 30 to 40 feet, and the divemasters give our time limits. If anyone were to hit 50-feet, the divemasters would insist that he return to the boat. But on most days they weren't in the water watching depth gauges.

The fish at these sites are accustomed to being fed, and aren't shy about it. I began to think of sergeant majors as underwater mosquitos--pesky critters to be brushed away before they nipped me. French angels were more like puppies; given a little encouragement, like wriggling fingers, they would follow me around like housepets. I saw barracuda on most of these dives, one spiny lobster which would have made a nice meal for two if we weren't diving in a marine sanctuary, and one sleepy nurse shark.

On one day we took two shallow dives, but on all other days our first dive was always on the wall. As the boat left the beach in the morning, the divemasters would ask everyone which sites they had visited, and try to choose new ones. During my eight days I never visited the same wall site twice, and Spanish Anchor was the only repeat shallow dive.

When it comes to wall dives, Soto's divemasters run a pretty tight ship. In fact, even the shallow dives were pretty strict. We were told that "if you don't surface with your buddy, you won't dive with Soto again." Groups ranged from 3 to 5 buddy pairs plus the divemaster. We went down together, and came up together.

A ten-minute safety stop at ten feet with ten other people can get crowded. There was a hang bar beneath the boat, but on most days strong currents prevented us from using it. Group size didn't really have anything to do with how crowded things got. I was less crowded diving with ten other people one day than with six another because one turkey hadn't been taught about the buddy system, buoyancy control or any of scuba's fine points.

The walls along Seven Mile are fascinating, though less satisfying than the north wall. Although the swimming pace was leisurely, I had little time to linger. And where to look? Down--as the colors merged into seemingly bottomless blue? Up--as the guides led us toward the light and the spectacular coral silhouettes? Or to the black coral, giant barrel sponges, large parrotfish, grouper and jacks, and other sights the divemasters pointed out on each dive?

One need not stick with Seven Mile beach diving with the Soto operation. Soto's owner Ron Kipp had recently purchased the Cayman Diving Lodge on the East End. For an extra \$25, which included transportation and lunch, I could "upgrade" my package. The Lodge caters to only a handful of divers at a time, and the difference is obvious when you hit the reefs. We hit a spot called Lossa Wally. Depending on whom you talk to, the name is either a corruption of "Lost Wally," after a hapless diver who wandered into one of its tunnels, or a corruption of "Lobster Wall." I didn't see any lobster, but I saw a lot of tunnels. . . I wouldn't have thought it possible to see as much life and beauty as I had been seeing on the West End, but the East End looked like a painter had gone mad and splattered reds, yellows and lavenders everywhere.

The seas (3-5 feet) were rough in a small boat, so we made the second dive at Crystal Palace, a shallow spot (15-foot max) inside the reef. Cayman is known for its walls, but its shallows are indeed aquarious. Our guide, an enthusiastic transplanted Floridian named Andy, put us in touch with (sometimes literally) all kinds of marine life. Seeing my camera in tow, he caught a puffer fish and used it to scare up a spotted stingray. Back at the Lodge, deep fried grouper made the day. For many years, the Lodge has been a rundown, funky place, but Ron Kipp had obviously put some work into it. Yet, it's still not much more than a place to hang your hat, better for an exuberant kid fresh out of college than a romantic couple or people expecting more from a hotel than a bed in a roadside inn.

The Cayman Islander offers a bit more, but it's essentially plunked down in a mini shopping center and not on the beach (though one can easily walk across the street and use the beach). It's nothing fancy and quite typically motel-like, with its decent rooms with two double beds, air conditioning, and even tv with HBO, an amenity of no interest to me in the tropics. One must walk through the courtyard and bar area to get to one's room and the friendly crowd made the hotel quite hospitable. Food is served at the bar or nearby tables, with a cuisine ranging from toasted cheese sandwiches to turtle steak. It was mediocre fare. Currently, a package is being offered through December 15 with a tab of \$599/person, double occupancy, for eight days, seven nights. That includes the room and six morning dives and round-trip air fare from Miami. Cayman Airways is the sponsor. Call 800/422-9626. And, for the Tortuga Club, it's \$80/day/person, which includes two tanks, breakfast and dinner, and a room on the beach--but no air fare. Call your travel agent, or the Club directly at 809/947-7551. Ask for Frank Conolly, the long-time general manager.

Now there's more to say about Cayman, and our readers have sent us their recommendations during the past year. So, I'll continue a bit with Cayman in the next issue as we get back responses from our readers.

Diver Injured In Tekna DV3 Explosion

The Tekna Dive Propulsion Vehicle, designed to tow divers around at a fast clip underwater, received a great deal of attention at the 1985 DEMA Show. A number of shops ordered several for sale and rental, and people even began to predict that for tropical resorts they would become as popular as the jet ski.

But, in April, a diver who had rented suffered severe facial injuries when the device exploded, apparently while he was recharging it. At the time, he was aboard the *Cayman Aggressor* and had to be rushed to the local hospital for treatment. Tekna has since issued a recall on the vehicle.

Leonard Slocum, Vice President of Administration at Tekna, told *Undercurrent* that the diver had rented the DV3 from a local outfit on Cayman. He was recharging the unit on deck when the device exploded. Slocum said that some passengers aboard the *Aggressor* noted that smoke was coming from the charging unit.

Tests conducted at the factory indicated that under certain conditions hydrogen gas

could be generated within the vehicle and if the motor or headlight were activated, the gas could be ignited and explode.

In the event of a leak, electrolytic action caused by salt water contacting internal metal components might generate hydrogen. In addition, a rare type of charging failure might also be the cause. Whatever the cause, the volume of gas generated may be greater than the device could neutralize leading to a potential explosion.

Both models of the vehicle, the T5000 and the T5050, (i.e., the DV3 and the DV3*) have been recalled. To determine whether a device is one subject to recall, one must call a Tekna dealership or Tekna customer service (call collect: 415/592-4070) for serial numbers of the vehicle in question. Only those vehicles manufactured between December 14, 1984 and April 10, 1985 are involved.

Recalled DV3's are to be returned to the Tekna dealership from which it was purchased, where it will be fitted with an additional catalytic device to alleviate the problem.

Modified Buddy Breathing

--A Procedure To Ensure Sharing

Several years ago during a discussion and analysis of diving accidents reported by the University of Rhode Island National Underwater Accident Data Center, we were struck by a recurring problem with buddy breathing as noted in one of their reports.

"...the accident description leaves little doubt that the usual 'two breaths then pass' requirement for shared breathing was not followed. Typically, the victim finds two breaths entirely insufficient and is reluctant to give up the regulator at all. Alternately, the victim breathes rapidly several times from the shared regulator and then rises as rapidly as possible, embolizing on the way up."

The report also stated:

"...the possession of one's own regulator is decisive in an air-lack emergency. Seldom does the person with his own regulator die."

It seemed clear to us that the initial two breaths are *insufficient* for the victim to regain self control. Initiating an immediate ascent prior to the victim's getting his breathing under control only serves to worsen the situation. The victim's buddy, as noted time and

again by the URI, was usually able to make it to the surface even if he never recovered his own regulator because he was not "out of control" at the beginning of the problem. Thus a typical buddy breathing failure begins as follows:

When a victim runs out of air, usually he has not paid attention to either pressure gauge or breathing resistance and normally notices the problem only after exhaling a good breath and then attempting to inhale and getting "no air." The victim must then work against anxiety to swim over to his buddy (hopefully not far) and give an out-of-air signal before getting air. At this point it becomes obvious that the victim cannot regain control of his breathing in just two breaths. However, if the victim keeps the regulator for additional breaths, this immediately causes the other buddy great anxiety and the procedure is doomed to failure from that point on.

The answer then is to:

- ★give the victim a means of regaining self control

- ★ make an established procedure so the victim's buddy is prepared, and
- ★ give both victim and buddy a chance to get the procedure under control before surfacing.

All these can be accomplished in a matter of seconds if the victim gets four breaths instead of the traditional two.

There are mainly two differences between this and the "old" buddy breathing procedure. First, when a diver runs out of air and signals such to his buddy, the buddy passes the regulator *and allows the out-of-air diver to take four quick breaths*. This has two advantages in that:

- 1) the out-of-air diver gets the necessary additional air to regain self control; and
- 2) the buddy is *expecting* the out-of-air diver to take several breaths and, not being anxious, is easily able to wait for the air;

Second, the buddy pair then starts the two-breaths-then-pass cycle and *at least two passes are made prior to the start of the ascent*. This ensures that:

- 1) both divers have regained their self control, within a matter of a few seconds, which is essential for the success of the procedure.
- 2) both divers are in correct position and able to execute a calm ascending maneuver.

TRAINING PROCEDURE:

Obviously training emphasizes the proper monitoring of air pressure so that an out-of-air situation does not occur. Octopus breathing should be presented as the first option. However, buddy breathing should be taught as a procedure which can work, provided that:

- ★ it is learned correctly, and
- ★ it is taught as a skill that must be practiced from time to time in order to maintain proficiency, and
- ★ it should be part of the pre-dive buddy check that every time both partners are not using an octopus, the buddies should go through the correct hand position of being donor and donee prior to the final okay to start the dive.

The procedure and positioning should first be tried on land, then in shallow water. The important steps in training are as follows:

- 1) Give the correct signals ("out-of-air" followed by, "share air").
- 2) The donor immediately passes the regulator with the *right hand*, holding the regulator in such a way (depending on the make) as to allow the donee clear access to the purge. The donor always holds the regulator with the right hand and passes it as if it was a regulator with an exhaust valve below the mouthpiece regardless of whether it is one with a side exhaust. Trainees *must* become conditioned to do this in order to avoid inadvertently giving an out-of-air victim a regulator upside

down, causing the victim to be unable to purge the water from the second stage.

- 3) Both donor and donee maintain a hold on the second stage at all times while sharing air, and exhale a continuous stream of bubbles anytime the regulator is out of the mouth.
- 4) *The donee begins by taking four quick breaths*. This is easy for all to remember as it is the same life-saving procedure as used at the start of giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. The normal two-breaths-then-pass sequence is then started.
- 5) The donor must have a firm hold of the donee's tank strap or BCD with the left hand. The donee must have hold of the donor's tank strap or BCD with the right hand. This ensures that they are in correct position and using the correct hands to pass the regulator.
- 6) *The buddies pass the regulator between them twice before commencing their ascent* in order to establish both self control and control of the procedure.
- 7) The pair swim up at a normal rate of ascent, with both buddies kicking slowly and continuously (do not stop kicking while inhaling!) for the surface.

TESTING:

We have done extensive testing of this procedure over the past several years and have found it extraordinarily successful. It cannot be emphasized strongly enough how important are both the victim's first four quick breaths, and the pair's exchange of the regulator twice first before initiating their ascent. This method has proven successful not only in tests, but also in a number of actual buddy breathing situations.

We would urge the diving community to try this procedure to realize the potential for improving the success rate of buddy breathing. Until octopus regulators become *standard equipment worldwide*, this method could lower the number of cases of buddy breathing failures reported so tragically often in the URI reports.

There is one simple initial test to try. One person sits at one end of a pool (back turned) at least 30 yards away from the "victim." The person playing the victim removes his regulator and swims towards his "buddy," exhaling continuously (to simulate an out-of-air victim without full lung volume). Upon reaching the buddy, get his attention, give the correct signals, and *then* begin buddy breathing. The difference between the old "two-breaths-then-pass-and-start-up-right-away" and the "four-quick-breaths-and-pass-twice-before-starting-up" method will immediately be clear. In fact, it will be found by most people that two breaths to start with are "not enough" something that many out-of-air victims discovered for real.

UNDERCURRENT NOTES:

Two other points should be made to the Instructor regarding the teaching of buddy breathing. Dr. Glen Egstrom stated in his article in *Undercurrent* (November-December, 1984) that:

"...error free behavior and continued progress throughout the sequence (of buddy breathing) were not seen until the eighth or ninth trial period."

This means that a few practices in the pool and once in the ocean are entirely insufficient. Buddy breathing practice should be practiced several times in pool sessions, performed at least four times in the

open water and on at least two separate dives. This should ensure that each buddy is comfortable being both donor and donee and should result in a total of 12-16 separate buddy breathing practices to get the trainees beyond the limit described by Dr. Egstrom.

And remember: reaction times slow due to depth, narcosis, cold, anxiety, and other factors.

The authors of this article are Jenny Garmendia, Henrik Nimb and Peter Oel. Garmendia, a PADI and NAUI Instructor, was the training director of the Singapore diving contracting firm Divemasters, Ltd., at the time of writing this article.

Our 10th Anniversary

With this issue *Undercurrent* celebrates its tenth birthday. To think that we have plunked ourselves down at our typewriters 110 times to crank out fodder for the fertile minds of divers boggles my own less-than-fertile mind.

More than ten years ago, after a hopeless diving trip to Jamaica, we struck upon the notion that divers need a little truth in traveling, a little truth in training, a little truth in equipment. It was not as if someone was out spreading falsehoods, but there was no question that the typical sport diver was beholden to incomplete sources of information.

We wondered whether we could fill that gap. Apparently we have. That we could survive economically for ten years, without advertising income, indicates to us that we indeed help meet the needs we set out to fill.

In retrospect, I'd like to highlight a few articles we have published during the past ten years. More than one made the industry sit up and take notice.

The SOS Decompression Meter: Chamber testing had shown in the early 1970s that the meter followed no acceptable standards of decompression theory; but the data had been suppressed by the industry. Instructions accompanying the meter were inaccurate and incomplete; the meter itself could lead one into dive profiles with a high likelihood of bends. In a major story we showed how Scubapro, the American marketer of the meter, failed its responsibility to provide correct information about the device and quoted several major figures in the diving industry who gave no credibility to the SOS meter. One even called it "a toy." With some resistance, Scubapro eventually changed and reduced claims about the meter's veracity. Eventually Scubapro stopped marketing the meter altogether. Nonetheless, the SOS is still sold, producing dive profiles not based on any scientific reality, which can jeopardize the unwitting diver. Many new decompression computers are now on the market and

--Reflections On The Past

being tested by the U.S. Navy. *Undercurrent* will publish those results as soon as they are available.

Automatic Inflators: Our reader survey in 1978 discovered a great deal of trouble with automatic inflators. Not only did some fall apart, but others were virtually unusable by divers with gloves. In several models, the buttons were easily confusable, making it likely that the diver who wanted to deflate might in fact inflate. That could be dangerous. Within a year from our story, several devices had been modified and improved by the manufacturer.

Basic Certification Questionnaire: Hundreds of our readers responded to our 1980 questionnaire about their dive training. The data showed little difference in the training results between agencies; the difference was in the quality of individual instructor, and no agency had a monopoly on good or bad instructors. A surprisingly high percentage of people did not feel confident once they had completed their course, obviously a contributor to unsafe diving and a high dropout rate. The agencies were not doing the job well enough. We expect another questionnaire soon to look for changes.

Dear Undercurrent: By listening to readers complaints, tracking down answers, and reporting the results, we've stopped some problems. A Wenoka knife point that dangerously poked through the sheath; a Scubapro tank band that could open at depth and lead to a dropped tank, a Plana fin that ripped with little effort -- these kinds of problems readers brought to our attention and we talked to the manufacturers and passed on solutions to our readers.

Diving Deaths: The industry doesn't like to acknowledge the risks in our sport, but they are there. Our continuing effort to report systematically on the causes of diving deaths so that they can be prevented has been a landmark contribution to widespread sport diving knowledge.

You Can Help

We have to rely on our readers for information about problems with products or for unsafe diving practices. If you have any problems -- or if your buddy experiences problems -- let us hear from you. We want to know about mail order purchases, about new products that have to be returned, about straps that unnecessarily break, about BC mouthpieces that fall off -- about anything that may endanger a diver. We'll look into the problem and if it appears that it's something we should alert our readers to, then we'll get right on it.

We need to count on you, our reader, to keep us informed. Write Ben Davison, Post Office Box 1658, Sausalito, CA 94965.

Regulators: When we first published U.S. Navy tests of regulators, the average sport diver had no source of information other than advertising hype from one manufacturer or another. But, when we could explain why a Tekna or Scubapro regulator was a top rated regulator because it could deliver air at great depth under great work load, with minimum tank pressure, divers could at last understand why to buy one regulator over another. The U.S. Navy is once again performing regulator tests. *Undercurrent* will no doubt be the only publication to list the best --and worst -- by manufacturer and model number. Look for it.

Depth Gauges: It wasn't long ago that every one presumed one depth gauge was just as good as another. Then in 1982 we published U.S. Navy tests on brand new depth gauges showing some to be off by as much as 20 feet. Those were some revelations! It now seems that shop personnel are more cognizant of the potential error, divers certainly are, and there

is even a move afoot to put small test chambers for gauge calibration right in shops.

Product Recall: In 1975, the ATPAC, a back mounted buoyancy device, proved faulty, and was "recalled" by the manufacturer -- but without going through the correct process required by the federal government regulations. Prior to that, faulty dive gear had often been brushed under the table by manufacturers. Our published analysis of the omissions in the ATPAC recall (which included interviews with the Consumer Product Safety Commission staff) led to a more aggressive recall of faulty devices. In the '70s we dogged companies on the recall of faulty devices, much to their dislike, and it now seems that at last the industry follows government recall standards designed to protect the consumer --not to protect their image.

Diving Techniques: We've published scores of stories that others won't touch: diving alone -- and why it might not be so bad after all; the onslaught and management of panic; using a BC as a breathing device during rapid ascent; multilevel dive tables, the theory and how they're used safely by Hawaiian divers. All controversial topics -- but not topics to be ignored.

Travel: By our count, more than half a dozen small dive operations that were jeopardized by lack of trade became healthy after we wrote glowing reviews. By the same token, we know of more than one operation that quietly shut down after our review. They should have been shut long before. On the whole, we pride ourselves in good straightforward reviews, and almost to a letter when anyone writes us after a trip they take based on our review, their response is "well, it was just like you said it would be: the food was too greasy, the boats too funky, but what remarkable fish life!"

I could write on and on about our ten years. It's been our intent, and will continue to be our intent, to tell it like it is. We invite you to stay with us.

-- Ben Davison

Computerized Treasure Hunts

--Games That Let You Dive Without Getting Wet

The lost treasure of the *Sao Vera* is just waiting to be salvaged. A priceless stamp collection awaits the diver who penetrates the *S.S. Leviathan*. In fact, there's treasure aplenty out there for the diver who enjoys high-tech fun and games. Among the games with diving as their theme are *Cutthroats* and *Seastalker*, both from *Infocom*, and Parker Brothers' *Lost Treasure*.

The *Infocom* games are "interactive adventures" to be played on a personal computer. In this relatively new type of computer game, the player is the story's central character. Text on the screen sets the

scenario, and the player types in commands, reacting to situations, to make the story progress. Throughout the game, the player is confronted with difficult situations that must be solved; correct situations earn the player points. While the ultimate goal of the game may be to salvage a treasure or to put a sea monster out of commission, the player's most pressing problem is how to stay alive.

In *Cutthroats*, the player is a diver living on Hard-scrabble Island. When the game begins, an old shipmate, who has just revealed new coordinates for two wrecks, has been murdered. The next morning, when

the player "awakes," there is a note on the floor. From there, the game might go like this:

▶ get out of bed

You get out of bed

▶ read note

The note is hastily scrawled:

"If you're interested in a big deal, be at The Shanty at 8:30 this morning."

▶ check watch

It is 8:10 a.m.

Before the dive boat can leave the dock, the player must meet the shadiest band of characters ever to roam the wharf. The salvage operation must be financed, and a ship hired, outfitted and ready to go when the tide is right. This is, as they say, easier said than done. The island is small and it's tough to keep the project away from prying eyes. A traitor in the midst makes things even more interesting. It's fair to say that it could take 40 hours of playing time to bring back one of the treasures. Or more. But it's the kind of game that can easily be played for eight hours at a crack. And it can be played alone or with a buddy.

Naturally, it's not necessary to be a diver to play the game. But it may make solving some of the problems easier. Divers won't need to read through the enclosed booklet "True Tales of Adventure" to find clues on which equipment to use and which boat to hire for which salvage operation. (One will be made on scuba, while the other requires surface-supplied air.) A diver's response to certain situations, e.g., how to swim through a narrow passageway, will probably be automatic. With a little imagination, *Cutthroats* can be almost like the real thing.

Almost. Diver-players who get too detailed will find that "bottom time" and "decompression" are not in the program's 800-word vocabulary. And sometimes the logical, "real" response is not the solution. On one wreck, after the diver "descends" into a lower deck, the ladder leading to the upper deck breaks. A diver will probably try the command "swim up," which the game claims is not an option. The cabin is filled with water, so why not?

Another time, a diver's logical command might even get the player killed. In a letter to *Infocom's* fictitious Pete the Rat (the company encourages such correspondence), one experienced New Jersey wreck diver noted, "...any safety-conscious diver wouldn't walk up a companionway ladder wearing his flippers and mask, so I had them securely in hand as I was climbing up the aft deck." Upon reaching the deck, the diver jumped into the water and was informed that he had died. He continued, "Now come on, Pete. No one dies from jumping in the water with mask and flippers in hand..." And don't even think about making a repetitive dive.

Lost Treasure: A Board Game

Those without home computers aren't out of luck in the treasure hunt, although they'll need a much more vivid imagination to conjure salt spray and sinus squeeze. Parker Brothers' *Lost Treasure* is a board game with an electronic Dive Control Center. The object of the game is to salvage gold and silver treasure, return to port and cash it in without being pirated. The first player to earn \$1 million wins.

In *Lost Treasure*, as in reality, divers must cough up some cash before they can begin the salvage operation. They also must fill their tanks before a dive, and watch the "pressure gauge" on the dive console so they don't run out of air. Running out of air while playing *Lost Treasure* is less hazardous than doing so in reality (or while playing *Cutthroats*, for that matter). The salvor merely drops the treasure gathered so far and must wait until the next turn to recover it.

Lost Treasure is more a treasure hunting game than a diving game. Most of the action is spent trying to narrow down the location of the booty on the board's grid, which depicts an island-studded portion of a fictitious body of water. At least one diver has made the game a little more interesting by covering the original board with a nautical map of part of the Atlantic coast showing the locations of several popular wrecks.

Lost Treasure is available at most toy stores and toy departments, including Kiddie City, Toys R Us, KayBee Toy and Hobby and the toy department at Sears. Prices quoted ranged from \$12.99 at KayBee to \$30 at Kiddie City, so it pays to do some comparison shopping.

Divers know it's not necessary to remove one's mask in order to grab a drink or a snack, but the computer doesn't. The game has a few other similar quirks, which are impossible to mention here without giving away any clues.

Cutthroats is "standard" difficulty level. It's considered a good introductory level for adults. Younger divers who have never experienced an interactive adventure might want to try *Seastalker*, a "junior" level game (for ages 9 and up). In it, the diver/player must save an underwater research lab from a giant sea monster while trying to thwart a traitor and operate a new deep-water submarine.

Cutthroats and *Seastalker* are available from most computer software dealers at Waldenbooks and directly from *Infocom*. They are available for most popular home computers, including Apple, Atari, Commodore, IBM PC and PCjr. (For some machines, they must be ordered through the machine

manufacturer.) Both retail for \$34.95-\$39.95 depending on the computer. They can sometimes be obtained for \$25 or less through mail-order software dealers advertised in most personal computing magazines, but offerings and prices change frequently.

If the diver/player really can't figure out what to do with the shark repellent, *Infocom* has designed a unique line of *InvisiClues* hint books, which only give away as much as the frustrated player wants to

know. They sell for \$7.95 where the software is sold. (Also, an order form comes with each package.)

For more information, write *Infocom, Inc.*, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138; attn: Pete the Rat.

The author, Cathie Cush, spends more time in the water than at the keyboard of her p.c. as she works her way up the ladder to become a full-fledged instructor. Cush resides in Dresher, Pennsylvania.

A Note From NAUI

Dear *Undercurrent*:

NAUI, along with other instructional agencies, having been publicly chastised in *Undercurrent* for failing to report problems or shortcomings with equipment to instructors is anxious and willing to join forces with your publication, and any others who choose to do so, to remedy the situation.

All publications have their own niche. NAUI News is not a general circulation magazine but more of a "house organ." Nevertheless, in our own small way we have made a serious attempt to devote as much space as possible in each issue to articles of a technical, scientific and educational nature. Prior to mid-1983 these articles were spread throughout the issue. At that point we made two important decisions. First, we incorporated all technical diving articles, instructional tips and other valuable information related to underwater education into a "Technical Section" emphasized by printing those pages on buff stock.

Second, we appointed Walt Hendrick, Sr., NAUI's National Training Director, as Technical Editor of *NDA News*. This, happily, removed the onus of selecting the proper articles from me as editor, simply because I never have been, am not now and never will be a scuba diver. I was employed (almost four years ago) as NAUI's Publications Director because of my nearly four decades of journalistic experience. Walt's credentials are virtually untouchable.

Past and recent surveys responded to by our readers indicated a desire for even more technical, scientific and educational articles

including EQUIPMENT REVIEWS. We do not, however, have the manpower or available time among qualified members of the Headquarters staff to obtain the equipment, test it and write about it.

With the permission of *Undercurrent*, we could possibly reprint its equipment reviews. Should a review exceed the one-quarter page reprint limitation, it could be paraphrased. If this is not acceptable or feasible perhaps you could direct me to a person or organization whom I could contact to arrange to receive such reviews.

Be assured, that NAUI, through its publication and by other methods, continually strives to make its instructors and members aware of all aspects of diving that insure safety to the highest degree.

Jim Arkison
Editor, *NDA News*

Dear Jim,

We appreciate your letter and your desire to better serve your instructors.

We have always permitted our articles to be published by training agencies, and generally have had a reciprocal agreement to publish each other's material. In fact, I don't recall a single instance when any agency has refused a request from *Undercurrent* to publish an article and we certainly have refused none.

So consider this blanket permission. Our purpose on this planet is surely served when NAUI NEWS and others find stories on our pages worth sharing with instructors.

Ben Davison

Why Divers Die

The third part of *Why Divers Die* will appear in the next issue. The first two parts appeared in June and July.