

# undercurrent®

THE PRIVATE, EXCLUSIVE GUIDE FOR SERIOUS DIVERS

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## Travel Reports From Our Readers: Part II

### -- Burglars, Beach Divers & Brackish Water

Has it occurred to you that liveaboard dive boats are getting about five times the passengers they did five years ago? Well, that's what a review of this year's travel questionnaires shows. And with more boats becoming available, that's sure to increase. Responses about South Pacific trips have doubled in the past couple of years. About 10% of the trip reports are about Cayman and another 10% about Bonaire, which is our answer to a question sometimes asked: Why do you write so frequently on Cayman and Bonaire? Obviously, our readers favor these islands, Bonaire because of its truly unlimited beach diving and good prices, and Cayman because it is easy to get to and easy to dive. But our old mossback divers know there's more to Cayman than Seven Mile Beach, which I'll now proceed to explain.

C.C., travel editor

**CAYMAN ISLANDS/GRAND CAYMAN:** Most of the diving action on Grand Cayman is headquartered along Seven Mile Beach, but there's far better in the Caymans. Sadly, the marine life has declined substantially in the past few years. And the number of tourists has risen. The beach is lined with condos, the roadway with shopping centers and restaurants, and it's all a little America. Thankfully, the local people have remained friendly and upbeat. Go to Seven Mile if you have kids, if you want the single action, if you're a first timer.

To wit: I dived with Bob Soto's Holiday Inn operation in November. There were 21 people aboard a craft that could hold twice that number. We entered the water as two groups, waited for everyone on the surface -- about ten minutes -- then descended. I waited on the bottom six minutes. Two divers in our group were short on air by the time they reached the anchor at 45 feet and were returned to the surface. We swam for twelve minutes, down to uninspiring scenery and few fish at ninety feet and back to the anchor line. I had 2000 psi left and thought I would circle the area for a while, but I was instructed to ascend. Two more divers were out of air. Prior

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to the dive, the divemaster told us to hang at ten feet for three minutes before getting back on the boat. He cautioned divers not to go to the surface. Nonetheless, two divers went directly to the surface to take their three-minute safety stop before getting back into the boat. I have to compliment the divemasters for handling this flock of turkeys without freaking out and throwing the whole lot overboard. Unfortunately, Soto and Foster and Surfside attract a lot of bozos. It's good income for them, but for you and me, pal, it's only a joke. If you insist on diving off Seven Mile Beach or the west side of the island, readers continue to recommend two operations highly: Peter Milburn (809/947-4341) and Quabbin Dives (809/949-5597).

There are other possibilities. I lolled around Spanish Cove for a couple of days and a couple of dives. Twenty-some divers on one of their craft was too many for me, but they handled them well and gave especially good treatment to photographers. There were shop and boat staff all over the place, nearly all behaving a bit surly prior to the morning dives (something to do with the night before?), but they warmed up well as the trip went along. I had an O-ring leak at my pressure gauge, which was discovered by one crew member who popped it off, ran it in the shop and repaired it in 30 seconds, gratis. That's good service. The north wall dives were conservatively led down and out (nice wall, of course, but a great absence of fish at the two spots selected -- they'd do better by heading farther east), and I wasn't permitted to follow my EDGE, but I did use it to stretch out second dives. This is a good resort with a well organized and easily accessible dive shop, handy to north wall diving. And there's good reef diving right off the shore. One caveat: Most people wish they hadn't confined themselves to the Cove for dinner with their package plan. There are too many other places to sample. (800/231-4610; 305/381-9954)

At Rum Point, I took a dive with Surfside. Twenty divers jammed into their craft was awfully uncomfortable on rolling seas, and they even claim their boat can hold more. Still, the leaders were competent and I got a couple of nice north wall dives (809/468-1708; they can fix you up with nearby luxury condos on Rum Point). . . . Cayman Kai has a dive operation here as well, although readers complain it is too restrictive. I have the same complaint for Surfside and most other Cayman operations. This is a good resort for a quiet family time. It's in nice shape, but a little passe as a diving destination. (800/223-5427). . . . I found an inexpensive little two-story surfside hotel with superb food and a very friendly bar a few miles from Rum Point dive shops: the Villa Caribe, whose congenial hosts James and Norma Terry work hard to make everyone's stay a joy (809/947-9636). . . . My favorite remains the funky Tortuga Club, the only place in the Caribbean where I don't travel anonymously -- but I still pay my bill. Reader George Sherrard (NYC) was there in July and his evaluation is on the money: "I have the best restaurants and night clubs at home. Foreign travel should be foreign. The Tortuga Club is isolated in time and space, a throwback to the big game fishing clubs of the '30s. Hemingway would have loved it here. You can walk on the beach for hours and never meet another person. And this is virgin diving. Every day is a dive on the north wall." Newly hired Welsh divemaster Keith Neale will take people on two morning dives a day. Both wall and shallow dives are excellent, but like all of Cayman, there aren't a lot of

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big fish (we did make a couple of dives with a couple of dozen 3-4 foot tarpon which approached within an arm's length). Food is fattening and plentiful. It's a cinderblock hostel, simple and tidy, undermaintained and a little buggy, with brackish water in showers that don't always work perfectly. Other than the holidays, there's seldom more than half a dozen guests in the 14 rooms. Unfortunately, a damnable TV set has appeared in the bar, which does a lot to break the spell. (Note to manager Frank Conelley -- several guests told me the TV so pervades the only common space they use with other guests that the afternoons and evenings are no longer pleasant social periods; stick with the juke box.) The California owners have the Club on the market and no doubt in another year or two it will be unrecognizable. The price is shy of \$2,000,000; if any of you readers want a partner, drop me a line at POB 1658, Sausalito, CA 94966. I'm itching to hang out here (809/947-7551). . . . Last I heard the Cayman Diving Lodge, also within easy reach of virgin diving, is up for grabs. This compact Lodge, with 16 tiny, however refurbished rooms, is being offered by Ron Kipp for \$625,000 (call Pat Scharr at 809/947-7555).

Little Cayman is another story: two tiny outposts, and a handful of residents, a surfeit of biting bugs and perhaps the best diving in the Caribbean, so claim our readers. One reader who left his response unsigned said: "I quickly forgot the minor deficiencies of my room once I got into the water. I can't imagine any serious diver being unhappy with a visit to Sam McCoy's Lodge."

## Tip Your Dive Guide?

In the April 1986 issue, we ran a piece about tipping dive guides, the conclusion, to sum it up, being, "Well, maybe, but it's not really the practice and it's up to you."

The editors of the British magazine *Diver* read our little essay and in their *Beachcomber* column offered their own editorial:

"Now here's a jolly thought to ponder over your Christmas pud -- should you tip your dive boat skipper?"

"I only ask because this is the time of giving and is also the time when real divers start planning their winter diving in the sun. And my Yankee Leak [editor's note: the Yankee Leak is the *Undercurrent* article] tells me that to tip or not to tip is now the great debate.

"On one side are the views of those who are laughingly called 'dive guides' in places like the Caymans. One of them was quoted in a diving magazine as saying: 'When my buddies and I get together for a couple of drinks and compare tips, I might as well not have worked. I get a reasonable salary, but this is a service industry and divers are blind to it.'

"And taking the other view are those who have no intention of tipping -- they believe the dive boat skippers and instructors are professionals and that the quoted price includes their services.

"You will, of course, want to know where *Beachcomber* stands. Well, I am well and truly in

the no tip lobby. I am, however, very willing to buy the skipper and the instructors drinks in the relief of après-dive, but I'm damned if I am going to tip them as well.

"To be fair, many dive boat skippers and instructors, even Americans, would be offended at the offer of a tip. I speak now of the so-called 'dive guides' who hang around on dive boats doing little to assist. They know little of the marine life of even the boat's regular dives sites and despite repeatedly diving the area, very often find their way back to the boat only by the merest fluke. They should not be tipped but rather fined, depending on the length of the snorkel [swim] required to get back to the dive boat.

"Am I being too hard? My Yankee Leak has provided me with some salary figures which may help you make up your own mind. He tells me that instructors on the American circuit expect salaries and commissions ranging between £8108 and £16,216 per year when they work with retail shops. [An English Pound is worth about \$1.40 U.S.]

"When in resorts, they get between £8000 and £12,000, plus room and board. And on cruise ships they are paid between £6480 and £9000 with cabin and all found. On the ships there are service bonuses which mean that in five years an instructor could be earning £20,370 with all found and two months' holiday each year.

"I do feel sorry for them, don't you?"

(203/438-5663) For a review of the Southern Cross Club, see Undercurrent, July 1984. . . . Three liveboard boats are here weekly. Both Cayman Aggressors get top marks: Janet Donovan (Madison, WI) says: "Sharks, eagle rays, tarpon, eels, I saw them all. Many night dives. Went to best sites near Grand Cayman and Little Cayman. Excellent crew, well prepared food, couldn't ask for better accommodations." (800-DIV-BOAT). . . . The Little Cayman Diver obtains equally superlative reviews. Paul Eikenberry (Gibsonia, PA) says: "Pricey, but great diving on a great boat. Little Cayman's walls start in shallow water and go straight down, a perfect profile for me and my EDGE. Winston McDermott is a super guy. Visited large friendly groups, and angels, nurse, reef (and even a hammerhead) sharks, fantastic sponges and scenery." (800/DIVENOW). . . . As for Cayman Brac, the readers pretty well agree with our positive review in our May 1986 issue (we preferred the Tiara to the Brac Reef, but both hold up well). Jack Simpson (Houston) says of the Brac Reef: "Even though Winston's boats are large and there is always a crowd, his divemasters do an excellent job. We will go back." (800/223-8880) Edwin Cassem (Weston, MA) liked the Tiara, noting that "the big fish are gone around the Brac, but two trips to Little Cayman were excellent with more large fish. Dive guides Norbert and Bunny were first-rate." (800/367-DIVI)

CURACAO: In the March 1983 Undercurrent, we reported that little-dived Curacao has pretty fair diving. Eric McClary (Carson City, NV) got some fine wall diving with Dive Curacao, though, he says, they were reluctant to visit the more distant sites outside the marine park. He found good restaurants and good touring, but had another problem: "A gorgeous beach dive at Playa Kalki at the west end of the island was spoiled when we returned to find our locked rental car burglarized and expensive photo gear hidden under the seat stolen." . . . Alyson Buchalter (Brooklyn) liked Peter Hughes's Underwater Curacao at the Princess Beach: "They bent over backwards to accommodate us and left experienced divers alone if that's what they wanted." (800/367-DIVI)

FIJI: Increasing dive tourist travel is being handled in part by a number of tiny outposts being opened on the outer islands. Most Fiji diving beats the Caribbean by a long shot. Joan and Tom Moody were chased out of their Pidertupo Village of the Coast of Panama several years ago (we loved that place) and now handle eight guests on the out-of-the-way Moody's Island of Namena. No more-tropical-a-setting anywhere. Reader James Baruszak (Highland Park, Ill) says it's better than Pidertupo, and that's saying something. "Food great, fishing great, diving excellent. Moody and his wife make the stay excellent." (Moody's Namena, Private Mailbag, Suva, Fiji Islands, South Pacific or POB 34, Charleroi, PA 15022). . . . D.P. Herzig discovered the Qamea Beach Club and says: "Two-year-old resort with seven cottages owned by a San Francisco couple; all new equipment and boats, five-star diving, gourmet food -- undiscovered, unspoiled, \$85/day with meals/person. Arrived by outboard from Taveuni." (800/DIV-XPRT). . . . We reviewed Dive Taveuni in our Nov./Dec. 1984 issue and a couple of readers say the review still holds up -- fine diving, carefree attitude by the operator, Ric Cammick, and perhaps it will take off if competition develops (206/441-3483). . . . One reader, who didn't include his name, said a dive trip sponsored by his local dive shop and a travel agency to the Plantation Inn was a "joke." "Resort had no weights and no tanks; had to borrow them at nearby island and stop off for refills. Service slow and unprofessional, rooms barely ok. This place has a long way to go." . . . Carol and Art Murray (La Jolla, CA) found great snorkeling right off the beaches of Beachcomber and Naigani Islands.

HAITI: We reviewed Haiti in August 1983 and found "aquarium-like" diving, which also means no big fish but beautiful, virgin reefs. Our favorite operators left during the revolution, so we stopped considering Haiti as a dive destination. But Port-au-Prince resident and Undercurrent reader Roger M.

Dunwell says: "The Kaliko Beach Club, where Alan and Eva Baskin put Haitian diving on the map, is still open. The dive shop, now owned by Gigi Duryea, is in full swing. Gigi and her divemaster, Yves, have added a variety of new dives and kept the old ones you wrote about. Haiti is trying to build a democratic future for itself. This is an attraction and not a drawback. And the people are still friendly. You're doing a disservice to your readers to dismiss Haiti out-of-hand." (312/519-9800). . . .For those who know Haiti, mourning is appropriate for the closing of the Grand Hotel Oloffson, a 19th-century gingerbread structure with a past as colorful as Haiti itself.

HAWAII: Dive services offered in Kona (the Big Island of Hawaii) are a little different from any place I've ever visited. Ten years ago Tom Shockley (and shortly thereafter in partnership with Lisa Choquette) began offering service so personalized on a six-passenger boat that each diver got the feeling he was being treated to his own underwater tour. Tom and Lisa know where a host of special critters hang out -- Spanish dancers, lion fish, whatever -- and see that their guests get firsthand glimpses in and out of lava tubes. This sort of care has spawned other operations that, to get customers, must provide similar service. So today, off Kona, one can get some very special critter diving (which makes up for the lack of colorful hard coral, and the absence of soft coral and large sponges). If you can't get on the Dive Makai boat (808/329-2025) with Tom and Lisa, readers report some excellent options. Dennis Dietrick (Richmond, VA) took a group of six to Kona in August: "Our local dive shop said Hawaii was not good for the sport diver, but we saw marine life I had never seen in the Caribbean -- lionfish, white-tipped reef sharks, spotted morays, slipper lobster, moorish idols. Sea Dreams Hawaii is a first class dive operation; owner Bob Curran took care of our every need: he found us a first class condo, took our gear every night and hooked it up in the morning, gave us a slide show of reef life before we started diving, and underwater kept heading white tips out of their caves so we could get good photos. Oh, how we proved our local dive shop wrong." (808/322-6118). . . ."Steve Myklebust is one of the most experienced guides on the Kona Coast," says Larry Leedom of Campbell, CA. "His Sandwich Isle Divers provides a very relaxed six-passenger boat operated with fun in mind for all divers. The small groups allow the divemaster to tailor the diving to the special interests of his guests each day." (808/329-9188). . . .Dennis Rank (Vancouver, B.C.) liked the Kona Coast Divers. He calls them "flexible, professional and responsive." "We were certified but rusty and they provided a refresher pool session that was perfect both in content and cost (only \$20 each). This was in marked contrast to the nearby PADI Five Star facility [ed's note: Gold Coast Divers] that first ignored our nervousness and finally suggested a one-tank refresher -- at \$135 each. Kona Coast provided extra service to my wife who is recovering from a back injury." (800/KOA DIVE)

If you go to Lahaina, Maui, you'll find hordes of tourists, hefty prices for diving, and you'll drive to the harbor for 8 a.m. charter departures. Forget diving along Maui or you'll end up writing the same report that reader Diana Krongaard (San Juan Capistrano) did last year: "Nothing to see, no personal attention, cattle boat runs, little or no marine life." She picked the wrong dive operation, which in this case was Lahaina Divers. Get a charter that heads to Lanai or Molokai for caves and arches, large schools of tropicals and an occasional pelagic. Overall, Central Pacific Divers has the best operation. Says Mel Butler (Claremont, CA): "CPD runs an excellent program; each diver interviewed by divemaster en route to dive spot and buddies assigned if necessary; staff was friendly, learned names of divers, watched first dive carefully, they allowed divers to go off in pairs or groups; gear was set up by crew and divers were helped in and out of it; dive sites were varied and not repeated if someone had been there." (808/661-8718). . . .Craig Snodgrass had a good go with Extended Horizons: "Eric Stein runs a first class operation; we

snorkeled with a large school of dolphins, saw octopus, turtles, rays and a snowflake eel; I'm an instructor, so he took me around the island to some of the more difficult dive spots which most divers never get to see." (808/667-0611). . . If you're at the other end of the island (Kihei), go with Ed Robinson of Hawaiian Watercolors. "You can do your own thing, and at the same time be guided to exciting things to see, hold and pet. Ed and Debby worked diligently to show me many new specimens," says Kathy Rankin (Butler, PA). (808/879-3584)

The diving off Kauai doesn't measure up to the two previous islands. Elizabeth McCoy (Amarillo) says: "The north shore is definitely the best diving, but only divable in the summer months. Thanks to Sea Sage and the sub-contracted boat Bubbles Below, we saw some very rare specimens of fish and shells." Richard Duma said: "Ken with Sea Sage gives excellent boat and pre-dive briefings; has broad knowledge of sea life and is eager to show you unusual species." (808/822-3841). . . Dive Kauai lost its dive boat this past summer. Seven tourists got dunked on their way to their first dive when two enormous freak waves broke over the 26-foot dive boat, sinking it in 40 feet of water about 75 yards from shore. No one was injured.

Al Sharar (Chicago) says the best way to dive Oahu is with the Bojac Dive Club, which welcomes tourists. "It takes a group shore dive every Sunday morning; you bring your food and drink and join the picnic afterwards. Call 808/671-0311." We get continuing complaints about the Aloha Dive Shop in Honolulu. Sharar says: "The \$114 for two of us was less pleasure per dollar than I can remember. The first dive was to some twisted piece of steel left over from a dredging, alongside a busy boat channel. This was inferior and the second only slightly better. At neither site would the engine start, so we had to be towed twice." Not everyone complains. Ray Wilkerson (Moorpark, CA) says: "I have gone to the shop with flight crews varying from 5-15 people several times in the last four years and would recommend them to anyone. I have always found the employees to be helpful and safety conscious." (808/395-5922)

A final tip about Hawaii: many readers say they're told they don't need wet suits, but upon arrival they find the water too cold. Winter water is in the low 70s. Summer it nears 80°F. I find a wet suit top necessary year-round and many guides there wear full suits year-round. Go prepared.

HONDURAS: There is one place readers continually complain about getting eaten alive by sand fleas and no-see-um's: Anthony's Key Resort. All the Bay islands are alive with biters, but we regularly get letters from AKR visitors who had to curtail their diving and their fun due to scores and scores of bug bites. As far as we know, AKR sprays regularly, but they are powerless to provide full-time protection. Some people react allergically to a swarm of bites, and if that's your proclivity you're best off heading elsewhere. Other than that, most people have liked the operation since it's laid back, isolated and without the amenities of resorts in populated places. Whether the recent addition of a casino and disco will change that -- who knows? Says reader Judy Lees (Frederick, MD): "Fantastic hard and soft coral formations, plenty of creatures both big and small, great macro as well as wide angle photographs. Rooms are charming in typical island style, meals are plentiful. Be prepared to max out on diving and lay back." Harvey Miller (Deerfield, IL) says: "This is a big operation, but runs very smoothly. All employees are anxious to make the diving as enjoyable as possible. In mid-September it rained every day and visibility was down." This too is a common complaint of diving here. By the way, Peter Hughes is no longer connected with AKR. (800/227-DIVE, or Florida 800/343-DIVE)

We get mixed reviews of Caribbean Sailing Yachts, which has a 3-day hotel/3-day liveboard package. A couple of readers report good liveboard diving and

good times at this yacht basin hotel, but William McDonald (Westport, CT) reports that the CSY dive shop day boat didn't have its act together when he was there several months ago; they repeated bad dive sites, didn't keep schedules and were disorganized on many counts. CSY has several operations in the Caribbean -- it exists to serve sailors who want a dive or two, rather than divers who want a week underwater. (800/237-1131 or 813/886-6738). . . . CoCo View (see Undercurrent, January 1985) has become a favorite of many a serious diver. Fred Warth (Sault Ste Marie, Ontario) says: "An excellent place to charge your personal battery. No restrictions, not herded like cattle, no really large fish, but enjoyed the diving. I understand that in 1987 they are accepting Canadian money at par, which will mean a 40% savings." Bill Sherman (Frederick, MD) says: "A smaller but cozier place than AKR. I could do a scillion beach dives and never grow tired; it's truly an all-encompassing site where divers of all levels and interest can be enchanted with the reef and wall 100 yards off the front porch. Mary's place is another unique site with chimneys, tunnels, lots of coral. The food improves each year." (800/282-8932 or 904/588-4131). . . . Lanny Brown went to Cayos Cochinos on Cayos Del Sol: "Two-room cottages are spacious, with ceiling fans; meals were tasty and well prepared; 42-foot boat well rigged for diving with a helpful crew; diving was great, with impressive coral and sponges, tropical fish, a few larger fish and rays, and a couple of sharks." (800/336-7717 or 312/336-7717). . . . As for the Reef House, we haven't heard anything pleasant about it for more than a year, and received a three-page critique from Sharon Begly (Hubbardston, MA) which read like a Paul Theroux novel. I'd steer clear of the Reef House until other readers give us an update. . . . The operation at the Bayman Bay Club has been upgraded with a better boat and new hot water heaters since our February 1985 review. A couple of readers say our review essentially holds true, although others say management seems to be paying less attention to the welfare of the guests and divers. The place has a lot of promise, yet to be realized. (800/524-1823 or 305/525-8413). . . . One Houston reader visited the newly advertised Posada del Sol and said that the "staff are very experienced divers and will work hard to give you a good dive experience. The accommodations, staff and food make this a great vacation resort, comparable to a luxury resort such as Caneel Bay. I hope this is successful, but the marginal diving may prevent it." (800/642-DIVE or 305/944-8554)

## The Undercurrent Regulator Survey: Part I

### -- What Our Readers Have To Report

Several months ago we provided a questionnaire asking our readers to give us detailed information about the working history of their regulators.

We received 658 valid responses and a great deal of information about just how well our most vital piece of gear -- the regulator -- holds up. The responses include:

Scubapro	194 (29%)
Dacor	139 (21%)
U.S. Divers	131 (20%)
Sherwood	79 (12%)
Tekna	52 ( 8%)
Poseidon	32 ( 5%)
AMF	31 ( 5%)

We did not tabulate brands which had too few responses to permit generalizations about those

brands. One diver reported on his double hose regulator, which had been working for God only knows how many years, but that response was not included in our overall data.

Women comprised 22% of the respondents and men comprised 78%. The average age of the respondent was 39, the average number of years diving was 9 and the average number of dives per year was 49, which indicates that the typical respondent to the survey is an experienced and frequent diver. Indeed, 76 respondents said they dived 100 or more tanks per year and 6 of these people were 50 years of age or older. Six respondents indicated they dived 300 or more tanks per year. Thirteen people had been diving 20 years or more -- before buoyancy compensators and submersible pressure gauges.

Were there surprises in the responses? Only if it's a

surprise that overall regulators prove to be a generally reliable and long-lasting pieces of equipment, regardless of the brand. Yes, there are a few anomalies from brand to brand, but generally the regulator is a tight piece of equipment. But then if it weren't a reliable piece of gear, the risks of this sport would be too great to undertake.

Let us begin with overall observations about the results, then in the next issue, we will provide more specific information about individual brands.

Divers reported fairly regular servicing; 13% serviced their regulator at least every six months while an additional 70% serviced them at least annually. Only 17% serviced them less frequently.

A surprisingly high percentage of people used octopus rigs or auxiliary second stages. Interestingly, only 54% of the divers get their backup regulator serviced at the same time they service their primary regulator. This raises an interesting question. If divers are expecting to rely on their buddy's octopus rig if they run out of air, can they be expected to rely on their buddy's willingness to maintain that second regulator? After all, every time one has to get the second regulator serviced, it's an additional \$20 or more, which is often the reason maintenance is less frequent on the backup regulator. One must remember: just because we see a regulator hanging from one's tank doesn't mean that it's in good repair.

Power inflators, which were introduced in the early 1970s, are standard equipment: 94% of the divers in the survey have them.

Of the 658 divers responding to our survey, 95% reported they liked their regulators and 89% would recommend them to friends. However, 62% had experienced some sort of problem. These were the most cited complaints:

Freeflow	68%
Wet breathing	15%
Hard breathing	11%
Exhaust piece fell off	7%
Mouthpiece fell off	5%
Purge valve stuck	5%

The most serious problem one might imagine is to have a regulator stop delivering air. Only seven divers (1%) reported that occurrence. We'll discuss several of those cases separately later. In addition, 4% of the divers reported that their regulators had frozen in cold water.

Several divers had problems with their high pressure hose:

Hose bubbled	11%
Hose burst	6%

In most cases, the hose bubbles or bursts at the attachment to the first stage. This is easily prevented by slipping a sleeve over the hose so that it cannot be crimped and weakened. The sleeves can be purchased at any dive store.

### Aspirin, Gatorade And DCS

Some people believe that aspirin prior to a dive may help prevent decompression sickness, even though there is no medical evidence to support such a claim.

But there is a theory behind it, according to Dr. James Lowenberz, who provides treatment at the NOAA recompression chamber in Miami. Aspirin tends to keep blood platelets from bunching together. Theoretically, this would restrict the quantity of "bubbles" that can gather on the platelets or restrict the clumping of the platelets, thereby restricting the flow of blood in the body. When decompressing, nitrogen in the blood will be carried off more efficiently if the blood flow is unrestricted.

The theory suggests, then, that a tablet of aspirin before a dive can't do any harm and it just might do some good.

Gatorade may also be "cheap insurance" for bends protection, says Chris Wachholz, the director of Divers Alert Network.

Nitrogen moves through the blood stream in two ways: diffusion between membranes and profusion, when the blood picks it up and carries it away to, say, the lungs for outgassing.

When a diver enters the water, an immersion reflex occurs. Fluid is lost through urination and other means. The blood in the system actually becomes thicker and will absorb less gas. Ingesting Gatorade or warm bouillon (which have salts necessary to the system) will help hydrate a diver, increasing the amount of fluid in the blood and helping the blood carry off more gas. Water, beer, soda and the like don't have the same properties and won't help as much.

For 11% of the divers, their problems occurred while their regulators were under warranty. And 24% said that it took more than two weeks to repair their regulators (which means if you're planning a trip soon, you had better get your regulator serviced far in advance of your departure date). These are the most frequent service problems cited:

Parts not available	9%
Dealer wouldn't service	8%
Dealer overcharged	4%
Repair took too long	2%
No local service	1%

In the next issue we will give a rundown on specific brands, as well as describe some problems which occurred which readers will need to know about to help ensure their own safe diving.

Continued next issue.



# Dear Undercurrent

## -- Words From Our Readers

Dear *Undercurrent*,

In your October issue you mentioned that the Bay Islands of Honduras shouldn't get a bad rap because they are far removed from the mainland. But you still have to change planes on the mainland to get to the Bay Islands.

In 1982 my commuter flight between La Ceiba and San Pedro Sula was taken over by terrorists. The women and children were released after six hours, but the men were held under guard by four terrorists with handguns, surrounded by at least fifty sticks of dynamite, wired to detonators for at least three days. The climax came after the eight hostages engineered our own escape by going out emergency exits under gunfire.

The only solution to the problems of Bay Island diver operations is the completion of the runway on Roatan and the inauguration of nonstop flights from the U.S., preferably with American flag carriers. When that happens, I want to be on the first flight.

Jack Simpson  
Houston, Texas

Gentlemen:

I am disappointed to have seen you endorse an unproven, unscientific, absurd and dangerous technique as you have in your article "Stopping the Underwater Sinus Headache." [Editor's note: In this short piece, the author, Lisa Choquette, a long-time dive charter leader from Hawaii, wrote that she had found that an ascent feet first eliminated sinus headaches that had plagued her.] Each sinus cavity has sweeper cells that sweep the mucous toward the opening and keep it from accumulating within each sinus. One sinus has its opening facing forward, two others have theirs facing upward and the remainder have their openings facing downward. That is, there is no particular drainage pattern.

Inverting the head works against this mechanism, impacting the mucous and causing further blockage of the opening of the sinus. Air travels the path of least resistance, whether it be up or down; thus there is no need to have an opening at the top of a container for air to escape.

This particular technique may work for the author because of her slow ascent. I would suggest that instead of inverting one's head, a slow ascent alone might be just as helpful.

Your magazine is excellent, but I would like to see

you obtain further consultation from the experts before publishing comments from readers.

J. Nicholas Vandemoer, M.D.  
Ear, Nose and Throat Diving  
Medicine Specialist  
Hyannis, Mass.

Dear *Undercurrent*,

Contrary to your report in the October issue, both La Mer and See and Sea are running trips to the Red Sea. If the Arab and Israeli conflict doesn't put them out of business, you will.

Sally Calvert-Shore  
Philadelphia

Dear Sally,

How true. See and Sea, the folks there tell us, do not promote their trips and, in fact, always push other options to people who inquire. But they still run trips. As for La Mer? I just screwed up. My apologies.

And for your name. Sally C-Shore? Quite a moniker for a diver, I must say.

C.C., travel editor

Dear *Undercurrent*,

Based on my years of experience as a motion picture cameraman using ni-cads, I would like to respond to Bob Townsend's September article on "The Care and Feeding of Rechargeable Batteries."

In reply to his statement that "Ni-cads should not be recharged too often," I've found that they may be safely recharged as often as necessary without doing any real damage to the cells — providing they go through the full recharge cycle as recommended by the manufacturer.

Unlike Townsend, I don't believe "they should be discharged as fully as possible before recharging." If a ni-cad is fully discharged, it is possible (though not certain) to reverse polarity in the cells. Once that happens you may as well throw the battery out. I discharge batteries to no less than 70-75% of their full capacity, and then fully recharge them. Furthermore, there is no real need to store a ni-cad in a discharged state. If ni-cads are to be stored a long time, it is better to discharge them every 3-4 weeks to 25-30% of full capacity and then fully recharge them. This will help prolong the life of the cells.

Townsend is quite right about ni-cad's propensity for developing a memory if not discharged and recharged properly. Memory can be avoided by discharging down to 25-30% of capacity at all times and then fully recharging. For example, you have a light that is rated for one hour running time when fully charged, but you have run it for, say, half an hour. Let it continue to discharge down to 25-30% of capacity and then give it a full recharge.

Ralph Gerstle  
West Dover, Vermont

Dear Ralph,

Thanks very much for your comments. Perhaps the best place for anyone to start with new recharge-

ables, is to follow the manufacturer's instructions. Although most instructions are not complete (especially in regard to memory), the batteries of each manufacturer do indeed differ.

One additional point. As a professional cameraman, you may have a dozen or more batteries out of use and will provide the ongoing attention required to pull them out every 3-4 weeks for recharging. A typical sport diver may have only one or two batteries and not be willing to provide the TLC of a professional. Forgetting about them until the next trip is what will most likely happen. In this case, it seems best to store them at a low (25-30%) charge level.

Ben Davison

## The U.S. Navy Tables

There is an interesting anomaly in the U.S. Navy Tables at depths of 60 to 90 feet: there is a linear relationship between depth and maximum no-decompression times.

That is, for each 10-foot depth increase there is a corresponding 10-minute decrease in prescribed maximum bottom time. However, when no-decompression limits are exceeded, we don't see the same linear relationship in decompression requirements.

Feet	Bottom Time	Required Decompression Time at Ten Feet
60 ft.	60 + min.	2 min.
70 ft.	50 + min.	8 min.
80 ft.	40 + min.	10 min.
90 ft.	30 + min.	7 min.
100 ft.	25 + min.	3 min.

As you can see, decompression requirements for 70, 80 and 90 feet are significantly greater than they are for other depths. Of particular concern is the 300% increase between the two minutes required at 60 feet and the seven minutes required at 70 feet.

### *The Crossover Depth:*

With standard 71.2 cubic foot tanks, the depth at which an experienced diver has sufficient air to exceed maximum no-decompression time -- we'll call it the crossover depth -- is 60 feet.

The deeper a diver descends below his crossover depth, the easier it becomes to inadvertently exceed

## -- Problems At Sixty Feet

maximum no-decompression limits and still have air left to breathe. A 55-minute dive at 60 feet, for instance, would still be within no-decompression limits. If, at the end of the dive, the diver stopped at 10 feet for two minutes, the dive profile would look quite safe.

But this becomes complicated if the diver's depth gauge is inaccurate -- and many studies have shown that a very high percentage do indeed give incorrect readings. Suppose, then, that the true depth had been 70 feet -- and not 60 feet. The decompression obligation would become eight minutes at 10 feet.

In this case, obviously, a two-minute safety stop at 10 feet is insufficient and a serious decompression violation has been made, which could lead to a case of the bends.

Many divers (especially female divers) can easily exceed sixty minutes at 60 feet with a single 71.2 cu. ft. tank filled to 2250 psi. (At that pressure a tank contains roughly 65 cu. ft. of surface-equivalent air.)

Larger tanks increase the likelihood of exceeding the crossover depth on a dive. Aluminum 80 cu. ft. tanks filled to 3000 psi (80 cu. ft. of air) provide a whopping 40 percent increase, or an additional 23 cu. ft. of air. This is enough to increase bottom time at 60 feet by 16 minutes for a diver who breathes (i.e., has a respiratory volume) of .5 cubic feet per minute.

### *Respiratory Volume:*

In warm water it is uncommon for an experienced diver to breathe more than .5 cfm unless he has to work against a current or get out of a difficult situation. For most diving, respiratory volumes range from .3 cubic feet per minute to more than 1.0 cfm.

Chart I shows the amount of air divers with differ-

**CHART I: Air Available At Varied Depths According To Breathing Rate**

Depth in Feet	40	50	60	70	80	90	100	120
Minutes available with RMV of 1.00 ft <sup>3</sup>	440	250	168	155	136	111	100	69
Minutes available with RMV of .75 ft <sup>3</sup>	330	187	126	116	102	83	75	51
Minutes available with RMV of .5 ft <sup>3</sup>	220	125	84	77	68	55	50	34
Minutes available with RMV of .35 ft <sup>3</sup>	154	87	59	54	48	39	35	24
Minutes available with RMV of .3 ft <sup>3</sup>	132	75	50	46	40	33	30	20

ing respiratory volumes would need to exceed no-decompression limits at various depths. A slow breather with a rate of .35 cfm could exceed no-decompression limits at 60 feet (the chart shows 59 minutes) with a single 71.2 cu. ft. tank. At 70 or 80 feet, it becomes progressively easier.

As an additional example, the crossover depth for a diver with a breathing rate of .3 cfm and diving with an 80 cu. ft. tank is 50 feet.

*Putting it all together, we have:*

★ Larger capacity air cylinders decrease the crossover depth for scuba divers.

★ Add to that the possibility that depth gauges will be inaccurate and indicate false depths.

★ Efficient divers outfitted with modern equipment which makes breathing easier and keeps them more warm and comfortable. They breathe less air.

★ It is generally recommended that scuba divers stop at 10 feet for 2 minutes before surfacing as a preventive measure.

★ Yet, an anomaly in the U.S. Navy Tables occurs at 70, 80 and 90 feet which makes the 2 minute rule insufficient if one has exceeded the tables.

The minimum decompression requirement for a single violation at 70 feet is eight minutes at ten feet; at 80 feet it's ten minutes at 10 feet.

*Conclusion:*

Divers have been known to suffer decompression illness following dives during which they believe they didn't necessarily push or exceed no-decompression maximums. In many cases, the problem I've described in this article offers a possible explanation.

A diver, no matter how experienced, must be exceptionally careful when he nears the maximum bottom time limits at that 70 to 90 foot range. Indeed, the more experienced diver -- that is, the slow breather -- can be even at greater risk if he fails to monitor his bottom time or exceeds the depth limits. In these cases, the traditional two-minute stop at ten feet may just not be enough.

And for those of you who descend without watches (or even depth gauges!) and depend upon low air as the signal to surface, my condolences...

*The author of this article, Walt Hendrick, Sr., was, for several years, the Training Director for NAUI and Technical Director for NAUI NEWS until his recent resignation.*

## Been Dry Too Long?

### -- Reeducating Yourself By VCR

Quite a number of divers who read this publication are vacation divers who wait long periods between dives. Skills can get awfully rusty -- especially if they weren't well developed in the first place.

If you've been out of the water for a while, just how should you get ready to jump back in?

The best way is to practice in a pool, with an experienced diver or an instructor. And the next best thing is to get personal attention on the first open water dive.

Here's another recommendation -- get your hands on the videotape *Scuba Video Refresher Course*. It carries just about all the information you'll need to

recall before you go diving -- and then some. In this 35-minute tape, two instructors demonstrate the essentials of basic diving, including:

- maintaining neutral buoyancy
- mask and ear clearing
- water entries
- buddy breathing
- controlling vertigo and fatigue
- getting under the surface
- safe ascents
- breathing skills

While viewing this compact video, I was struck by

the multiplicity of skills a diver needs to know to dive safely. It also occurred to me, however, that divers do a few bonehead things that might have been covered in this tape:

- \*walking around in the boat with fins on
- \*putting the tank in the harness so that valve opening is facing inward
- \*getting the tank properly in the harness (which in the last frame the instructor fails to do; the tank is mounted so low that it hits his calf when he enters. But that's better than having the valve hit the back of his head, isn't it?)

Items like these would be helpful to the rusty diver. Yet the topics which are covered are clearly explained and demonstrated and indeed much easier to absorb than if one were to reread an introductory text.

The tape is a little heavy emphasizing the physical training that's required to be a diver. The narrator says that one should begin conditioning himself at least three weeks before going diving, but he gives the impression that one needs to work out in gyms and pools on a regular basis to be a safe diver. Diving is "a rugged sport," he says, while the two instructor models glide gracefully through clear waters at thirty feet. He also states that one ought to avoid *all* alcohol on the night before a dive, certainly an excessive warning.

Nonetheless, one who has been out of the water awhile and knows his skills have oxidized would be well advised to view this tape.

A 35-minute companion tape, *How to Use Dive Tables*, provides a well explained description of working out actual dive profiles. I've seen too many divers sit on dive boats and get lost in repetitive

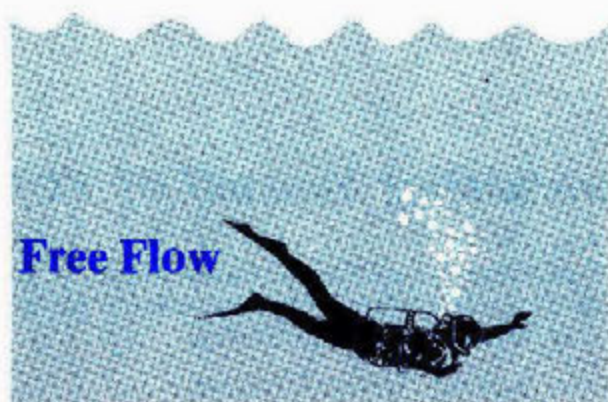
groups, residual nitrogen calculations and other numbers games, then silently slip the tables away and decide surreptitiously to rely on the divemaster. With other turkeys on board, that's not smart. What if the divemaster were to swim off to aid someone else? The poor diver, incapable of understanding the tables on his own, wouldn't have a notion when to surface.

Narrator Bob Cowart provides clear and concise explanation of the tables, along with good tips: how to define bottom time ("the safest thing to do is to consider the entire time spent underwater as bottom time") to how to position yourself if you're going to stop at ten feet (your chest, where your lungs are, is to be at the ten-foot marker).

For a diver who hasn't been wet for awhile -- and who finds descriptions in the dive manuals about as easy to understand as a calculus text --this little tape can be just the ticket to get the proper refresher before a dive trip.

For some the \$49.50 price tag per tape will seem high for a one-shot affair, although if you frequently have long gaps between dives you can consider it amortized over several years. You might urge your local dive stores to have rental copies on hand. It would be a good service to the diving community while giving the store the opportunity to make sales to the diver when he comes to get the tape and again when he returns it. We all know there's got to be something in the deal for them.

If you wish to purchase either tape, you may do so directly by writing the distributor: Cowart Marine Enterprises, PO Box 23399, Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33307. The postpaid price is \$49.50 each. Specify VHS, Beta Max or 3/4 inch.



This past summer a diver in Florida and a diver in Hawaii were killed when slashed by the propeller of a passing boat. One diver was flying the flag, the other was not. If boats aren't hazard enough, consider the jet ski, that noisy and raucous craft which anybody can pilot. In Hawaii a woman was killed when a jet ski operated by a 6-year-old boy plowed into her inflatable kayak. Who's going to be the first diver

creamed by this intrusive little vessel? And how many will follow?

**When we reflect on the inadequacies of scuba training programs, charter boats, and resorts, let us also reflect upon this item, which comes from the Fall 1986 issue of *Fathom*, a publication of the United States Navy: "Over the past two years, our diving safety surveyors have visited nearly all of the Navy's diving lockers. We found that inadequate training spans the entire diving community and is a serious problem. Diving training remains a low priority within many commands and equipment maintenance and safe diving procedures suffer.... We have yet to see an accident that was the result of a properly maintained piece of diving equipment failing within its designed operating limits. Every major mishap involved someone cutting corners. Using marginal or inoperative equipment jeopardizes the diver and can't be accepted."**