
Kauai and Beyond

Aloha, vacationers! Diving? Sure, we got that

If I were going to Hawaii to dive, it's Kona, the Big Island, that I would ask for at the Aloha Airlines counter. But if you're vacationing in Hawaii, it's easy to end up on the lush green island of Kauai. If you do, here's a couple of tricks our correspondents asked us to pass along to get you to the best diving.

The first trick is Ken and Linda Bail's Bubbles Below. These guys garner the best comments on the island from *In Depth* readers, and they offer a couple of the ordinary specialty dives. One of these is to Niihau, a tiny private island to the west of Kauai. It's not an easy place to get to; you can't actually land there unless you're prepared to cough up \$1,500 or so to try out the big-game hunting. However, Bubbles Below will do it as a day trip, a two-hour crossing from Kauai.

Most of the diving here is done at Lehou Rock, a volcanic

remnant almost identical to Molokini, off Maui. The big difference I noticed was that ours was the only boat in sight.

My first dive was enjoyable — the water was crystal clear and

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fish-filled, including big schools of pennant butterflies and false Moorish idols. I didn't care much for the 90-minute crossing, but I

would liken it to a good day at Kaiwi Point on Kona, a fine dive by almost any measure. The terrain was much like that of Molokini, and I spent most of my dive along the slope of the crater watching the fish play in the surf.

My second and third tanks of the day raised the bar. Dive number two was at Pu'u Mu'u. I was in a fairly large group, eight divers, following Ken Bail through a huge lava tube that was big enough to swim through. As we made our way toward the far side, Ken stopped and signaled everybody to drop down on the bottom. Circling the cavern opening were four or five juvenile gray reef sharks, each about three feet long. Now, this was worth the trip. While common in the western Pacific, these sharks are rare in the human-infested main Hawaiian Islands. And here I was seeing a virtual school of them.

Dive number three, Vertical Awareness, was an exquisite dive for those not afflicted with agoraphobia (an abnormal fear of open places). In honest-this-is-the-truth 100-plus visibility, I descended an absolutely sheer wall and kicked along it, enjoying a profusion of fish. Then I left the wall and followed Ken out into the vast blue. No up, no down, no around — just blue, until another, equally sheer wall came into view on the other side and we followed it back in the other direction.

In honor of the ongoing '96 Summer Olympics, I stopped at a two-foot ledge on that wall, firmly planted my feet, leaped out into infinity, and performed a perfect somersault. I then returned to the

Diving That Really Sucks



along comes "L.A. Man Diving for Lobsters Gets Sucked into Power Plant's Intake Pipe" to take its place. Not only is he sucked up a 12-foot-diameter pipe along with 60,000 gallons of water a minute, but he emerges from the holding tank inside the power plant still holding his two lobsters!

It makes a good myth, but the trouble is, this time it's a true story. While I give the diver a good thumbs up for making the ride, living to tell, and bringing home the bugs, it's definitely a thumbs down for the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. A spokesperson from Water and Power assured us that the bars at the end of the tunnel were only an inch apart and that the diver's grim thoughts of being chewed up by a turbine while he was being sucked down the 1,500-foot-long pipe were for naught. However, doesn't it seem to make some sense to put a grate at the intake instead of the other end? J. Q.

group, mentally awarding myself the gold medal in the 300-meter platform dive.

During the surface interval, I got to see a rare (and very endangered) Hawaiian monk seal parked on a ledge. These creatures occasionally buzz the dive groups.

On the trip home, we stopped for a school of dolphins that were quickly identified as not dolphins — the dorsal was all wrong and they were too big. After a couple of almost-close encounters in the water, it was a search through the critter books. The best anyone could do was Cuvier's beaked whale, or perhaps some other kind of beaked whale. This was an important litmus test for a dive operation: (1) if they see some unusual critter in the water, do they stop to check it out? and (2) having done that, do they rummage through the literature until they're satisfied they've found what they saw? Bubbles Below passed with flying colors (with Ken calling Linda at home on the cel phone, saying, "She's the marine mammal expert").

The next day it was to Mana Crack along the western edge of the island. This is their other "special" dive, a rift in the reef that provides some excellent terrain. I found these dives, too, to be very enjoyable, but not substantially better than a good day at one of Kona's better (and closer) sites. This time Linda was running the group. She and Lisa Choquette of Kona's Dive Makai (whom I consider to be one of the best divemasters around) have a lot in common. Linda loves the little critters out there and knows every one. Each hole and crack in the reef ridge was carefully inspected. Linda timed the dive to end at a large amphitheater where a school of gray reef sharks occasionally hang out. Alas, the

sharks were not in residence, but it was a fine dive nonetheless.

Toward the end of the dive, Linda suddenly went berserk, pointing at a small fish swimming around the reef. I looked, but all I saw was something that looked like an oddly shaped pennant butterfly. When we returned to the boat, Linda whooped with delight. We had seen a Hawaiian morwong, which is simply not seen around any main Hawaiian island except Kauai and is rare even there. "Next time you see Lisa Choquette, be sure to remind her she's never seen one," demanded Linda with a giggle.

Beyond Beyond

I asked Linda, "Is there anything, um, further out?" knowing that the northwestern chain of Hawaiian Islands disappearing into the setting sun is renowned for its shark populations. She smiled and got a faraway look in her eyes. "Kaula. It's a few miles beyond Niihau. That's where Marjean got chased out of the water by gray reef sharks. We don't get there often." Marjean, the amiable and terribly competent captain, piped up, "I go there every chance I get."

K. L.

Bubbles Below can be contacted at 808-822-3483. If you're diving Niihau or Mana Crack with Bubbles Below, stay on the southern side of the island, where they pick up passengers for those dives. The crossing to Niihau is very weather susceptible and they understandably ask you to agree to a regular two-tank dive with them if they can't get across the Kaulakahi Channel. As it is, Niihau diving is restricted to the summer months.

Ditty Bag

Postmarks

More feedback on computer diving

In the October issue of In Depth, under the title "Computing Your Way into Trouble?" we published excerpts from the 1995 workshop sponsored by the Underwater Hyperbaric Medical Society. We focused on Dr. Carl Edmonds's outspoken comments against divers placing their trust in dive computers because in this industry the only place you can read a controversial remark is a nonadvertising publication like In Depth/Undercurrent. Good

controversy should raises a few eyebrows, and this one did. Last month Bret Gilliam, current CEO of UWATEC (a dive-computer manufacturer) and vice chairman of NAUI's board of directors, took issue with a number of points and we printed his response. Shortly thereafter, we also heard from Dr. Peter Bennett, executive director and founder of Diver's Alert Network, and John Lewis, co-author of Recreational Diver's Guide to Decompression Theory, Dive