
Flotsam & Jetsam

News on line and in letters

AN OFFICIAL REASON TO SWIM NAKED. The editor for U.S. Health Service's *Public Health Reports* has announced his recommendation for avoiding a rash from sea lice: skinny dipping.

Sea lice are tiny jellyfish that get caught between anything you have on in the water (swim suit, wet suit) and your skin. Trapped where it's tight, the jellyfish react by stinging. Your body responds with a rash. The official recommendation — take it all off. Or in more bureaucratic language:

"In the interest of good public health research and practice, we feel compelled to note that abandoning swimming garments altogether, usually referred to as nude bathing or skinny dipping, might go a long way toward reducing the occurrence of this disease."

BUT KEEP BIKINI ON. Don't take Bikini off your list because it has only a land-based dive operation. The operators of the 170-foot *Thorfinn*, which has been based in Truk, Micronesia, have announced that if enough divers are interested they will head out on a series of discovery tours in 1997. Bikini, with its wrecks, is just one of many stops in Micronesia and the Marshall Islands. The 14-day trips are listed at \$3,895 per person plus a fuel surcharge of \$1,000 (619-330-3040, fax 691-330-4253, e-mail Seaward@mail.fm).

CALYPSO CHIPS. I almost hesitate to tell you about this, in case you snap up the last piece before I get there. For just \$100, the **Cousteau Society** is selling four-inch pieces of wood salvaged from the *Calypso* after it was run into by a barge in Singapore harbor and sunk in 16 feet of water. Proceeds from the sales go to the *Calypso II* fund.

PENETRATION PARADISE? The island of **Espiritu Santo in Vanuatu** — known in the diving world for the *Coolidge*, the largest wreck that can be dived on air — might have a new drawing card. Scientists from the University of Western Australia have been studying a large freshwater cave system in the rainforest. The hope is that it will become a diving attraction as well.

KAVA KAVA. I've thrown down a few cups of kava in **Fiji** and in **Vanuatu**. I say "thrown down" because I've never found the appearance or the taste of the muddy, dishwater-looking beverage — a traditional drink made by several people chewing up a local root and spitting it into a coconut shell — all that appealing. The drink is supposed to induce tranquility and restfulness in both body and soul. As for me, it just makes my lips numb.

Kava is interwoven with the social, religious, and political life of most Pacific islands. Now it's being introduced into the West, and the pharmaceutical companies are getting involved, so you can expect the cost of your next cup of kava to go up.

BEE BOP. Shark attacks on divers are uncommon, but **Whitsundays Island off Australia** has reported an attack on an Italian tourist. Depending on which wire service you read, the victim was either a snorkeler or a diver completing a navigation exercise as part of a four-day dive course. It's the third recent shark attack in the area, and local shark hunters are convinced that the assailant is the same in all three cases, a nine-foot tiger shark. The local dive-school proprietor, defending the safety of diving, came up with his own statistic to put things in perspective: "Ten people will die of bee stings this year," he noted. ■

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