

The *Telita* and PNG

The saga of Bob Halstead's pioneer boat

Some live-aboards are just that — a base to eat, sleep, and dive from. Other live-aboards take on a character above and beyond the basics, where the captain or crew become an integral part of the experience. Such a boat is Bob Halstead's *Telita*, the first PNG dive boat. Opinionated and irascible as he is, Bob has a following of divers that equate him and the *Telita* with Papua

New Guinea diving.

Says Halstead: "When we started in dive tourism, we had Scuba Safaris, where guests had the dubious pleasure of camping in villages at night, initially in tents and then in village houses that we had specially built for us, and wonderful, adventurous diving. One of the main problems with this village life was the high probability of catching

malaria unless fanatical about precautions. Comfort was not the priority — adventure and virgin diving was."

After seven years Halstead built the *Telita*. Now the *Telita* is up for sale; the intimate, 8- to 10-passenger craft faces stiff competition from larger, more luxurious boats. Recently it was operated by Mike Ball, but he's now launching his own craft, the *Paradise Sport*.

For those of us who want to dive personally with Bob, here's his itinerary:

Great White Shark Trip aboard the *Falie*: Departs Adelaide February 24, 1998, returns to Port Lincoln March 2. Trip organized by Rodney Fox. Bookings through Mike Ball Dive Expeditions (800-952-4319 or 011-61-7-772-3022, fax 011-61-7-721-2152).

Milne Bay, PNG, aboard *Paradise Sport* with Dr. Genie Clark, March 21-31, 1998. University of Maryland research expedition (genuine ecotour!), inquiries to e-mail <clark@zool.umd.edu>

Milne Bay, PNG, aboard *Paradise Sport*, March 31-April 8, 1998. Regular cruise itinerary. Bob Halstead marine life seminar with dive briefings, photo tips. Bookings through Mike Ball Dive Expeditions.

Exploratory voyage along Papuan Coast aboard the *Golden Dawn*, October 18-November 1, 1998 approximately. Contact Dolphin Enterprises: e-mail <ingridd@ozemail.com.au> or fax PNG 675-325-0302.

Aboard the Reef Explorer

Just the way some divers equate Halstead and the *Telita* with PNG, others equate Kim and Allan Payard, owner-operators of the Cairns, Australia-based *Reef Explorer*, with diving the far northern Great Barrier Reef. Last

August they sold their boat. Their presence was missed by *Undercurrent* subscriber Alan Hutchison (Reno, Nevada), who was aboard the *Reef Explorer* in October: "Unfortunately, at the last minute the new captain (Allan and Kim's former mate, with five years' experience in the far north) left the boat for personal reasons. All in all, I had a good trip, but anyone who has been on the boat previously would be disappointed. We had great difficulty finding the designated dive sites, little effort was made by the new owner and three divemasters (whom I would describe as competent, affable Cairns cowboys) to explore the sites when we did find them, even though it was their first time there, and there were virtually no dive briefings or leadership. However, the Swiss chef was excellent, the crew and relief captain tried hard, and there is no denying that the diving is good in this part of the world. Despite the fact that our difficulty in finding the sites kept the number of dives down to only 26 on the 12-day trip, I had many wonderful dives. I encountered an enormous Queensland grouper who probably had never seen a diver on his reef before; the sea was full of mating green turtles, and coral and pelagic life was prolific. As much as I would like to return, I will probably wait another year until the new owner develops the degree of professionalism of Allan and Kim."

Editor's note: In November, 10 divers were rescued from rough seas out on the far north Great Barrier Reef. The divers, who were diving from the *Reef Explorer*, were on their way to Bligh Reef when large waves overturned their inflatable. The *Reef Explorer*, which was about three kilometers away, was unable to rescue them because it was too shallow on top of the reef. However, a nearby game-fishing boat heard their mayday call and reached the stranded divers within half an hour.