

different from what it actually is. In other words, They're Dreamin'!

I know the uneven buddy system does not work because I have tried it. The experienced diver has to sacrifice either a dive to care for the inexperienced diver, or he leads a too advanced dive for his novice buddy.

Each dive is incredibly valuable. You spend a lot of time, effort and money to get to dive and even then nature can deliver rough seas and poor visibility. The thought of finally getting to the dive site and having to babysit a beginner — well it's an unnatural act. The theory assumes that people behave in good and unselfish ways. Like I said, They're Dreamin'!

We train instructors and divemasters to teach and look after beginners. It is their job, a tough and skillful one at that. They get paid to do it, as they jolly well should. This is no place for amateurs.

I am no admirer of the buddy system. It is a big mistake — along with no-decompression diving — that we make in diver training. We should have ditched it years ago and instead promoted self-sufficient diving and surface support. Alas, too late now. The legal risks are too great for instructor organizations to make the changes.

Nevertheless, if you are going to buddy, it is essential that your buddy be of equal standard and interest. I first defined buddy diving many years ago as follows: "The buddy system occurs when two divers of similar interest and equal experience and ability share a dive, continuously monitor each other

throughout the entry, the dive and exit, and remain within such distance that they could render immediate assistance to each other if required."

I am flattered that several authors have borrowed my definition. Many dive operators seem to think that just by putting two divers together they create a buddy system. A little thought will expose this stupidity.

After observing some near catastrophic so-called buddy dives, I put my own theory into practice and paired inexperienced divers with other inexperienced divers. It worked like a charm. The divers did not dive deep.

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### **The buddy system – along with no-decompression diving – is a big mistake that we make in diver training. We should ditch them both.**

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They did not stray far from the boat. They did not have unrealistic expectations about their buddy's ability to rescue them. And they surfaced from the dive proud of their own achievement and eager to gain more experience.

I also allowed experienced divers to dive solo, though this does not mean diving alone because we always provided excellent surface lookouts and rescue capability. Solo diving is extraordinarily popular with experienced divers, especially photographers, since it allows close experiences with many wild marine animals that would

swim away if confronted with pairs or groups of divers. In fact, only solo divers ever had close contact with wild dugongs while I was running our boats.

Mike Ball of Mike Ball Dive Expeditions is the only Australian dive operator who can honestly say he caters to all styles of diving at his training facility in Townsville and on board his liveaboard fleet, Paradise Sport in PNG, SpoilSport and Water Sport out of Townsville and Super Sport out of Cairns.

If you are a beginner, you can get instruction. If you are qualified but inexperienced you can get a dive guide who is a qualified divemaster or instructor to be your buddy. That is their job and they get paid for it. If you wish to buddy dive and have a suitable buddy, you may do so. If you came alone, the crew will help you meet with like-minded divers on board. And, if you are experienced and have a redundant spare air supply such as a pony bottle with an independent regulator, you may solo dive.

This service is dedicated to giving divers the best possible experience commensurate with their ability and interest. It provides choice instead of treating everyone at the lowest common denominator. And it promotes excellence rather than mediocrity. Mike Ball is a smart operator. I do not think you will ever find him line dancing, with or without a horse.

*P.S. from Ben: Next time you're off to dive without a buddy, put a copy of this article in your dive bag: you may need it to prevent being paired with someone who doesn't know his fins from his fanny.*

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## **Flotsam & Jetsam**

A Hawaiian free diver, who three years ago was hit by a 21-foot boat, has been awarded \$400,000 by a federal judge. The boat driver said diver Dana Moss surfaced just 12 feet in front of his boat, making it impossible to avoid hitting him. But Moss said he was not submerged and was floating

on top of the water. The Big Island prosecutor's office ticketed Moss for diving without a flag, but the charge was thrown out. The judge found that Moss was 10 percent responsible for his injuries, and the boat driver was 90 percent responsible because he was driving the boat unreasonably fast

and was too close to shore. Moss, who had reconstructive surgery, may not be able to regain full use of his injured wrist and arm.

Emboldened by their unpunished protests of the sea cucumber quota last May, commercial fishing interests

on several Galapagos islands took to the streets in November to protest the 50-ton limit on lobster harvesting, despite having already received a special 30-ton extension. Local authorities protested with the fishermen, using municipal trucks to obstruct roads. On Isabela, they damaged National Park and Darwin Station offices, stealing cars, computers, cameras and radios. In other places, including Hood, divers and tourists have been prevented from landing or leaving their boats by protestors. Reminiscent of previous protests, no arrests have yet been reported. Those wishing to donate funds or equipment should contact the Darwin Foundation at [comments@galapagos.org](mailto:comments@galapagos.org).

DAN and *Skin Diver* have entered a joint agreement, in which DAN members will now receive 12 issues a year of *Alert Diver*, but wrapped in *Skin Diver* magazine. A few days after the announcement, *Skin Diver* issued a statement that its DAN edition will not carry direct mail dive product advertising, an anathema to retail stores. The arrangement has raised a few eyebrows. Dave Kasper, owner of Huron Scuba in Ann Arbor Michigan told *Undercurrent* that "DAN should not be in the business of promoting one major competitor in the dive industry over another. The retailer/sponsors have played a major role in building DAN up to

its enormity, and maybe that's to our ultimate detriment." DAN says the savings they accrue will allow them to increase research, telephone service and recompression chamber assistance.

While Florida shark attacks get press in the lower 48, snorkelers should be aware that Maui harbors a few of the big guys. In October, a woman snorkeling off Olowalu was bitten on her upper and lower back by what is believed to have been a 6 - to 8 - foot tiger shark. Snorkeling about a half-mile from shore, she was able to cling to a nearby kayak. It happened less than a mile from where a Maui woman was killed by a shark in 1991. A couple of years ago, a woman was seriously injured by a shark while snorkeling off Kaanapali Beach. Snorkel in groups and keep an eye out for one another.

Chapbook update ... Efra Figueroa, long time owner of Puerto Rico's Parguera Divers has sold the operation to his divemaster, Angel Rivera, who is expected to maintain the same high quality of service, reported by *Undercurrent* subscriber Tom Daly ... Our full review of Flamingo divers last August is no longer valid, the operation is now in disarray; manager Andrew Watts has departed for Saba Deep.

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The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers  
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