

## Barbados, West Indies:

### *Where, oh where, have the big fish gone?*

I am in mourning. I'm about to write an obituary, first for the passing of a good friend, then for the passing of a reef, a string of reefs, a stretch of coastline whose patriarchs disappeared while I was back in the good ole' U.S.A. making a buck so I could return once more to Barbados. I should have stayed.

My friend was an eight foot moray, the largest I'd ever seen, one surely large enough to hold his own against the denizen of The Deep who pumped fear into the heart of dear Jacqueline Bisset, God love her. My monster lived in a large, steel hulled interisland ferry, sunk in 110 feet of water off the coast of Barbados, and it was there I encountered this enormous creature. He was one of the many large, indeed extra large, fish (would you believe a two foot cow-fish!) I saw in Barbados over the many years of my visits to this little Caribbean island. Someone speared him, someone I hope who needed a meal, not a trophy, yet there's no telling who the hunter was. I'd have bought the spearman a year's supply of fish and chips to leave untouched the marvelous monster. Now, for a week's supply of eel meat, a thousand divers will never see the giant.

That eight foot serpent is symbolic. For in early May, as I made my first dive after having been away for but a year, I thought a very short year, I sensed there had been changes, but what were they, I wondered, as I sank slowly from the surface to settle on the bottom. I stood on the sand, balanced on the toes of my flippers, and turned about, unsure of what I was seeing, but feeling as if I had not been here before, feeling lonely, feeling sad.

The fish are gone. Oh, not all the fish, not the myriad of small tropicals, not the ubiquitous damsel fish, not the sergeant major, not the red snapper, nor the blennies, butterflies, or black bar soldierfish.

But, where were the angelfish, round and large as the tire on my lover's Honda, or the barracuda, those jaws large enough to snap an oar in half, or the enormous parrot fish, with beaks so strong and powerful they could crunch a coconut? Indeed the big fish were gone. Gone in one year.

I spent a week exploring the reefs, talking to the local divers, doing

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what I could to uncover the cause. The locals have only one belief, and I concur. For several months, boats were dredging the harbor. They stopped in February. That, said every diver in Barbados, scared away the fish.

Yet, for all this, Barbados remains good diving although not the quality of a year ago. The reefs are not silted and the visibility is fine. On the Caribbean side of the island, visibility is 80 feet, 100 feet, sometimes more. Only when the sun slips behind a puffy cloud have I seen it less than 60 feet. On the south coast, where the wind can kick up the sea to 5-7 foot swells and the rolling and pitching dive boat will raise puffy clouds in your stomach, visibility is usually 50 feet, sometimes less.

Every type of coral thrives in the warm water of Barbados, which is never below 80°, so I don't wear a wet suit top. Vast fields of elkhorn provide homes for multitudes of damsel fish. Organpipe coral sometimes stands 7 feet high, and endless carpets of finger coral house wrasses and friends. Beautiful three-foot yellow tube sponges add a splash of color when perched alongside brown basket sponges, which are home to a range of creatures from blennies to brittle stars.

Even today, with the big fish off gallivanting, Barbados can provide pleasant surprises. Sharks are unknown, or almost so, on the Caribbean side (they're seen occasionally on the open ocean side), so you won't be rudely surprised if you're hanging on the anchor line, but you might be surrounded by hundreds of southern sennet or ballyhoo, and that's a sight you won't forget. Occasionally a hawksbill turtle will explode from the sand just a few feet in front of you, a startling and delightful sight. Barbados is one of the few places in the Caribbean where I've seen with frequency the gold spotted snake eel, that creature unsuspecting divers believed to be a poisonous sea snake, but what you and I, the experts, know is a member of the eel family, whose nontoxic bite will be forthcoming only if you stick your finger in its mouth.

On this journey to Barbados, the surprises were still there. But, what was a complete and fascinating reef to me now has become, shall we say, an average plus, perhaps good, Caribbean reef, worth the trip, but only because Barbados as an island has more to offer: good restaurants, hotels, beaches and the people. The natives of Barbados are warm and friendly people, intelligent and honest. No Caribbean country is a better host for Americans.

Temperature usually runs in the low 80's, regardless of the season, with occasional rains from June to December. Evenings are pleasant. You might find a sweater or jacket useful on some nights if you're headed for swinging discotheques such as the Pepper Pot or Alexandra's, or to Dirty Harry's (and it is just that). There are plenty of good restaurants to satisfy nearly any culinary desire; Dolly's, which should be open now after a fire, the Bagatelle Great House and La Bonne Auberge are excellent.

Nondivers can easily get through a week in Barbados by sightseeing for a day or two, shopping for standard duty free goods, or for local handicraft and batik, and fishing, sailing, or whatever. Most dive shops provide short "resort courses" to introduce the nondiver to the thrills of what's below.

Now, who to dive with:

Willies Water Sports, Paradise Beach Hotel, Phone 02836: I've always

Undercurrent is published monthly by Undercurrent, Inc., P.O. Box 1058, Sausalito, Ca. 94965. Copies of this guide are not available on newsstands, but are furnished directly to the diving public by mail subscription only. To maintain its independence, Undercurrent carries no advertising and is supported entirely by

subscription income.

If you wish to receive the accurate, inside information Undercurrent offers, please send your check for \$15 in the U.S. funds to Undercurrent, P.O. Box 1058, Sausalito, Ca. 94965. A Second Class Postage Permit has been applied for at Sausalito, California.

found Willie Hassel to offer the best diving. His 32 foot dive barge has a bow ramp for easy loading, a fresh water shower, a diving platform and (you'll never believe this) a head! Willie and his guide Dolphin are attentive and competent guides. Since their primary goal is to please their customers, they listen to suggestions and requests, and usually can find diving for every interest. Willie won't ask to see a C-card (no one in Barbados does), but can give pool lessons. Those who fake it are watched carefully on their first dive to make sure they can handle themselves. One dive, with all equipment included, is about \$22, or you can sign on for a five-dive package at \$90. If you bring your own gear you get roughly a 20% deduction. Willie has two compressors, and full gear for 30 divers, all of whom could fit on the barge.

Sandy Lane Watersports, Sandy Lane Hotel, Phone 21311: Owner Peter Tomlin and his guide Dave take 2-4 divers to the reefs in their Zodiac powered by a 70 hp outboard. Tomlin has equipment for 12 divers and will take out a group just about any time of day. He freely admits he doesn't care much for diving himself and operates the service mainly for the hotel guests.

Lew Wotton Watersports, Coral Reef Club Hotel, Phone 23215: Les and his wife are fine folk and exceptional guides. Their glass bottom boat takes 8 divers to the reefs at 10:30 and 3:30. They have equipment for 35 divers. They allow no spearfishing and continually demonstrate great care about the safety of their divers. You'll never lose Les underwater, since he constantly hums a little song into his regulator. It's a good operation.

Scuba Safari, Between Holiday Inn and Hilton Hotels, Phone 60621: Once a Teach/Tour facility. Guide Mike is a friendly and capable fellow, who takes his trips to the reefs in a 18 foot Boston Whaler. Because of their location, they usually travel to the more difficult and less interesting dive sites.

Miramar Watersports, Miramar Hotel, Phone 22880: Although I had satisfactory diving last year with owner Ron White and his guide Keith, I spent a week looking for him this time, couldn't ring them up, and conclude they're either out of business or on vacation.

Hotels: Hotel rates for two in Barbados are astronomical. Beach front accommodations begin in winter at \$100/day or so (American Plan) for two. Since I prefer Willies for diving, I stay with the younger crowd who frequent the Paradise Beach Club, where I consider the food and accommodations excellent. I need no car to get to the dive shop and I'm a \$3 cab ride from town. The reef begins 100 yards from shore and the snorkeling is excellent. The other hotels with shops -- The Coral Reef Club and the Miramar -- are perhaps even better than the Paradise, but they are also more expensive and, as I said, I prefer Willies for diving. Off season rates drop 30-40%.

There are hotels south of Bridgetown -- e.g., the Holiday Inn and the Hilton -- which have lower rates but are not near the good diving so a car is required. Also south of town is Sam Lords Castle. They advertise diving and farm people mainly to Willies. Sam Lords is not on the water and is 35 minutes from town. Rates begin at about \$55/couple, winter, without meals. It's a less expensive way to visit Barbados.

Note: Most hotels add a 10% surcharge to their bill for gratuities. If your hotel surcharges, don't tip at dinner or for drinks unless you care to further reward the service. The government adds a 5% tax at the end of your stay. If you pay cash at the bar and don't add it to your hotel bill, you save 5%.

Conclusion: I think the big fish will be back. In mid-June I called a fellow diver in Barbados who said a few are beginning to reappear. That's encouraging. I'll report again next year, but for now I can only hope. KE

# Critique of World-wide Diving, Part III:

## *A summary of readers' experiences.*

VIRGINS, BRITISH: The British Virgins are much less populated than the U.S. Virgins, and the size brings both charm and inconvenience. The diving is very similar to that of the U.S. Virgins and of course they share many of the same sites such as the wreck of the Rhone, popularized by The Deep. We have gotten some complaints however about lower quality diving than offered in the U.S. Virgins and hotel rates higher than accommodations merit. Unless transportation synchronizes well, getting there can also be difficult.

Bert and Jackie Kilbride are no longer running their well-respected tours; Jackie has departed and, according to responses from our readers, Bert's offerings do not meet their previously high standards. Diving with Marler's Aquatic Center on Tortola is rated acceptable.

Little Dix Bay and Peter Island: Both are expensive, luxury resorts for those who seek class. Reports on accommodations and food remain fine (better at Little Dix) and the diving is generally good, although aimed more at the snorkelers and the inexperienced, not serious, divers.

VIRGINS, U.S.: The U.S. Virgins can provide good Caribbean diving, all the amenities of the U.S. -- film development, scuba repairs and equipment and even the N.Y. Times, a day late -- and provide plenty to do for the nondiver. They are an excellent choice for vacationers who want to get in a few tanks, but don't want to spend the full week diving, even though diving can be sufficiently varied to make a full week interesting. Visibility runs in the 50-100 foot range, reefs are better than average, and with the right guides, trips to the pelagic fish areas can be exciting:

St. Thomas: The most populated of the islands with the most diving. We like Virgin Islands Dive Center for the inexperienced, Joe Vogel or Dave Fredenbaugh (at Lagoon Undersea Center at Harms Marina) for the experienced, and for a quality resort with a first class guide and photographers, we recommend Bolongo Bay and guide Armando Jenick. Those who can afford the costs enjoy the luxury and diving offered at Caneel Bay Plantation.

St. Croix: A smaller version of St. Thomas, but some divers like it better because the reefs have been visited less. Divers seem to prefer V.I. Divers and Pressure Limited for guided tours.

St. John: Here Cinnamon Bay Campground provides overnight camping in furnished tents for astonishing low rates and dives at Cinnamon Bay Waterworld at standard rates. Write Cinnamon Bay Campground, PO Box 4930, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, 00801.

BONAIRE, N.A.: Virgin reefs, a fine range of tropicals, and 50-100 plus foot visibility make Bonaire just about the top underwater spot in the Caribbean. Capt'n Don's operation at the Aquaventure Habitat and Hotel Bonaire can easily handle scores of divers for boat or fine beach dives, making unlimited diving a reality. Though the Capt'n has had a fine operation, divers have begun to complain that the connection with Worldwide Divers has affected the home-spun quality of the operation and seemingly weakened the management. Teach/Tours operation at the Flamingo has just added well-regarded guide Dave Woodward, which could mean strong competition. Bonaire is a small, lay back island with

a casino, a couple of restaurants and not much more than sunshine and diving. Reviewed in Undercurrent, January, 1976. (We did not include Bonaire in our first review because of late information we decided to check out more carefully.)

BOAT TRIPS: A number of live-aboard boat trips are offered throughout the world, but few have had sufficient patronage from our readers to earn reviews. Three, however, have had sufficient response to permit attention. More information can be received by writing Undercurrent.

The Cayman Diver: Paul Humann's 83' Cayman Diver is by many divers considered the best way to dive Cayman, and you can dive as often as the tables permit. Accommodations are fine and food surprisingly good (you can bring up your own conch, but no spearing). It can be chartered by groups or buddies can join up with Sea and See's junkets.

Misty Law: A 56 foot trimaran based in St. Thomas, the Misty Law holds eight divers and with exception gets good reviews for the attentive crew, the food, and the diving possibilities. If it's chartered by divers only, diving can be most adventurous, but generally the travelers are mixed and diving, snorkeling, sunning, eating, drinking and lounging rate equal time.

Spirit of Adventure: The Hawaiian-based Superboat continues to get panned by our readers. They complain of tight schedules, average meals, and diving no better than they could get from the land-based shops for much less cost. According to those who report, the expectations advertised by the company are unmet by the crew. The boat indeed has fine possibilities, but it's still plagued with self-created difficulties.

In the next issue, we will make additions and corrections to our reviews based upon reader responses. The 3-part Critical Guide for Vacation Divers is being printed as one volume for new subscribers. It is being sold at \$4 for non-subscribers, and to subscribers for our cost: \$2.

## Southern California Charter Boat Diving, Part II:

### *Tough and rewarding.*

Now that we've explained how to get organized for a Southern California dive trip (May, 1977), let us describe what you'll find once you drop overboard at a few sites. From Santa Barbara, southward. . .

Wilson's Rock: Exotic but difficult to reach unless the weather is right. Wilson's is a "wash rock", with no shelter from the ocean, wind or weather. It's for experienced divers. There's no kelp, but large anemones, large scallops, and yes, pelagic fish.

San Miguel Island: Cold water, thick and beautiful kelp, and sometimes strong surge make this a place for experienced photographers or pelagic fish hunters.

Santa Rosa Island: Popular because of good diving at protected sites. Visibility from 10' to 40', depths from 10' to 100'. The kelp provides good hunting grounds, for plentiful lobster, abalone, scallops, rockfish, halibut, sea bass and lots of coweries. For everyone but beginners. Watch the kelp.

Santa Cruz Island: Visibility varies, but is normally 40-50' with a sand and rock bottom running from 10' to 100'. Abalone, scallops, lobster, rockfish

and some halibut at a few sites, including Scorpion Anchorage, which is often used as a check out site.

Anacapa Islands: Soon to be the site of an underwater nature trail, visibility can run up to 100' at the three islands. The wreck of the Winfield Scott lies in 30' off the middle islands. Depths from 25' to 125'.

Begg Rock: Like Wilson's Rock, an exotic dive spot for the lucky and experienced. Lucky, because boats can only make the trip about 20% of the time and experienced because depths run to 240', with strong currents possible, heavy swells normal, and water colder than the other areas. Visibility ranges from 40' to 150' and the bottom starts at 55'. But, look what you'll find: white anemones at 120' up to 3 feet in diameter; herds of coveries and flocks of nudibranchs; walls of tiny anemones so dense you cannot put your hand down without doing damage. . . and the chance you might spot or swim with grey whales during their winter migration.

San Nicholas Island: Approaches the quality of Begg for shells and anemones, and hunters can find red and black abalone, black sea bass, rockfish, electric rays, lobster, scallops and sheephead. Diving can be tough but rewarding, with varying visibility usually between 40-100' in depths from 20' to 150'.

Santa Barbara Islands: Good photography with vertical ledges, kelp, and plenty of marine life: some red abalone and lobster, scallops, sheephead, blue perch and opaleye. Thick kelp around Sutil Island and purple coral has been found on the ocean side of the "Arch". Visibility 30-50'. Depths 20' to 150'.

Santa Catalina Island: At the numerous dive sights here, on a weekend there may be more divers than just about any place in the world. Most skippers look for sites where there are few other boats, but don't be surprised to find a half a dozen in the same area. Although Southern California is not for turkey divers, a few, like myself, have climbed out of the water and gotten on the wrong boat. Having no money on me to buy air on this strange boat, I had to swim back 300 yards across the top of the kelp forest to get to my boat. Now that is being a turkey!

The island's front side is used for check out dives, and there are sites for the experienced only. Visibility varies, but 50' to 100' is typical; depths range from 10' to 150'. In most areas kelp beds thick and populated with horn sharks, angle sharks, lingcod, mackerel, calico bass, morays, lobster, sheephead, blue perch, kelp bass, sculpin and the bright orange Garibaldi. Photography is excellent. The back side is mainly for experienced divers and best for the hunter. Due to surge, the visibility is lower (often 35') making photography unpredictable. Don't be surprised to find patches of gorgonia and black coral.

San Clemente Island: Depths down to 150', visibility from 35' to 100', and purple coral in 75' of water at 9 fathoms reef. It's possible to dive with the seals if you get to Perfume Point . . . so named because of the stench of the rookery. After a few minutes, novice divers lose their fear of entry and jump overboard to beat the aroma. Fine photography among the broken rock formations, sand bottom, abundant kelp and brilliant Garibaldi.

THE BOATS: Out of San Diego I consider the SAND DOLLAR and the BOTTOM SCRATCHER as good boats for traveling divers. They provide both tanks and weights which saves you hassles.

The SEEBEE (Port Hueneme) is highly recommended by several Southern California diving friends, but I have not taken her.

In Santa Barbara the CORAL SEA is the only game in town at present, however it is rumored that the TRUTH may move there from San Pedro next year. The CORAL SEA usually takes 2-3 day trips. The TRUTH also visits Santa Barbara from September through November.

**Recommendations:** The visiting diver who has not been in kelp before is best off visiting Santa Catalina for the first few dives. The diving is interesting, it's an excellent introduction to California waters, and provides the needed experience to move into tougher water. Furthermore, it's easier to get a trip to Santa Catalina than elsewhere because most of the boats travel there at least once a week and several go nowhere else for their one day trips. All boats permit spearing and mollusk gathering and collecting. Enjoy!

**Amenities:** San Diego, Santa Barbara and Monterey are tourist oriented and offer many hotels, motels and restaurants near the points of boat departure. San Pedro (the Los Angeles harbor) is off the beaten track so here are some suggestions: I've had good luck staying at the Vagabond Inn Motel on Gaffey

### SAN DIEGO AREA

Boat and Captain	Address
<i>Bottom Scraicher</i> <i>Sand Dollar</i>	Diving Charters, Inc. P.O. Box 6374 San Diego, CA 92106 (714) 224-4997
Bill Johnson	
<i>M/B Kwajalein</i>	273 "D" Street Chula Vista, CA 92010 (714) 427-7699
Jim Williams	

### LOS ANGELES HARBOR/SAN PEDRO AREA

<i>Blue Sea</i>	P.O. Box 1406 San Pedro, CA 90744 (213) 833-1577 or Laguna Sea Sports 7066 Van Nuys Blvd Van Nuys, CA 90415 (213) 787-7066
<i>Golden Doubloon</i>	Aloha Dive School 2910 W. Magnolia Burbank, CA (213) 846-1302 or Aquatic Center 4535 West Coast Hwy Newport Beach, CA (714) 673-5440 or Sea d Sea 1911 S. Catalina Redondo Beach, CA (213) 373-6355
Eddie Tsukimura	
<i>Mister C</i>	Box H Southgate, CA 90731 (213) 547-1131
Terry Wilmarth	
<i>Rio Rita</i>	P.O. Box 1406 San Pedro, CA 90744 (213) 833-1577
Dan Peterson	
<i>Sea Vue</i>	332 South Bedford Drive Beverly Hills, CA (213) 277-6625
Bud Wolfe	
<i>Scuba Queen</i>	P.O. Box 867 San Pedro, CA 90731 (213) 547-2236
Pete Greenwood	
<i>Toronado</i>	141 West 22nd St. San Pedro, CA 90731 (213) 547-3010
Roger and Ken Hess	
<i>Truth</i>	141 West 22nd St. San Pedro, CA 90731 (213) 831-8111
Roy Hauser	

### LOS ANGELES (continued)

Boat and Captain	Address
<i>Westerly</i>	Westerly Charters 504 N. Broadway Redondo Beach, CA Charters: (213) 833-6048 Open Boat: (213) 372-8423
Jim Ingram	

### VENTURA/OXNARD/PT. HUENEME AREA

<i>Barbara-Marie</i>	Aqua-Ventures Diving School 2172 Pickwick Drive Camarillo, CA 93010 (805) 484-1594
Charles Curtis	
<i>*Islander</i>	Seafarer Dive Shop 3600 Cabezon Way Oxnard, CA 93030
<i>*Jeanne</i>	Port Hueneme Sportfishing Dock 1 Port Hueneme, CA 93041 (805) 488-4715
<i>*Sea-Bee</i>	Channel Island Sportfishers 3825 Pelican Way Oxnard, CA 93030 (805) 985-8011
<i>Sea Ventures</i>	3805 Palma Drive Ventura, CA 93003 (805) 647-2805
Jake Sunderland	

### SANTA BARBARA AREA

<i>Coral Sea</i>	1641 Hillcrest Road Santa Barbara, CA (805) 966-1356
Glenn Miller	
<i>Truth</i>	(See San Pedro—operates here during Sept., Oct., and Nov. from C Landing in Santa Barbara.)

### MONTEREY AREA

These boats operate only within Monterey Bay itself because of the lack of shelter at other areas on the North Coast.

<i>El Tigre</i>	5652 Glen Haven Ct. San Jose, CA 95129 (408) 446-4066
Harvey Ayres	
<i>Brawley's Hargef</i>	7 Seas Diving School 598 Foam Street Monterey, CA (408) 373-1377
<i>* No compressor</i>	<i>† Pontoon Boat</i>

Street. It's clean, modern and at \$23/night double occupancy, it's priced right (215 Caffey, San Pedro, 213/831/8911). I get my tanks at the Pacific Dive Shop at 17th and Pacific. Good restaurants are not abundant, but I've enjoyed Greek food at the Papadikis and liked the Tasman Sea. Several fair, tourist oriented restaurants can be found at "Ports o'Call", a contrived, but cute shopping village a couple of blocks from the Catalina/Los Angeles ferry building.

From San Pedro I suggest the TRUTH, the WESTERLY, the BLUE SEA, and the SCUBA QUEEN. With the exception of the TRUTH, all have been converted from another use into dive boats. The TRUTH was built as a dive boat and has some amenities which the others do not have: exits on both sides of the boat and at the bow; containers with fresh circulating sea water to wash your mask off; two hot showers on deck to warm you up between dives; a full galley and well planned but not private sleeping area. The SCUBA QUEEN is the only boat mentioned which does not offer "open boat" trips.

The chart on Dive Boats was prepared with the assistance of NAUI. One last word about Southern California diving. Don't forget to bring your full wet suit, with hood and gloves. You won't last 5 minutes without it. (TB, 6/77)

## The SOS Decompression Meter:

### *Scubapro fiddles while divers bend.*

In the April, 1976, issue of *Undercurrent*, we published a major story about the popular SOS Decompression Meter, an Italian-made device marketed in the United States by Scubapro. Test results show that the Scubapro Decompression Meter begins to deviate from the U.S. Navy Tables at 90 feet, and permits the diver a full 15 minutes at 150 feet, even though the Navy Tables permit only five minutes. Depending on the profile of repetitive or decompression dives, the meter may deviate significantly from the Tables.

The main point of our story was that for some time Scubapro has known exactly how the meter works and exactly how it deviates from the tables, but Scubapro has failed to alert the user. In fact, the instruction booklet seemed to cover up the meter's shortcomings.

In our article we quoted a number of experts who knew of the liabilities of the meter and had evidence of divers who relied on the meter and got bent. Many believed that the meter should not be on the market.

Several months ago Scubapro slapped a sticker on new meters describing the shortcomings, but retained the misleading instructional booklet. Now the company has completed its new booklet. It is clearly an improvement over the old one in describing the meter's parameters.

It has been 14 months since we met with Scubapro officials about the liabilities of the meter. Had we not written our article, we doubt that Scubapro would have changed its instructions. We commend Scubapro for the change. Yet, we can't help wondering why it took 14 months and we speculate about how many divers who trusted Scubapro's reputation got bent while Scubapro fiddled.

and the new books. Remember, however, that Scubapro has sold the meter in this country for more than a decade. There have been no significant changes in its mechanism.

**The old book:** "For maximum safety, on dives in excess of 150 feet, divers should decompress for a minimum of five minutes at ten feet even though the meter may not indicate that decompression is necessary."

**The new book:** "Maximum depth to be not more than 130 feet . . . For dives between 100 and 130 feet, decompress five minutes at 10 feet even if not indicated by DCP."

**The old book:** "The Memory Zone [on the face] represents residual nitrogen from the preceding dive. It will take six hours for the needle to return to its starting point. If you dive again within that six-hour period, the residual nitrogen saturation will be automatically added to the prescribed decompression for the repetitive dive."

**The new book:** "The U.S. Navy Decompression Tables state that any dive within 12 hours of an initial dive is to be considered a repetitive dive. Due to the limited memory of the DCP, [approximately 6 hours] any dive conducted from 6 to 12 hours following an initial dive falls outside of the capabilities of the DCP."

There are other similar changes. Of particular interest is one caveat without adequate explanation.

"A safety margin may be added to the dial reading for repetitive dives, dives to excessive depth, dives in immoderate cold, dives involving prolonged exertion, or to accommodate individual physiological parameters." That's made obvious for divers in poor physical condition or where cold water or strenuous



work may have a physical impact on the diver. By saying that "a safety margin may be added" for repetitive dives, Scubapro implies that the meter is accurate for those dives, when in fact the diver *should* add a safety margin. On some repetitive dive profiles, tests show that the meter may permit as much as *twice* the bottom time as the Navy tables.

Indeed, Scubapro has improved the facts on the meter in the latest version of the manual. Yet, by omission, the manual is still misleading. It is still incomplete. It is still deceptive.

Scubapro acknowledges in kind that the old manual is misleading. The Director of Engineering, Dennis Hart, has written *Undercurrent* stating that "we are planning to send a copy of this manual to every registered owner of our automatic decompression computer." That's a good first step, but we do not believe it's enough.

First, Scubapro will contact divers by writing to them at the addresses on their warranty cards. Many purchasers never submit warranty cards. Furthermore, the many users who have moved during the last several years will not be reached. Based on our experience, that could prove to be a majority. Some 12 per cent of the *Undercurrent* subscription list reports a new address in any given year.

Second—and we believe just as important—the diving community has developed beliefs—often false beliefs about the meters' limitations. When we surveyed dive shops and divers for our original story on the meter, we discovered a widespread assumption that the meter not only replicated the U.S. Navy Tables, but that it worked accurately for any kind of dive profile. Our article may have helped dispel the myth, but we *don't overestimate* the impact of *Undercurrent*. A substantial number of dive shop employees and instructors do not understand the meter, yet they continue to sell it and tell people how to use it. For example, consider this statement from Mort Walker's new book, *Sport Diving: the Instructional Guide to Skin and Scuba*, published as an instructional book just this year.

"If you must make a decompression dive, know the U.S. Navy Decompression Dive Tables *or* use a decompression meter. The record of your rate of nitrogen intake into the bloodstream is determined by these two methods. The decompression meter can accurately calculate repetitive dives; it has a six hour

memory zone and shows this information on a dial."

Many other instructional books have similarly misleading statements. Many instructors unknowledgeably "educate" their students on the meter, without recognizing inaccurate data on the meter. Regardless of Scubapro's latest change in the instructions and a letter to present meter owners, it will take years for the many people in the diving community to alter their misperceptions of the meter—misperceptions formed originally because Scubapro withheld the facts on the meter's operation.

### What Scubapro Needs to Do

Scubapro is a fine company which produces quality products. Its continuing dance of deception around the facts of the meter is a childish tactic from an otherwise mature corporate hierarchy. We do not believe the meter should be taken off the market, because we believe if all the facts of the meter are made available, then divers have the right to use the device—properly or improperly. The assets of the meter, as a backup to the Tables, outweigh its liabilities. We do believe, however, that Scubapro has a responsibility to the diving community at large, a responsibility it has so far abdicated to protect both its name and its product's position on the market.

On June 30 we wrote to Scubapro President Dick Bonin to ask, in the interest of diver safety, if Scubapro would do the following:

- Run an advertisement, preferably full-page with large type, in *Skin Diver* magazine and other publications, explaining the limitations of the meter.
- Run a similar advertisement in each of the training agencies' publications, but aimed at instructors.
- Ask the training agencies, in their next mailing to their instructors, to mail a detailed statement about how the meter works.
- Send a poster for display in all dive shops and resorts which explains the meter's operation.

This will cost Scubapro money. We estimate it will be \$10,000. The curious question is what level of expenditure for Scubapro is worth preventing a case of the bends. Surely it's worth \$10,000. To a seriously bent diver, it's worth a hell of a lot more.

Note: You may receive a new instructional manual by writing Scubapro (3105 Harcourt, Compton, CA 90221) and including your meter's number.

## Sport Diver Magazine:

### *A variation on a too-familiar theme.*

For more than two decades *Skin Diver* magazine has been the scuba diver's Bible. As the preeminent and usually solitary diving periodical on the market, *Skin Diver* keeps the industry apprised of staff and business changes in individual companies, training agencies and resorts. It provides a vehicle for industry advertising and product data. Shops receive a continuing stream of information that they otherwise would not get, and

they're lent "political" support through *Skin Diver's* "support your local dive shop" campaign. Features on equipment and resorts support the industry while providing facts to the readers. *Skin Diver* reports instructional agency information and discusses training techniques, while gently prodding the agencies with editorials on safety in instruction. *Skin Diver* prints something for everyone, most of all the diver himself,

who reads the magazine for travel and product information and straight entertainment.

During the reign of *Skin Diver*, other publications have challenged the throne, but none successfully. The most recent were offspring of NASDS's John Gaffney: *Dive Magazine*, a general circulation periodical similar to *Skin Diver*, and *Aquarius*, a magazine directed at NASDS-certified divers, but available over the counter. Both expired in the early '70s, after short lives.

### Enter Sport Diver

Now, in 1977, a new effort to cut into *Skin Diver's* market is off the press. The magazine is *Sport Diver*. The publisher is Haas/Littlefield Publishing Co., in Jacksonville, Florida. The editor is Richard Stewart. The question is, "will it survive?"

A careful inspection of the first issue leaves us pleased a little and puzzled a lot. We're pleased because issue number one is a well financed, professional effort of 128 pages, richly illustrated with full-color photographs.

We're puzzled because other than the extensive use of photographs, it differs little from *Skin Diver*. A look at the logo and the coincidental covers is just the first indication either of a lack of imagination or of a very obvious effort to catch a ride on *Skin Diver's* popularity.

### DIVE CLUBS, DIVE SHOPS, INSTRUCTORS

Have we got a deal for you!

*Undercurrent* accepts no advertising, a policy which our readers support. That means we have to pay our costs from subscription income. We believe we offer a special service to divers, a service available from no other source. As we increase our subscriptions, we can expand the coverage that *Undercurrent* provides. You can help.

- We mail information about *Undercurrent* to members of dive clubs or shop customers. We give free subscriptions or make donations for mailing lists (anonymity is guaranteed).
- We pay if you sell subscriptions.
- We have special rates for group subscriptions.
- We have displays for dive shops and pay subscription commissions.

Send your mailing lists or write for more information to:

Big Ben Davidson  
Undercurrent  
P.O. Box 1658  
Sausalito, CA 94965

Departments such as "New Equipment," "Underwater Photography" and "Dive Shop Directory" look familiar. Other items listed as "Departments" are articles not unlike those that would appear in *Skin Diver*.

The photographic quantity is superb; the quality, both of the shots and the printing, is inconsistent.

The articles, although profusely illustrated, might just as well be found in *Skin Diver* or other underwater magazines. How many times do divers need a listing of the Pennecamp Dive Boats—without critical evaluation—or a tour of Teach/Tours Bonaire dive sites—without an evaluation of Teach/Tours operation.

Editor Stewart claims *Sport Diver* will attract more readers because it will carry fewer advertisements than *Skin Diver*. So far there are substantially fewer ads (although you've seen them all before), but the economics of the publication may fast change the publisher's mind on that score.

Will *Sport Diver* survive? One possibility is that if it prospers and begins to cut into *Skin Diver's* market, the newcomer may force changes at *Skin Diver*. *Skin Diver's* continued growth is in part due to its continuing improvements in content, layout and editorial policy. *Skin Diver's* strength and resiliency cannot be underestimated. And with reason.

Just as *Skin Diver* supports the industry, the industry supports *Skin Diver*. At the same time, the industry complains of high advertising rates. Many manufacturers and resort owners hope that *Sport Diver* can provide relief. For the first issue of *Sport Diver*, advertising rates ran about two-thirds of those *Skin Diver* charges, but the first issue's circulation will be less than one-third that of *Skin Diver*. Thus, the cost to an advertiser per thousand readers—advertising's traditional measure of cost effectiveness—will run higher in *Sport Diver* than in *Skin Diver*. Advertisers may be willing to pay this premium in order to subsidize competition through two or three issues, but not much longer.

### An Optimistic Editor

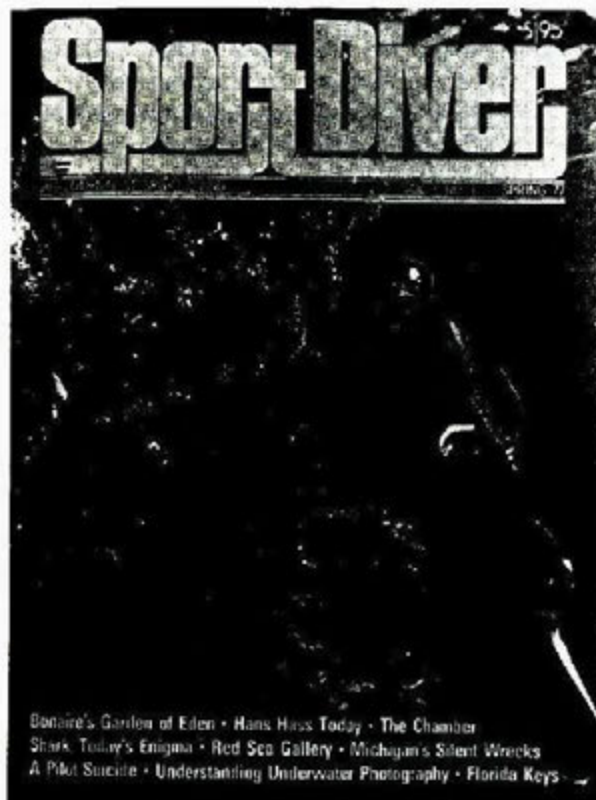
Editor Stewart is proud and optimistic about his publication and is confident of its future. He's excited about its acceptance among divers and claims to have hired additional people to handle the surge in new subscriptions, now that the first issue is out. Dive shops and their customers, according to Stewart, are responding with great enthusiasm.

The question still remains: will it survive? Stewart believes that the full-color format is the great plus in attracting and retaining readers. Like *Oceans* magazine, *Sport Diver* might become a coffee table magazine to be left in plain view to impress visitors. A sizeable portion of the public subscribes to an attractive magazine, just for that reason, so Stewart hopes that when people stop diving they'll continue to subscribe. Stewart also believes he'll attract readers by balanced reporting about equipment and resorts. That's an admirable goal, but the first issue doesn't achieve it.

On page 31 runs an article entitled "Superboat." It's a relatively factual article about the "Spirit of Ad-

venture" which now runs between several Hawaiian islands. The author is listed as Don McGrew. Although McGrew just happens to be president of the company which owns and operates the Superboat, his affiliation is not mentioned. Stewart admits he did not pay McGrew for the article. Continuing omissions of this sort will send *Sport Diver* to an early grave.

A piece on the movie, *The Deep*, is essentially an advertising handout from Columbia pictures. Stewart's review of Harbour Island in the Bahamas is nicely illustrated with Stewart's own photos, but it doesn't differ much from what Paul Tzimoulis might write, and Tzimoulis is a better writer.



### Good Luck, Sport Diver

As avid readers of everything about diving, we hope that *Sport Diver* succeeds. We offer our criticism hoping that folks at *Sport Diver* are open to change. Even so, we are not certain whether there's a sufficient market among divers to support a second major publication, although Stewart believes *Sport Diver* will have more readers than *Skin Diver* in three years.

We are certain that divers don't need another publication that's just a shadow of the Granddaddy. As publishers before have learned, unless you have something different to say, the industry just may not be big enough for another variation on the same theme.



## For Armchair Divers:

Peter Benchley's novel, *The Deep*, was lousy. Sure, there was adventure, but it was hidden among diving naiveté. The story was linear. *The Deep* had no depth.

Nor did the characters. It was a script in search of a director, and while the search was on, hundreds of thousands of pulp readers would pay Benchley's bar tab, and fill in the great blue holes of the novel with their mind's eye. Whether it would succeed as a script would be the task of Hollywood, A very large task, at that.

Indeed, my fellow divers, Hollywood has performed admirably. From the moment the theatre darkened for the critics' preview and the screen brightened up with Jacqueline Bisset and Nick Nolte cruising the wreck of the Rhone, or playing with a puffer, or gazing at a

### *'The Deep' is the next best thing.*

passing barracuda, it was clear there was to be something special about the film—that it had been taken seriously and that the advertising puff piece which claimed that "realism" was the goal of the film was in fact not puffery. Columbia's promise of realism will be reality for *The Deep's* toughest critics—scuba divers themselves.

### Superb Underwater Footage

*The Deep* is a formula adventure story, and that formula is given to the screen with special care. Vacationing lovers discover ampules of morphine on a 20th-century wreck, but also discover a 16th-century gold medallion. They track down Robert Shaw, who plays a Bermuda diving and treasure expert (modeled

## \$100

We've received several requests from divers who want to know how to start a dive club—not necessarily a dive club with a formal charter, or with meetings dictated by Robert's Rules, or one which spends more time telling lies about past dives and forgetting future dives.

Divers want to know how to organize a club which can get them out on the weekends with plenty of diving—and plenty of fun—where men and women participate equally, where they can organize themselves for trips to a Grand Cayman dive resort, or rent a condominium on Maui, or take a group tour of the South Pacific.

So, for the best article on how to start a dive club submitted to *Undercurrent* by September 10, we'll pay \$100 to the author—or his club, if he so chooses. We reserve the right to select and edit the article ourselves. For any author whose work we don't print, but from whom we borrow ideas, we'll send a year's subscription to *Undercurrent*.

after the real life Teddy Tucker), and the adventure is underway. From then on it's bad guys, voodoo, road chases, sharks, spearguns, explosives, underwater fights and plenty of diving.

The underwater adventure is absolutely excellent. Footage of a shark's feeding frenzy is superb and is embellished with unique shots of sharks getting entangled in hookah lines. Jacquelyn Bissett gets knocked about by an enormous moray in a scene so convincing that even the most skeptical diver will unwittingly hold his breath. While the divers crawl about the wreck, the wreck shifts and munitions fall about. It was near-terrifying, just as were the underwater fight scenes. These could have easily been overplayed, but were rather craftily acted and photographed. Indeed, all underwater shots—and the story line too—work exceptionally well.

Although the movie hums along on the surface, Nick Nolte's acting is inconsistent. Neither he, nor his accompanying cast, nor the movie itself will likely win Oscars, but I might bet on nominations for a few people behind the scenes, particularly Al Giddings and Stanton Waterman, whose creative underwater camera work steals the show.

### Picking a Few Nits

Oh, there are places to nitpick. There's not a BC in sight, for example.

Some of the dives in 80 feet of water were surely long enough to require decompression stops, but no

one ever does.

Any time the scene is under water, a mysterious background sound emanates from the soundtrack to simulate what nondivers might think being under water "sounds" like. Those sounds would fit better in an old World War II submarine movie.

And, there's something unsettling about the casting, producing as it does, an all-white crew of good guys and an all-black gang of bad guys. But then, it's not the sensitive '60s. The relaxed '70s seem to permit such transgressions and stereotyping.

Dives in 80 feet of Bermudian water are cold enough to require more than a t-shirt. However, who cares about all these nitpicks? It's a fun movie.

Aside from Jacqueline Bisset's prominent nipples popping through her wet t-shirt (Aha! That's why there's no BC or wet suit covering her body.), *The Deep* is a family movie with no four-letter words more nasty than "damn" or "laid." An opportunity for real obscenity sprang from several potentially violent scenes, but they were handled with great restraint, a credit to the filmmakers. The movie is rated PG.

The underwater scenes were filmed in the British Virgins, Australia and Bermuda. Most of the underwater footage was taken in a million gallon tank constructed for the film. It's unlikely you'll detect a change in location between scenes or be able to determine the difference between the ocean and the set. The set works beautifully, without a trace of phoney-ness. And it surely has its advantages. For example, the silt-free sand made it possible to dig, and dig, and dig, in some scenes, without seriously clouding the water. Have you ever found that kind of sand in a wreck?

It is unlikely *The Deep* will stimulate a rush to the dive shops and provide that much-needed shot in the arm hoped for by the industry. Aside from the introductory shots, the underwater scenes are without the beauty of a good coral reef. The scenes are mainly shots of people at work in a wreck—crawling through holes, bumping their tanks and their heads, getting frightened by eels and sharks, and all those normal things divers do. However, the film may create a few new divers from those who believe they, too, might discover gold medallions (or morphine) on Bermuda wrecks.

And, it may also encourage some previously timid women to take up the sport. Jacqueline Bisset is as skilled a diver as anyone in the film and clearly demonstrates that femininity is no handicap to underwater treasure hunting.

So, divers, *The Deep* is a surprisingly enjoyable film. You'll relish spending nearly half of the two hours under water. It's often as good as a real dive and certainly more exciting. And your popcorn stays dry, too. And sometimes more. C.C.

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Correspondents located strategically in the major diving areas of the world as well as on all coasts and major inland waters of the continental United States.

The editors welcome comments, suggestions and manuscripts from the readers of *Undercurrent*.