

undercurrent®

THE PRIVATE, EXCLUSIVE GUIDE FOR SERIOUS DIVERS

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Club Med, Cancun And Beyond

-- *What Else Is The Solo Diver To Do?*

To my female readers, let me caution you at once. I'm writing from the male perspective. And the single male perspective at that.

You see, I once harbored great fantasies about traveling to dive resorts as a single man. And especially as a writer. Surely I would find myself romancing exotic beauties or even like-minded traveling lady divers. It didn't take long to watch that fantasy fizzle.

I discovered few exotic beauties at the places I went to write about. And whenever I did, they often asked for my money, not for my moniker. Now and then I've met a female diver traveling solo. The ones I've encountered who were available were usually smitten with the hotel divemaster or a local rasta man. Why be interested in an ordinary guy from back home?

That's one reason a lot of young bucks head off to be divemasters. On my last dive trip one aging buck told me about his follies at Freeport. "If it weren't for the way the airport was built to handle immigration, I'd have been in big trouble. More than once I said goodbye to someone I had just spent a couple of days with, then ran over to the other side to greet one coming down to repeat last year's frolic."

Ah, those crafty divemasters. Behold the poor single male tourist, with a winter pallor and no shark stories to tell. By the time the second day rolls around, he knows he should have never come alone.

Long ago, I let go of my adolescent fantasy. And I would suggest that other single male divers do the same. And now that I've given ample caution about my male bias, let me go on to write a bit about what the solo diver (not necessarily the single diver, and certainly not just the male diver) might do to enhance his or her (that's the last time I'll use that cumbersome double pronoun) solo dive trip.

There can be nothing more disturbing than to find a grand dive location, only to have the resort empty or, insecure as I am, be filled with amorous couples. It's not

INSIDE UNDERCURRENT

Pity The Poor Lime	p.3
A Book For Children	p.5
The 10th DEMA Show -- <i>And Not A Bad Show At That</i>	p.6
Undercurrent Index 1985	p.7
Florida Regulation Of Instructor Certification -- <i>It's In The Hands Of The Legislature</i>	p.9
Five Agencies Set Minimum Training Standards	p.11
Dear Undercurrent	p.12
B.C. Rebreathing: -- <i>An Out-Of-Air Technique Largely Ignored</i> ...	p.13

just good diving that makes a trip worthwhile, it's good company. How boring to find a sea horse and have no one to talk to about it. How frustrating to go face to face with a white tipped reef shark and not be able to relate the story twice a night for a week. A dream dive vacation alone can be a real bummer.

That's why many solo divers select a Club Med as a destination. There are always plenty of people to talk to and plenty of things to do. Yet hardly a Club Med has worthwhile diving for the experienced diver. The Club can build every other activity with bricks and mortar and friendly staff, but it has yet to create a good reef where there is none. Thousands upon thousands of divers go every year, hoping otherwise.

For the solo diver who is serious about playing (and hopes to get a little diving in) the Clubs Med may be just the ticket. Since a Club Med is the last place I wanted to go, I called upon an associate who agreed to suffer through it. His assignment was to write mainly about the diving. If you don't know what else Club Med is about, you're not smart enough to be a diver. And for those solo divers who, like me, want better options than a Club Med, I'll suggest a few later on.

* * * * *

Clubs Med have some of the most beautiful settings in the world. One may engage in any continuing number of social activities, athletic activities, and social games, or sit back and do nothing. It can be a 24-hour party, 24 hours of relative quiet, or anything in between. All at a price that's pretty unbeatable.

Yet, a diving instructor at the Cancun Club Med pointed out a characteristic that is sometimes overlooked: "We're probably the largest resort scuba diving training operation in the world." A friend who first tried scuba diving at a Club Med, and later became certified at home with NAUI, told me, "I didn't learn anything through NAUI that I didn't learn at Club Med."

That may be promising for the beginner, but the main question here is whether Club Med meets the needs of the more experienced diver. The answer is no. But an experienced diver may still want to take inventory of what Club Med does offer: plenty of opportunity for involvement with others, if you're traveling alone; if not, plenty of activity for a nondiving partner to rid you of guilt when you go diving.

Six Clubs are prominently displayed in Club Med brochures as featuring scuba diving: Fort Royal in Guadeloupe; Buccaneer's Creek in Martinique; Eleuthera in the Bahamas; Moorea in Tahiti; Playa Blanca in Mexico; and Cancun on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, which I selected. A week's stay, depending upon time of year and the Club, may vary from \$700 to \$1,000+, plus airfare. Some of the sidetrips organized and recommended by the Club cost additional. Drinks at the Club bar, including bottled water for those who fear Montezuma's revenge, cost extra also. Activities that don't cost extra: windsurfing, sailing, beach and pool swimming, snorkeling, waterskiing, tennis, volleyball, basketball, discotheque dancing, and, of course, local scuba diving.

At Cancun, a staff of about 100 leaders and teachers known as G.O.'s (Gentils

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Organisateurs) have as their primary function keeping the Club guests occupied and happy. As the heart of Club Med, they work at getting guests acquainted with each other and involved in activities. Before my first day ended, I knew at least a half-dozen other guests by name, and the relationships and numbers continued to grow and multiply. Silly songs and childish pranks are the rule among the G.O.'s in Cancun and elsewhere.

Most Club activities have a flippant air. The scuba diving staff took a much more serious approach. Within the first hour of my arrival, certified divers and those wishing to learn scuba diving were sought out to take a physical. No matter how experienced a diver, no matter what level your certification or how good your health, to dive you must pass a physical given by the Club Med physician and nurse. This included a medical history, an activities stress test, blood pressure check, and examination of ears, nose, throat and chest for signs of congestion. A simple head cold, or sign of high blood pressure, and you won't be allowed to dive at Club Med unless your condition changes and you're certified by the doctor as O.K. to dive. It won't be until the next day that you get a chance to check out the diving.

At Cancun, it's a 10-minute walk (or a shuttle ride) to the scuba shack. Club Med supplies all the essentials: tank, back pack, regulator, BC's, pressure gauges, weight belt -- even masks and fins. This Club uses Scubapro equipment, as do the Clubs in Playa Blanca and Eleuthera. Other Club locations use French Spiro-technique. You may want to use your own gear, at least to some extent. The Club provides a pressure gauge but does not issue a depth gauge, or dive watch. The BC's are horse collar-style and are not equipped with power inflators. Fins are full foot style.

Cancun dive sites were all within 30 minutes by boat, which could take as many as 30 divers. A nurse or doctor goes on each dive, and oxygen is kept on board. The first dive is a check-out dive no matter what your experience. Mask and regulator clearing, hand signals and buddy breathing, are gone over. One experienced American diver asked to break with one of the procedures: he wanted to put on his tank first, then his fins, not the other way around as the dive master instructed. He was coldly put down in a manner that reflected an attitude that was not uncommon: "it's our club, it's our sport (Cousteau is French), do it our way." It's hard for me to imagine Jacques Cousteau flapping around the deck of the Calypso in his fins looking for his tank.

We dived in groups of six, with a single leader. On my first dive, Lori, an American G.O., took us to 95 feet. She led us through colorful coral caverns with plenty of small yet colorful fish, including queen angels. Blue striped grunts flocked to us as we fed them bread. The largest fish I saw during half-a-dozen dives were a few four foot barracudas. Currents were never a problem. Visibility ran from 50 to 100 feet. I enjoyed the diving, but would never come here just to dive. In fact, one dive per day is the limit at Cancun and at other Clubs Med, with the exception of Fort Royal, where two dives a day are permitted.

For an extra fee, -- about \$120 -- the Club sponsors day-long trips to Cozumel, 20 minutes away by low-flying airplane. There, I took two dives as part of the Club outing, and of course, the diving is much, much better. Man-sized fish (like four-foot groupers) are more common. Visibility is better. On a deep dive, the reefs were remarkable. If this is your kind of diving, you ought to forget Cancun and go directly to Cozumel.

Pity The Poor Lime

In a letter to the New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. Wain White of the New York University Medical Center identifies a new epidemic: "Club Med Dermatitis." White says the condition -- a "well defined phototoxic dermatitis" which appears as a rash -- is caused by a "coed drinking game during which men slide limes down the bodies of females with their chins."

When the surface of the lime is broken, the peel releases its oil. Blisters similar to a very severe sunburn may result if a player has fair skin and receives a large enough dose of oil.

The condition is not fatal.

Although staying at a Club Med, there is no need to limit yourself to what the Club has to offer any more than you would at any other hotel. A short ride from the Cancun Club gates are several private diving operations that generally service other tourist hotels in the area. One of the many Mexican taxi drivers who station themselves right outside the gates can take you to them, if you want to find out more about local diving from natives.

* * * * *

If one wants to play around a lot and do a little diving, Cancun Club Med is a good choice. So is Hedonism II in Jamaica (see Undercurrent Nov/Dec, 1982), but it's sub-par diving. If you want action and better diving I'd suggest Lahaina, Maui, where there is good inter-island diving with Central Pacific Divers, and joints to hang out in at night. St. Thomas is another possibility. Pretty good diving and plenty going on. Cozumel has plenty of divers hanging around. Key West, Florida, has worked-over diving, but it's a real resort town.

What about the solo diver who is more concerned with the reef life than the night life? As I said, a memorable dive trip needs good people. On more than one occasion, in pursuit of a review, I've been the only solo. Sometimes I joined other people for drinks, but other times people kept to themselves and I ate alone. (I've noticed that single women travelers are almost always invited to sit with someone for dinner, but single male travelers more frequently have to invite themselves.) At one now-defunct Bahamas resort, I was the only patron. I went nuts. And I had to pay double to dive because the dive boat wouldn't go out with one paying customer. But, the solo traveler need not find himself so isolated. There are plenty of options.

The first is to join a local dive club. Any dive store manager can tell you about one or two in the area, and if you don't go along on the dive club trips, then you can most likely find a diving buddy. Local dive stores also run trips, and that's a good guarantee for buddies.

Another good option is to join a tour, where travelers depart together. Nearly all dive shops offer them these days, and plenty of travel agencies advertising in Skin Diver, for example, offer group travel. Another good bet is to sign up for a live-aboard dive boat, where space limitations create a much different ambience than is created at resorts. People get to know each other quickly.

If you prefer resorts, then go to the bigger hotels where you know the diving is good. The Flamingo Beach on Bonaire and Spanish Cove or the Holiday Inn on Grand Cayman, where you can normally expect plenty of divers. Once on the boats, it's usually easy to connect for nondiving activities. Stick to the high season -- December 15 to April 15 -- for plenty of people. During the off season, even the bigger places can be quiet (although the diving can be better). But divers like to talk diving, so even if there are few people around, striking up a conversation about diving should get you instant friends.

Want another option? Consider the personal ad. Desperately seeking scuba buddy to travel to Micronesia. Run it in Scuba Times or Underwater USA or hang it on your dive shop bulletin board. Or join the Travel Companion Exchange. You'll get a list of hundreds of people of all ages and interests who want traveling companions for one thing or another. I tried a 6-month membership (\$18), came across three or four people who listed diving as an interest. I got a letter from one who was coming to town and wanted someone to have dinner with. Turned out I wasn't hungry. (For information, write The Travel Companion Exchange, Box 833, Amityville, NY 11701; a similar organization is Travel Mates, Inc., 49 W. 44th Street, New York, NY 10036.)

A last word about the Clubs. We haven't heard about the diving at the new Club on Providenciales in the Turks and Caicos Islands (about 550 miles from Miami), but

those waters have grand diving. The Club in the Maldives (Indian Ocean) is purported to offer world class diving (as does the Maldives) and permits two tanks per day (bad visibility in May, June, July). Fort Royal on Guadeloupe has a couple of fine sites. But we get our greatest complaints about the Club on Moorea, Tahiti. Let me share comments from two readers. Alan Klein, M.D., Belmont, MD: "Diving with Club Med is a bore; they keep all divers in large groups with a leader and dives are kept short and shallow. Poor diving." And Gary Goldstein, DDS, NYC: "The treated sewage disposal was a few hundred yards off the Club Med beach. I noticed it when snorkeling because it's where all the fish congregate. The smallest cut becomes an insidious infection, often with scarring -- a forever reminder of a Moorea vacation." C.C., Travel Editor

A Book For Children

Dee Scarr is a real diving pro, having lead personalized diving trips on Bonaire, written for many publications, and now having published a book for children entitled *Coral's Reef*. Most adults would presume it's a great little book for introducing children to diving, but would a real kid think about it? We decided to ask.

This review is written by Filaree Radich, age 11, a sixth grade student at Wade Thomas School in San Rafael, California. This is the first published piece for Radich, who hopes someday to be a writer and journalist. Obviously, she already is.

* * * * *

I've had some experience with diving that have made me curious about the sport. I'll never forget the ordeal of waiting on a boat for my mom who was scuba diving below. The lively waves became my enemy during the trip and I got quite seasick.

Fortunately, before that, in Florida, I learned to snorkel and saw the miracle of undersea life. I had a taste of diving myself that, I might add, was quite salty.

I was glad to hear of *Coral's Reef*, a book for children, because I want to learn more about diving. The author, Dee Scarr, seems to genuinely delight in underwater life and beauty and the book conveys that.

Young explorers of the sea, Coral and Tommy, find a very special octopus off the island of Bonaire. This octopus has the gift of speech. Oliver Octopus sends the two children on hunts to find hidden, as well as commonly seen, animals. Coral and Tommy enjoy many gentle interactions with the creatures of the Caribbean.

Oliver's friends love this way of living until they discover Oliver is missing. So they can search for their missing friend, Coral and Tommy learn to scuba dive. They eventually find Oliver alive and his friends continue to visit him.

At times the plot kept me glued to the book. Other times I lost my concentration and had to go over the pages again. My lack of concentration was due to the plot.

The section on scuba diving is very short. It does not give a look at how difficult diving can be. Scuba is a water sport that is to be taken seriously.

After reading *Coral's Reef*, I got the impression it was suitable for children eight to early eleven. The book is illustrated with well-done black and white drawings that any age would enjoy. Even without the illustrations, the writing created pictures by itself.

Coral's Reef supplied me with information about great sea, though because parts of the book dealt with fantasy, I could not be positive that the information was true. If children want facts about the sea, I suggest not to depend only on this book. Pleasure should be the goal of the readers of *Coral's Reef*, and speaking as a reader, I did receive much pleasure from this little book.

--- Filaree Radich

Coral's Reef, by Dee Scarr, is published in paperback by Avon Camelot. It may be found in any children's section of a book store or ordered directly from the publisher for \$3.50 U.S. or \$4.25 Canadian. Avon Books, Dept. BP, Box 767, Rt 2, Dresden, TN, 38225. Allow 8 weeks for delivery.

The 10th DEMA Show

-- And Not A Bad Show At That

The January 1986 DEMA Trade Show in Orlando, Florida, marked the 10th anniversary of the Diving Equipment Manufacturers Association. Along with great enthusiasm exhibited by both the vendors and the visitors, this show set participation and attendance records: there were more than 750 booths and 350 exhibitors, over 220 seminars and clinics, and about 8,000 visitors.

After a couple of years where color coordination seemed the only equipment innovation offered by the manufacturers, new and improved products were at last back in vogue. There were also several new vendors. If they can survive to increase competition in the industry, sport divers might get even better equipment at, hopefully, better prices. As it is now, the cost of diving equipment is outrageous.

Tekna offered some of the more interesting innovations, mainly in prototype, many of which seemed to be fantasy when they appeared just a couple of months ago in an *Undercurrent* feature on the sport diver of the future. Two of the more interesting gadgets were the Tekna Air Consumption Computer Module and the Tekna Decompression Computer Module. The Decompression Computer tracks current depth, maximum depth, bottom time, dive group, surface interval, remaining no decompression time, records the dive number, and indicates decompression stops if they become necessary. Nitrogen build-up is pictographically displayed. A Safe Flight indicator appears after 12 hours of surface interval. The Air Consumption Computer tracks tank pressure, breathing rate, water temperature, and remaining air time. A pictographic image of diver's lungs fills with LCD segments upon each inhalation. Both units incorporate a low battery indicator and the decompression computer uses the U.S. Navy Dive Tables.

Tekna exhibited a small 12,000 candlepower, 4 AA battery powered headlight which snaps onto a Tekna mask. It weighs only 8.5 oz. and provides up to 3 hours of continuous white light, a great help for an underwater photographer working at night. Tekna also exhibited OPTIM-EYES, snap-on devices for a face mask which increases circumferential vision from 120° to 320° and upward/downward vision to sides to 140° with no loss in forward vision. Now, divers can really get the "big picture."

The gauges of most manufacturers have faces requiring more than just a casual glance to determine the exact reading. The main exception seems to be those from Sierra Scuba which have outstanding readability, although they could have improved scaling.

Scubapro once again had a fine display and a group of true professionals to explain their products. Some new and interesting products were: titanium dive knives; a slender lightweight galvanized 71.4 cubic ft.; 3000 psi tank; two new regulators, one of which incorporates diver-controlled inhalation resistance; Sea Wing fins which, reportedly, combine the hydrodynamic features of a fish's fin with the most modern principles of aircraft technology; and a Freshaire snorkel they tout as a truly dry snorkel.

Tekna's diving scooter, the DV-3X, which has been plagued with serious battery problems, was reported to be safe now. The problem, which led to at least one injured diver due to an explosion, stemmed from the out-gassing of the battery.

Parkway displayed a 100 cubic foot, 3300 psi, aluminum tank only 8 inches in diameter.

Lifetime warranties are in style: Princeton Telectonics has one on all their products; Parkway on their 100 cubic foot tank; Dacor on their stainless steel tanks, and Sherwood on their regulators. Many require a diver to take certain annual maintenance action or otherwise keep on his toes to keep the warranty in effect.

Major breakthroughs in underwater video systems can be mostly attributed to the new Video 8 Camcorder, which can record up to 80 minutes on one battery charge and two hours on one cassette. Their small size and low weight (3 lbs. with battery and cassette) make it possible to contain them in small and lightweight housings. Sony has a system that weighs 12 lbs. in air; AquaVision Systems has one that weighs only 9 lbs. complete. No doubt, there is a good future for the compact light underwater video systems.

"Skins" are in. These are skin tight, full length suits of lycra and nylon that provide protection from coral cuts and jellyfish stings. It is claimed that the suits allow the diver to tolerate water temperatures up to 6°F colder than he could without the suit. When worn under a wet suit, they make donning the suit easier and, supposedly, provide increased

(Continued on page 9)

UNDERCURRENT INDEX 1985

Subject	Issue	Page	Subject	Issue	Page
Air Embolism	Nov/Dec	16	Fifty Keys Divers Rescued After		
Anguilla*	Apr.	2	Boat Sinks	June	5
Another Training Death:			Fiji*	July	2
\$1.8 Million Awarded	Oct	12	Final Limits for Time Unlimited, The	Apr	8
Antigua*	Apr	2	Fisherman's Tall Tale	Oct	8
Aqua Tech Van Guard Bottom			Force Fins	Mar	6
Timer	Sept	11	Grand Cayman	Sept	1
Aquanautics Corporation	Jan	8	Grand Cayman	Mar	1
Art of Breathing, The:			Grand Cayman, British West Indies:		
Part I	Mar	10	Part I	Aug	1
Art of Breathing, The:			Great White	May	11
Part II	Apr	9	Grenada*	May	2
Ascent Rate and The Buoyancy			Guadalupe	May	3
Compensator	Mar	8	Guanaja, Honduras	Feb	1
Australia*	Apr	2	Guarantee Diving 365 Days a Year?	May	3
Award in Diving Death, \$1.2 Million	Mar	5	Guinness Underwater World Records	July	10
BC Jacket Recall: Sherwood, Dacor			Haiti*	May	3
and Parkway Jackets in Question	July	2	Hawaii*	July	3
Bahamas*	Apr	3	Health	Apr	6
Barbados*	Apr	4	Health Insurance	Apr	7
Bayman Bay Club, Guanaja,			Jamaica*	July	4
Honduras	Feb	1	Jet Lag	June	2
Belize*	Apr	4	Key Largo, Florida*	Apr	1
Bermuda*	Apr	5	Lady of the Sea, The Philippines	June	1
Bonaire*	May	2	Lawsuits	Mar	5
Book Review	Nov/Dec	7	Lawsuits	Oct	12
Book Reviews	Jan	7	Lawsuits	Sept	5
Breathing	Mar	10	Lawsuits	Nov/Dec	13
Breathing	Oct	3	Life Insurance For Divers	June	11
Breathing	May		Lift of Major Flotation Devices, The	Apr	3
Buddy Breathing	Aug	5	Little Cayman	Mar	1
Buddy Diving	Oct	10	Lost Treasure: A Board Game	Aug	9
Buoyancy Compensators	Mar	8	Marisla, Sea of Cortez, Mexico	Nov/Dec	1
Buoyancy Compensators	Apr	3	Metal Detectors	May	7
Cancer "Epidemic" in Fish	Feb	10	Metal Detectors	June	6
Captain Crunch Sinking	June	5	Mexico	Nov/Dec	1
Cayman Aggressor, The	Mar	1	Mexico*	July	4
Children and Diving	Sept	9	Micronesia*	July	5
Coco View, Roatan, Honduras	Jan	1	Micronesia*	Sept	2
Computerized Treasure Hunts	Aug	8	Modified Buddy Breathing	Aug	5
Coping with Emergencies Abroad	Apr	5	Molasses Reef Massacre, The	Feb	6
Coral Reef Destruction	Feb	6	More Problems With Rechargeable		
Cup of Grog to Beat the Cold?	May	5	Batteries	Nov/Dec	10
Curious Deals Behind Mel Fisher's			More on Breathing	Oct	3
Treasure, The	Nov/Dec	8	Motion Sickness	Feb	5
DEMA Show, The, 1985	Apr	8	NUADC	July	7
Decompression Sickness	Oct	7	NAUI	Aug	10
Decompression Sickness	Jan	5	Ocean Divers*	Apr	2
Decompression Sickness and Air			Our 10th Anniversary	Aug	7
Embolism	Nov/Dec	16	Overcoming Jet Lag	June	2
Diver Injured in Tekna DV3			PADI Announces Another Record		
Explosion	Aug	5	Year	Sept	8
Diver of the Future, The: Part I	Nov/Dec	14	PADI Instructors v. PADI:		
Don't Drink the Water	Feb	4	An Update	Nov/Dec	13
Emergency Underwater			PADI and U.S. Divers Sued By		
Recompression	Oct	7	Instructors	Sept	5
Existence of Mermaids, The	June	8	Papua, New Guinea*	Sept	2
Expert Calls Great Whites Slow,			Philippines	June	1
Clumsy	May	11	Port Largo Resort*	Apr	1
Fantasea, Red Sea	Oct	1	Rechargeable Batteries	Nov/Dec	10
			Red Sea	Oct	1

Regulators	July	5	Travel Reports From Our Readers:		
Roatan, Honduras	Jan	1	Part IV	Sept	1
SOS Decompression Meter	Aug	7	Travel Resources	Apr	6
Safety	Jan	9	Treasure Hunting	Oct	5
Santa Barbara, Sea of Cortez,			Treasure Hunting	Feb	10
Mexico	Nov/Dec	1	Treasure Hunting	Nov/Dec	8
Science Fiction Scuba	Jan	7	Tropical Island Living	July	
Scilly and Scapa Flow, U.K.	May	4	Undercurrent 1984 Index	Feb	11
Sea Band	May	12	Undercurrent Limerick Content, The	May	6
Sea of Cortez, Mexico	Nov/Dec	1	Undercurrent Travel Questionnaire	Nov/Dec	11
Seychelles*	Sept	3	Underwater Metal Detectors: Part I	May	7
Spinal Hits and Heart Attacks	Jan	5	Underwater Metal Detectors: Part II	June	6
St. Lucia*	Sept	3	Underwater Power Struggle, The	Oct	10
St. Vincent*	Sept	3	United Kingdom	May	4
Staying Warm, Saving Supper	Feb	5	Vanuatu*	Sept	4
Teach A Four Year Old to Dive?	Sept	9	Virgins, The	Sept	4
Technical Limitations of the Octopus	July	5	Watches	Apr	8
Technology and the Treasure Hunter	Feb	10	Water Quality	Feb	4
Tekna DV3	Aug	5	Wet Suits	July	4
Tonga*	Sept	3	Wet Suits	Feb	8
Training Agencies	May	10	Wet Suits & Rescue	Jan	9
Travel Reports From Our Readers:			Why Custom Wet Suits Don't Fit	Feb	8
Part I	Apr	1	Why Divers Die: Part I	June	10
Travel Reports From Our Readers:			Why Divers Die: Part II	July	7
Part II	May	1	Why Divers Die: Part III	Sept	10
Travel Reports From Our Readers:			Will Treasure Hunter Rewrite		
Part III	July	1	History?	Oct	5
			Within A Rainbow'd Sea	Nov/Dec	7

*These areas were commented upon by readers; they are not full reviews.

UNDERCURRENT BACK ISSUES

Quantity	Issue and Topics Covered	Quantity	Issue and Topics Covered
_____	JANUARY 1985: Coco View, Roatan, Honduras; Spinal Hits and Heart Attacks.	_____	JULY 1985: Travel Reports From Our Readers: Part III; Why Divers Die: Part II.
_____	FEBRUARY 1985: Bayman Bay Club, Guanaja, Honduras; Why Custom Wet Suits Don't Fit; A Cancer "Epidemic" In Fish.	_____	AUGUST 1985: Grand Cayman, British West Indies, Part I; Diver Injured In Tekna DV3 Explosion; Modified Buddy Breathing.
_____	MARCH 1985: The Cayman Aggressor; \$1.2 Million Award In Diving Death; The Art Of Breathing: Part I.	_____	SEPTEMBER 1985: Travel Reports From Our Readers: Part IV; PADI And U.S. Divers Sued By Instructors; Teach A Four-Year-Old To Dive.
_____	APRIL 1985: Travel Reports From Our Readers: Part I; Coping With Emergencies Aboard; The Dema Show, 1985; The Art Of Breathing: Part II.	_____	OCTOBER 1985: Fantasea, Red Sea; Emergency Underwater Recompression; Another Training Death: \$1.8 Million Awarded.
_____	MAY 1985: Travel Reports From Our Readers: Part II; A Cup Of Grog To Beat The Cold?; Underwater Metal Detectors: Part I.	_____	NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 1985: The Sea Of Cortez, Mexico; More Problems With Rechargeable Batteries; Undercurrent Travel Questionnaire PADI Instructors v. PADI: An Update; The Diver Of The Future: Part I; Decompression Sickness And Air Embolism.
_____	JUNE 1982: The Lady Of The Sea, Philippines; Underwater Metal Detectors: Part II; Why Divers Die: Part I; Life Insurance For Divers.		

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warmth.

"Though we chuckle about those divers who get sucked into chucking their perfectly good black wet suit to dress up in the colors of the rainbow, the manufacturers are chuckling all the way to the bank."

Wet suit designs and colors continue to match the fashion of the ski suit industry. And, yes, though we chuckle about those divers who get sucked into chucking their perfectly good black wet suit to dress up in the colors of the rainbow, the manufacturers are chuckling all the way to the bank. Dry suits are also more colorful, as well as more numerous. We're surprised that the increased use of dry suits has not led to more accidents, since rare is the dive shop dealer who insists on minimum of training before a buyer dives with it.

Stabilizing jackets are still being improved. Essentially every dealer has copied the SeaQuest ADV, one of our favorites; some have improved on it by adding releases on each shoulder strap. Only Scubapro, which had the original design, has not copied the SeaQuest ADV.

The Grand Cayman group was advertising its two submersibles; the two passenger Research Submersibles, Ltd. sub that explores the Cayman Wall down to 800 ft. and the 28 passenger Atlantis that has an operating depth of 150 ft. with 16 20-inch diameter viewing ports.

An interesting travel concept is the Club Freedom time-share, 136 ft. yacht converted for diving. It is billed as a sister ship to the *Calypso* with luxury ac-

commodations, certified dive masters, state-of-the-art equipment for all aquatic sports and a few other amenities such as a helicopter. It's quite pricey to join up (I believe it is in the neighborhood of \$15,000 for a ten year membership) and we'd venture a guess they'll have a tough go to beat if they provide the service they advertise.

As for travel news, the once popular Riding Rock Inn on San Salvador in the Bahamas is reopening. Haiti was being given a big buildup by Poseidon Adventures. Had they expected a revolution, they would have not been there; after the revolution they must be dancing in joy at Poseidon. And that goes for those people touting travel to the Philippines. There were several Red Sea booths, most operated by Egyptians. Unfortunately, there have been many cancellations of Red Sea trips because of the unrest in that area and the terrorist threats to harm American travelers. One horror story making the rounds came from a group of divers who visited the Red Sea last year. They claim to have been held captive for several hours by Egyptians, offered release for \$500 per person, eventually released without payment of the \$500 but subsequently shot at during dives. And, finally, the ubiquitous Peter and Alice Hughes appear to be well on their way to operating every dive concession in the Caribbean.

Last year we noted that the DEMA show was dull, the participants unenthusiastic. Things have changed and this show proved highly successful. Although there are troubles on the training side of the industry with the major lawsuit against PADI and a forthcoming legislative fight in Florida to have the state regulate instructor training, the equipment and travel business seems alive and well.

Florida Regulation Of Instructor Certification

-- It's In The Hands Of The Legislature

If one were to poll the training agencies to determine who the least loved man in the industry is, the 1986 award would be given hands down to President Colby, a dive instructor who resides in Sebring, Florida. In the eyes of the agencies, gadfly Colby is nothing other than the agent of the devil. Colby is leading the call in Florida for the state government to control diver certification, and to certification agencies there is no greater anathema than government regulation.

Colby has been instrumental in preparing legislation to be introduced in April by State Senator Bob Johnson. The legislation establishes a board of examiners that will "adopt rules governing the licensure and operation of (dive) schools, required and optional curricula, instructors, facilities, safety and

sanitary requirements, insurance coverage, contractual agreements, the license application and granting process, and school closings. . . . Any person desiring to be licensed as a scuba instructor shall apply to the department to take the licensure examination." The law would also establish standards for compressed air and the behavior of boaters.

"We wouldn't have questions like this come up if everyone would stop certifying instructors in three days."

As one might imagine, the training agencies are all aflutter. John Gaffney, NASDS, says "I am opposed to any legislation, period. We wouldn't have ques-

tions like this come up if everyone would stop certifying instructors in three days." Bob Clark of SSI says the whole thing is "just another layer of bureaucracy, which won't solve a thing."

Prior to introducing the legislation, Colby was not a favorite son. He's one of the few instructors in the business who testifies as plaintiff's expert witness in death suits against the industry. Colby says that after testifying in a case of a Chicago diver who drowned while his wife and child were aboard the boat, "people in the industry made my life hell." He believes that at least one agency has either hired people or assigned staff to dig up dirt to discredit him, and is pursuing legal action to remedy that. In the meantime, his legislation is in the hopper in the Florida legislature.

The theory behind such legislation is not complex. Colby has written a statement which pretty well sums it up.

"The proposed legislation is directed at the unregulated practice of scuba instruction in Florida. There are seven 'training agencies' based in the U.S. offering training programs for scuba instructors. Those are: PADI, NAUI, NASDS, SSI, IDEA (International Diving Educators Association), YMCA, and PDIC (Professional Diving Instructors Corporation). Two additional groups having some affiliation with the above agencies but are based outside the U.S. CMAS (Confederation Mondiale Des Activities Subaquatiques) and BSAC (The British Sub Aqua Club). There is no overall group coordinating the standards for a person becoming a scuba instructor or a scuba diver.

"In 1972, under the auspices of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) in New York, a "Minimum Course Content for Safe Scuba Instruction" was established for recreational divers taking a formal course in scuba instruction. No standards were ever promulgated setting minimum knowledge or performance and physical ability requirements for persons completing a Scuba Instructor course. Even the attempt to develop diver standards was soon to fall by the wayside, since ANSI requires that "action be taken to reaffirm, revise, or withdraw (the standards) no later than 1977. No action was ever taken."

"In 1975, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, concerned over mounting diving deaths, informally concluded that at least that County must begin to regulate diving. No effort was seen at self-regulation by the industry. The equipment manufacturers and training agencies, fearing that state action would follow, formed two groups -- the manufacturers formed the Diving Equipment Manufacturers Association (DEMA) and the training agencies formed the National Scuba Training Council (NSTC). Both groups promised the L.A. County Board that reform would now result if they withheld formal regulation. The proposed regulations in L.A.

were directed at recreational divers' conduct (i.e., all divers in L.A. County waters had to be 'certified and have in actual possession proof of their certification')."

"The NSTC was to develop general standards for instructors and diver training, then monitor those standards. This way, students would be assured of basically similar training regardless of where their instructors completed their schooling. The standards were to have been nationwide. The NSTC (PADI, NAUI, NASDS, and YMCA), rather than face a lawsuit for restraint of trade, dissolved the organization before new training agencies could seek admittance. After the dissolution, it was discovered that the NSTC had never established itself as a legal entity."

"Between 25% and 33% of the deaths in scuba diving each year occur either on the first open water dive or within the first five open water dives after completing a scuba course."

"Since 1970, the National Underwater Accident Data Center has maintained statistics at the University of Rhode Island. These statistics are drawn from multiple sources, but are admittedly not complete, since submission of the data is voluntary. Florida has ranked number one in deaths in over half of the years since they were maintained, and more importantly, ranked second in the remaining years. Between 25% and 33% of the deaths in scuba diving each year occur either on the first open water dive or within the first five open water dives after completing a scuba course."

"Since 1977, the scuba training industry has emphasized less formal, shorter, and quicker courses for students. This has had the effect of broadening the base of the consumer/sport participants. But this requires that instructors be better trained, more astute, and more competent educators since they have less time to interact with potential beginning divers. As the course duration is shortened, more reliance must be placed on the experience of the instructor. While the sport expanded, the training agencies began programs that deviated from the ANSI Minimum Course Content Standards of 1972. No effort was made to evaluate this effect on the public. Growth was geometric, and just meeting the demand was staggering. At the present time, anyone can call himself a scuba instructor and offer lessons for 'certification' withdrawn by one organization for incompetence or negligence, they could continue to teach under authority of another. The organizations do not treat standards violations with an equal hand and often allow "politics" to enter into the process. The public is totally unaware of what happens in the process of a revocation of an instructor's 'certifica-

tion.”

“The scuba training agencies claim to be able to develop an astute, competent, safe and fully educated instructor in ‘seven days,’ or within 80 hours. No objective outside agency reviews the ability, qualifications and knowledge of these persons prior to their beginning the practice of scuba instruction. The largest agency, PADI, has recognized the need for evaluation of instructor candidates, but has maintained the evaluation ‘in-house’ which, since they have an interest in the results, detracts from their objectivity.”

“Scuba is taught in part in an open body of water, in a potentially dangerous, hostile environment which is uncontrollably dynamic. This legislation will help to ensure that persons engaged in the instruction process are able and knowledgeable in the sport. The

public has the right to believe that persons holding themselves out as professional educators in this hostile, dynamic environment are truly able to educate them, that they possess the necessary knowledge, and that they are free from physical disabilities that could turn a safe incident into a fatal situation due to the instructor’s lack of knowledge, experience, or physical ability.”

Since Colby wrote this piece, five agencies have established minimum standards. And, each agency has developed a strong response to Colby’s arguments.

Yet, aside from the fact that it’s generally a longer path to becoming an instructor than simply Colby’s oversimplified notion of taking an 80 hour training course (one cannot overlook the basic certification and experience required), Colby’s thesis is generally

Five Agencies Set Minimum Training Standards

In an apparent spirit of cooperation that has generally been missing from the certification industry, five certification agencies announced at the DEMA show a new set of instructional standards for all entry level diving programs. The five agencies -- NASDS, NAUI, PADI, SSI, and the YMCA -- had worked for six months to reach agreement on basic training. DEMA, too, was represented in the meetings.

Some elements:

- ★ entry level certification requires four dives
- ★ student equipment must include a low pressure inflator and an alternate air source
- ★ One must be able to swim 200 yards and float for 10 minutes without equipment
- ★ One must demonstrate a full range of basic skills underwater

Although one should wonder why the big deal about industry-wide standards, it is indeed a big deal for the agencies to come this far. Historically, there’s been a lot of backbiting and bitching about one another. Even today, with the tacit support from many people in other agencies for the well publicized lawsuit against PADI by PADI instructors, one must wonder how the five agencies could get together.

Even the role of DEMA -- that is the role of equipment manufacturers -- in developing training standards was under fire. There are those who believe that DEMA is too influenced by PADI (and U.S. Divers) and that if true cooperation is to be achieved the agencies have to work out standards on an equal footing. So, after the announcement of the standards, the Committee broke from DEMA to continue meeting on their own.

Essentially, the agencies are responding to strong external pressure to develop standards, not only from the lawsuit against PADI, but especially from legislation being introduced in April in Florida legislature to require strict regulation of diver training. With more than 100 sport-diver deaths occurring annually within the United States, the industry must do what it can to improve sport safety.

Still, the standards have short comings. For example, take the requirement that certification dives must be “at least 15 minutes at depths between 15 and 60 feet.” Dives for 15 minutes at 15 feet (or even 30 feet) are insufficient to build the confidence of divers, and it is lack of confidence that leads to trouble. That’s not much of a standard.

Furthermore the final certification dives can be conducted with one instructor present for as many as eight divers, which is common practice now. Yet one reason divers in training die is that one instructor for eight divers in open water is not enough when a problem arises with two students simultaneously. Economics dictates the 1:8 relationship. Dive stores keep training costs low to get new divers in the door -- that’s their equipment market. Many instructors are compensated for the number of divers they train. That’s why a one-on-one course at a resort can cost \$300 or more, and that’s why stores with a class of eight can often charge less than \$100.

Nonetheless, the agencies have broken bread together. That’s worth noting. And they have agreed upon minimum training standards, which we hope is seen as a first, not a last step. Just how far this cooperation extends, in a year filled with law suits and legislation, will be interesting to observe.

tight. But, does that mean legislation should follow? As Walt Hendrick, Jr., NAUI National Training Director has written to Senator Johnson: "I don't believe that Mr. Colby has identified the correct problem, only the symptoms." So, to prove that Colby doesn't know what the problem is, NAUI and PADI have hired legal counsel or retained lobbyists in Florida to fight the bill. Most likely other agencies will pitch in.

What is Colby's motivation? After several conversations, he seems honest about his view of scuba safety. Yet, many who oppose him are convinced that he's after personal profit; somehow he'll find himself a bureaucratic position or gain income through further expert testimony. Colby says he'll lose income because the legislation will reduce the problem and amount of time he spends testifying in liability cases. Yet, one can't wonder about the vindictive nature of his action, after his being ostracized by the diving community for testifying on behalf of plaintiffs in liability cases. Colby says people are unwilling to hire him, and some will communicate to him only through their attorney, so afraid are they that they will be faced with litigation if they imply that Colby's role in proposed regulatory legislation plays any role in employment decisions.

Angry, yet somewhat unruffled, Colby remains the true believer in regulation. He can't get very excited about the arguments about the anti-democratic

aspects of regulation. Since hairdressers and barbers are licensed, he argues, why should dive instructors, with a far more important responsibility, be exempt. He also tries to draw an analogy to medical education: "We would not support medical schools who received a fee from a doctor for every patient they serve. But that is what we do in the scuba business," he says.

Yet those arguments for Colby are unlikely to carry a lot of weight in a conservative legislature during an era of deregulation. Governments are interested in regulating less, not more. Furthermore, although medical schools don't get a fee per patient service, flight schools, ski schools and driver training schools do. If Colby thinks there is an argument there, he'll have to prove that training agencies rush through instructors for more income and, in turn, instructors rush through students for more income. Surely, a few schools do. And so do a few instructors. Is the problem serious enough to force legislation?

Colby's legislative proposal has put the industry on its best behavior, just as the instructors who are suing PADI are forcing that agency to face up to some of its own practices. We can't be sure of the long-term effects of these efforts, but it seems that in the short term the result is that the training agencies must examine themselves more closely than they ever have and that can't be all bad.

Dear *Undercurrent*:

Our readers have their say.

One occasional criticism of *Undercurrent* is that we don't give our readers enough of a say. That's a valid criticism. So from time to time we're going to run more letters from the readers, emphasizing those that raise issue with what we have to say and those which highlight problems our readers ought to know about:

Dear Ben:

I must take issue with your reprint of Dr. Knight's SPUMs article on Emergency Underwater Recompression (*Undercurrent*, October 1985). While we respect both Drs. Knight and Edmonds, factors in dive accident management in the South Pacific are greatly different than even in the most isolated areas of the Caribbean.

In-water recompression should not be advocated in the Caribbean basin. You did not emphasize that this procedure should only be carried out in truly tropical waters (in my mind, 80°+ F) or that it only be carried out by diving medical personnel trained both in diving and hyperbaric treatment procedures.

There are plenty of places in the U.S. that are more than 6 hours from a chamber. Most divers with

decompression sickness are delayed for longer than that -- not because they can't be transported to a chamber sooner, but because they fail to recognize their problem soon enough or do not have adequate health insurance. All divers should carry health insurance for hyperbaric treatment and air ambulance services.

Dr. Edmonds' procedure has its place in the South Pacific, but is out of place in this part of the world. I have met more than one Caribbean divemaster who walks around with numb feet since attempting in-water recompression.

Chris Wachholz
Divers Alert Network (DAN)
Duke University Medical Center
Durham, NC

Dear *Undercurrent*:

I had a very pleasant experience with Dacor Corporation in Northfield, Illinois that might be of interest to you and your readers.

On a recent trip to the Maldives I lost a button of my automatic inflator of my rather dated Dacor BC Vest.

The San Francisco store of the New England Divers was not particularly interested in helping me to find a replacement, but for my asking gave me the Dacor Corporation's Northfield address.

I called Dacor and explained my problem. Scottie, the customer service man, took my name and address without any hesitation and told me that a button would be sent to me by mail.

I said that I would pay for it and I would like to have two or three since this seems to be an item that might be easily lost and usually on the other side of the earth where replacement is impossible. He said that it was no problem and still no charge. Two days later in the mail I received three button replacements without any charge invoice.

I believe that service of this kind should be publicized. This letter is totally unsolicited. I continue to enjoy your publication.

George C. Szemes, M.D.
Merced, CA

Dear *Undercurrent*:

A few months ago my brother-in-law sent me a photocopy of the article *Why Divers Die: Part One* featured in *Undercurrent*. I thought it was very interesting and the side article on life insurance I found to be quite correct.

Approximately six weeks ago I started to look into life insurance for myself. I contacted the Minnesota Mutual Life Insurance Co. and after reviewing my needs I found their rates to be quite competitive until I answered yes to a question asking if I was a scuba diver.

My agent went back into her book and quoted me a rate of nearly twice the original amount. I told her about the article in *Undercurrent* and said that I would not pay a penalty for being a safe diver. I then sent a copy of the article directly to the underwriter at MMLIC and requested a direct response.

This week I received a letter from MMLIC stating they would drop the rating in my case and

return to the competitive rate originally quoted. They stated they were reviewing their policies regarding scuba divers.

I cannot thank *Undercurrent* enough for the thousands of dollars I saved by bringing this information to my attention. I hope that any diver paying such increased premiums will be able to bring a halt to such unfair practices.

Thomas W. Koogle

Dear *Undercurrent*:

I would like to complain about Tabata.

I was and maybe still am, a Tabata dealer. I was the first in southwest Louisiana to purchase Tabata equipment. Sold it by the truck loads and then as always in some equipment you get some that won't work. Well I had some BC's that had bad bladders and they were only 2½ to 3 years old. I sent them in to Tabata and the reply was that they were out of stock on these bladders and won't be getting any more in. Now there were the standard Horse Collars and Jacket type BC's. I can't believe that a company as large as Tabata could do this to the public. I have now some real upset customers and they want their money back or a different jacket and I'm stuck with jackets that can't be used.

How would you feel buying a product from a shop and then 2 years later come back and say, "we don't repair that model any more, you have to buy a new one!!"

I feel that the dive shops should let each other know and since I wrote to the other dive magazines and they haven't replied, I'm asking you to warn the shops in the area of the United States.

Ernst Toepfer, Jr. Owner
Darrels Dive Shop
Eunice, LA

B.C. Rebreathing:

-- An Out-Of-Air Technique Largely Ignored

In the last issue, Dennis Graver cited problems with many common self rescue techniques such as buddy breathing and emergency swimming ascent. He noted that there is another technique available to solve many of the problems of self rescue, but a technique which is seldom taught: using the BC as a rebreathing device.

Undercurrent first carried a story about that technique in February, 1979, by Albert Pierce. It took five years for other major magazines to pick up on the technique and so far as we know, no agencies teach it. Nonetheless, it is clearly the best technique available to an out-of-air diver.

In the 1985 proceedings of the NAUI's IQ 85, two

papers are discussed using the BC for self rescue, one by Graver and another by instructor Frank Albino. In this article we will further the discussion, drawing on both those papers and the pioneering work of Albert Pierce.

* * * * *

The technique is relatively simple. An out-of-air diver replaces his regulator mouthpiece with his BC mouthpiece and, after clearing any water droplets, inhales and exhales as he rises to the surface at the appropriate rate. Air in the BC expands as he rises, giving him more volume. Oxygen is depleted, but not

at such a rate that problems will be caused in 60, 90, or 120 seconds. One doesn't feel the out-of-air response, so the likelihood of panic is small. And because one is breathing in and out, the chance of embolism due to exhaling only (see that last issue) is eliminated.

The Specifics:

When diving, the B.C. mouthpiece fills with water, so the first step in using the BC as a rebreathing device is to clear the mouthpiece. Some mouthpieces have small holes in the end and clear very easily: one just has to aim the holes downward and push the button while blowing into the B.C. If you have a different sort of mouthpiece, or one that doesn't work, Pierce, in his book *Scuba Self Rescue*, gives the following instructions:

1. Seal your lips over the mouthpiece. Look down as you push the valve open, then blow the water that is in the mouthpiece into the hose.

2. Rotate your body in the direction the hose end is pointing (Picture the mouthpiece as an arrow head). Water will roll from the hose into the bottom of the BC. You should be looking toward the surface as you complete this roll. Blowing as you roll will help clear small water drops from the hose corrugations.

3. Inhale cautiously at first to be sure you are not getting water, then inhale more fully.

4. Keep your mouth sealed, the valve open, and your head up as you ascend. If you remove the inflator from your mouth, you'll have to clear it again. You can't let go of the inflator valve without shutting off your air. If you release the button of a perforated BC mouthpiece, you may find yourself inhaling water. Firm pressure is needed to keep such a mouthpiece from leaking water.

Obviously, that can be a cumbersome procedure, so one ought to practice with his mouthpiece in shallow water to determine how much water is present and how difficult it is to clear. Recently, for example, an *Undercurrent* staffer practiced the technique using the Scubapro Air II mouthpiece and found that the amount of water in the mouthpiece was so slight he didn't need to clear it to begin breathing.

The solution, if the industry ever accepts it, can be a specially designed mouthpiece. Graver points out that more suitable mouthpieces are available in Europe. They're actually demand valves. To use a BC thus equipped, a diver simply inserts the mouthpiece and breathes from it in the same manner as with a regulator. The air received is not under pressure. It is simply drawn from the bladder of the BC. The mouthpiece contains two valves, one which opens to allow air to flow from the BC to the diver, and one which opens during exhalation to allow exhaled air to be exhausted into the water.

Inherent Dangers:

There are a few. One reason to clear water from the mouthpiece is to eliminate stray drops of water, so they don't lead to a coughing spell. If one does begin to cough, leave the mouthpiece in and cough directly into the BC. The air there will be rebreathed when you have cleared your throat.

One should never rebreathe air from his BC if he has used his CO₂ inflator. A full breath could be deadly.

Controlling buoyancy can be a problem. As one rises the air expands and while one is concentrating on breathing into the BC, he may not control his rate of ascent. But it must be done. It can be most easily accomplished by exhaling out of the corner of the mouth or through the nose into the mask.

A diver might fear underwater blackout, given that his oxygen will be depleted as he rises. It's not impossible, but it's certainly less likely than in any other ascent without air. As one rises, it's conceivable that more air will become available in his tank and that can be added to the BC to provide fresh air. Still, rebreathing from 120 feet for two minutes should not be sufficient to cause a blackout if carefully controlled.

One problem often raised is the possible air contamination by bacteria or fungus growing in the dark recesses of the BC. Frank Albino writes that in his conversations with several physicians, he has concluded that "even if such organisms were present in the BC, in light of the body's natural defense mechanisms, a few breaths of air that has only recently been exposed to them should not pose a significant risk of lung infection." And if a lung infection is an alternative to an embolism or drowning, why give it a second thought?

Nonetheless, one can detoxify his BC. Graver cites studies from England that show that a 30 second rinse with a suitable disinfectant such as Sodium Metabisulphite (use in the manufacturing of beer) is 100% effective in eliminating bacterial contamination. Al Pierce suggests a 1:750 solution of Zephiran Chloride, which is sold in most drugstores. If the diving community ever picks up on the obvious notion of BC rebreathing, disinfectants will eventually become available in dive shops.

Conclusion:

Using the BC as a self rescue device is an idea which has floundered too long. It needs to be taught to new divers and practiced by experienced divers. There's no reason for it to remain in the closet any longer.

But it's not the ultimate self rescue technique. A back up air source -- a pony bottle -- is clearly the safest way to go.