

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Villa on Dunbar Rock, Guanaja, Honduras *a tranquil "round the rock" dive spot in the Caribbean*

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Dear Fellow Diver:

The first time I dived the island of Guanaja was November 1998, a week after Hurricane Mitch devastated the Bay Islands. The operation in Roatan I was diving with motored us nine miles over to Guanaja because Roatan's north side was still too rough and my divemaster thought Guanaja's south side would be better. While Roatan was relatively spared, Guanaja had been denuded of anything green by the 180-m.p.h. winds of that Class 5 hurricane four days prior. Bonacca, a town built on stilts around a sandbar in Guanaja Bay, was damaged but still standing. But what I remember most was that the diving I did, at a bare sandbar called Southwest Cay, was great -- some of the best I've done.

Exactly 20 years later, I stepped off one of Dunbar Rock's boats to revisit Southwest Cay, covered with greenery once more. I looked down at Afternoon Delight's multiple beds of colorful healthy hard corals and fields of purple sea fans at 40 feet. Eagle rays and three-foot-across Southern sting rays flew by, while barracudas eyed me from a distance. Schools of just about every species of Caribbean reef fish -- queen and French angel-fish, surgeonfish and Bermuda chub -- were moving everywhere. A hawksbill turtle swam between my buddy and me. The highlight: a white mantis shrimp my divemaster Raynel coaxed partially out of its hole.



The Villa at Dunbar Rock



Unfortunately, much of the sea around Guanaja has been heavily harvested for decades. If you've ever eaten at a Red Lobster restaurant, your dinner probably came from Guanaja, as their fisheries supplies that restaurant chain. About three years ago, the locals realized that needed to change, and Guanaja now has a marine park encompassing most of the island and still enlarging -- lobster boats now have to go 100 miles off to the east. All divers going to the marine park pay a \$10 fee. While I can't compare the health of Guanaja's reefs immediately before the park's institution, I can say that marine life density on its north side is better than at sites on the other Bay Islands.

I went to Guanaja with my long-time dive group and the 21 of us rented out the Villa on Dunbar Rock, which can be best described as a four-story, white stucco hotel built atop a big granite rock in the Caribbean. I felt like I was staying on a permanently anchored liveaboard. It's on Guanaja's south side, nearest Bonacca Town, which has less marine life. But it was easy to get to dives on the north side through a canal cut through the middle of the island, a 20-minute boat ride.

I wasn't in the best mood when our boat from Guanaja's dirt-strip airport docked at the hotel. Lahnsa Air had lost several bags, including mine, on the flight from Roatan (this seems to be common because Dunbar Rock gives its Mares rental gear for free to anyone whose dive equipment is delayed). But my mood lifted when Jennie, the hospitality manager, escorted us through the high, open-air atrium, always busy with multi-colored hummingbirds flitting between the feeders, and showed me and my dive buddy, Marty, to an oceanfront room on the second floor. The 300-square-foot space was plenty roomy, with a large closet and bathroom, two full-size beds and great sunset views from the balcony, even better when I watched them from the hammock. The solar-heated hot water was unlimited and the air-conditioning was frosty.

It's 43 steps from the lobby down to the dock and the PADI dive center; there's also a ramp winding around the building for those who don't do stairs. Dunbar Rock boasts about its "conciierge" divemasters, and Raynel, Romel and Manuel, all from Bonacca Town and averaging age 30, certainly were that as they attended to my group. They watched with eagle eyes as I set up my gear at the start of the week, then took turns setting it up the way I liked it on every dive. I never had to lift, haul or repack gear; the trio stored it overnight in a secure area, carried it to the boats, changed tanks and bottles between dives, and rinsed per my instructions. I enjoyed my chats with the friendly chaps -- Raynel has a forestry degree and is active in Guanaja's conservation efforts. Romel, a licensed electrician, lived in the U.S. . . and has no desire to return.

Shearwater Recalls Its Computer Transmitters

Over the years, some of our readers have expanded their skills from sport diving to technical diving, and if you're a Shearwater computer user for the latter, this recall notice could be important. You see, Shearwater computers can be gas-integrated with multiple tanks, using several transmitters on their first-stages. However, one of the transmitters is now subject to a voluntary recall.

Shearwater discovered that the yellow transmitters may have the same transmission interval as the one

found on the gray transmitters. When the transmitters of both colors are used by the same diver on the same dive, signal interference could potentially occur and cause dropped signals. (Otherwise, the computers aren't affected.)

If you've got a Shearwater computer, stop using the yellow tank transmitter and contact the manufacturer online at www.shearwater.com/announcements/voluntary-recall-notice-yellow-transmitters

The two dive boats, measuring 42 and 45 feet, were similar to Newton 46s but roomier, each easily accommodating our 21 divers. My biggest criticism was that although there was a big camera rinse bucket, there was no camera table or safe camera storage. I suggested to the divemasters that they could add a camera table by attaching it to the top of the engine cover in the middle of the deck. They told me they liked the idea.

The guys gave detailed briefings, suggested directions to follow and recommended total dive times of 40-50 minutes, but most of the group exceeded an hour, with no complaints. I could make either a rear platform entry or backroll off either side. I chose the latter for a dive at Pinnacles, following Raynel and Romel to 110 feet (the third divemaster always stayed on the boat) and made a quick spiral descent along the vertical sides covered with black coral and hundreds of bluebell tunicates. On the ascending spiral back to the upper reef at 35 feet, I admired the spectacular, sunlit, shallow shelf of healthy coral covered with a rainbow of darting and hovering wrasse, tangs, chubs, black surgeon, multiple types of damselfish and the ubiquitous sergeant majors. Visibility averaged 100 feet, better off the walls and less in shallow waters near cays. I climbed the long, sturdy aluminum ladder, and a divemaster was always there to take my rig and carry it to my parking spot.

Most rides to dive sites were 30 minutes or less, but I could also dive "round the rock." I just walked down the 43 steps to the hotel's small sandy beach on the bay of Guanaja, 10 to 15 feet deep, with clear water and no surge. It was a Caribbean macro wonderland, with common and reef octopuses, juveniles of everything, invertebrates and sea slugs of all types. A shore dive in the shallows around the hotel introduced me to a nudibranch metropolis, with frequent sea hares and black spotted nudibranchs.

I typically began the day by watching the sunrise from the hotel porch after making an espresso from their machine and grabbing a fresh-baked pastry (they were available all day long). I was on the boat by 8 am; divers were warned they'd be left behind if they weren't there by 8:30 a.m., but Manuel ran up to an absent diver's room one morning to make sure he was indeed sitting this one out.

The closest wreck dive was Jado Trader, a 200-foot tramp freighter sunk 30 years ago, resting on its side at a sandy-bottomed 100 feet adjacent to a reef wall. It's encrusted with nearly every species of Caribbean soft coral and guarded by five large tarpon hovering nearby. The large free-swimming green morays under the hulk were a friendlier bunch. Schools of silver scad and glassy sweepers filled the easily accessible interior; a large channel crab inhabited a shelf on the stern at about 70 feet. During my ascent, I saw a small group of long-snout seahorses at 40 feet, perched on the pinnacle near the bow, while shoals of Creole wrasse streamed across my path.

The divemasters handed out drinking water, fresh fruit and tasty tropical drinks after every dive, and it was great to have a long freshwater shower in the sparkling head. We headed back to a full buffet lunch and an hour of down time before getting back in the boat to dive on Guanaja's north side.



One of Dunbar Rock's Two Dive Boats

Villa at Dunbar Rock, Guanaja, Honduras

Diving (Experienced).....	★★★★
Diving (Beginners).....	★★★★★
Snorkeling	★★★★
Accommodations.....	★★★★★
Food.....	★★★★★
Services and attitude ...	★★★★★
Money's worth.....	★★★★

*= poor *****= excellent

Caribbean scale

Chef Arnold, a local, is a self-trained chef who has mastered all sorts of cuisine, producing meals of great quality -- and quantity. Fresh juice, fruit, eggs and bacon or sausage were always on the breakfast menu, and other hot dishes included Central-American-style huevos rancheros with refried beans, pancakes, crepes, and eggs Benedict done to perfection. Lunches were typically hamburgers, sandwiches and chili dogs, with a particularly delicious fried-chicken picnic waiting for us after a morning dive. For dinner, Chef Arnold started us off with of ceviche or homemade minestrone soup, followed by filet mignon, local lobster or garlic shrimp, and finished with caramel flan or key lime pie. If there wasn't a night dive, I ended my days watching great sunsets drop over the distant mountains on mainland Honduras while sitting by the swim-up bar at the infinity pool, adjacent to the main bar and dining room on the third floor. Lisa, the wonderful bartender, served wine to me and my all-American dive group, and I tipped her well for paying attention to our rambling dive stories with a cheerful smile.

For a surface interval, I visited Bonacca Town, described as the "Venice of the Caribbean," because most buildings are built on stilts (to avoid tides and sand fleas), and some are three stories tall. Its byways are footpaths and canals -- no streets, cars or scooters, and just a few bicycles. Residents speak English as their household language, due to the early settlers, and are required to learn Spanish in school. I could purchase all my needed sundries in town, and if I wanted, I had plenty of options for fly, bone and deepwater fishing charters.

Schools of fish were plentiful, always seeming to greet me as I descended on a dive. At Paradise, it was blue and yellow tang, Bermuda chub, saucer-eye porgy, barracuda and two large wahoos doing a fly-by. The large sandy flat, 50 feet deep, was surrounded by a rim of shallower reef, reminding me of a large athletic field surrounded by bleachers. Players on the field included sand dwellers like sting rays, garden eels, blue-striped lizardfish, yellow-head jawfish, and short-fin pipefish.

I only saw one or two lionfish on each dive, probably because Dunbar Rock has a harvesting program. The divemasters carried a Hawaiian sling and a ZooKeeper container on every dive. We were all encouraged to spot lionfish, and the larger ones were turned into our dinners. The smaller ones were fed, spines and all, to nurse sharks, which made for great pictures and video.

Guanaja has 50 named sites (Dunbar has six "secret" ones, visited by special request) that are mostly inside or at the edges of the barrier reef running along its northern and eastern sides. Some are officially drift dives, but I never encountered a current. So the 84-degree November water was as still as glass at Michael's Rock, a series of cracks and grooves in volcanic rock on Guanaja's northern end. Manuel pointed out multiple crevices and swim-thrus at 70 feet for me to poke through and see lobsters, black grouper, porgy, barracuda, porkfish and various species of grunt, followed by the grand finale: more than 100 flamingo tongues clustered together in a 50-foot-patch.

On our last night, several of us took the divemasters to dinner at Guanaja's "best" restaurant, Mi Casa Too, also a bed and breakfast. I was reminded the island has no roads when we took a

Save Money on Baggage Fees: Pack with a Purpose

Before you travel to Dunbar Rock, go to the website www.packforapurpose.org, select "Central America," then "Honduras," and then select "Villa on Dunbar Rock" to find out what materials, mostly school supplies and clothes, you can buy and bring down with you for Guanaja's children.

Pack for a Purpose is a nonprofit doing this for children living in remote areas worldwide, showing travelers how they can supply them with everything from pens and pencils to sports equipment and shoes. Antibiotic ointment and bandages are also appreciated. (There are other participating dive resorts in the Caribbean and Asia-Pacific -- click on "List of All Destinations.")

The website gives updated advice on how to pack for your destination in order to avoid problems with customs if what you're bringing might appear to be commercial quantities. Supposedly the airlines won't charge you baggage weight for bags labeled with the "Pack for a Purpose" tags. Several of our group filled collapsible cloth duffels with 30 pounds of supplies -- we weren't charged baggage fees, and the items were greatly appreciated.

Another Good Story about that Epic Thai Cave Dive Rescue

There are more heroics to report about the story that kept the world captivated last summer, when cave divers successfully rescued a boys' soccer team from the Tham Lung cave in Thailand. During the underwater search, Ric Stanton and John Volanthen, two of the cave rescue divers, stumbled across four Thai water company workers who were also trapped in an airspace in the cave system during their search and not otherwise known to be there.

The workers had been there for some days, very frightened and not in good shape, so Stanton and Volanthen had to come up with an immediate plan to get them out. With only two sets of dive equipment between six of them, the cave divers took the Thai men out of the cave, one by one, by de-kitting and re-kitting so that each could escape, and exposing themselves to the danger of rising water while not wearing any breathing equipment themselves. It was a process that took several hours.

Modest to the end, it was thought of as a sideshow -- something that both divers failed to mention at the time of the successful soccer team rescue and the media was focused elsewhere. The information only came out

in conversation later, and then was made public knowledge by cave diving medic Richard Harris during his presentation at a technical diving conference last month in England.

However, the difficulty that came from managing these four young men, who tended to panic and struggle during the underwater escape, proved a valuable lesson for the rescuers. That effort resulted in the decision to sedate the 12 boys and their coach (with appropriate doses of Ketamine) before passing them, secured to stretchers and breathing through full-face masks, through the much longer, flooded passages blocking their team's escape.

The final evacuation was to take several days and the trapped boys voted among themselves which of them were to escape first. They did this on the basis of who lived farthest away, considering how far they would have to ride their bicycles home, which indicated they had no inkling of the world's interest and the media circus that awaited them outside the cave.

Stanton and Volanthen have since been awarded the George Medal, England's second-highest civilian award, by Queen Elizabeth.

boat from Dunbar Rock and had to clamber over driftwood on the beach and climb 50 steps up the side of a mountain. We were greeted like family in the restaurant, with big-screen TV and bar, and my wood-fired, breaded lionfish with cheese and spices was delicious. Raynel and Romel described what it's like to work in the commercial lobster diving industry (which they do as a side job) with its very high rate of decompression sickness. When I went to say goodbye the next morning, the guys had cleaned and washed everyone's gear, flushed out BC bladders with freshwater, blew air through them and dried them thoroughly the night before. I had no hesitancy handing over my tip envelope.

While there are few pelagics, Guanaja has good Caribbean diving, with the advantage of no large dive operations or cattle-boat diving such as in neighboring Roatan. The reef habitats are on the upswing, thanks to the expanding marine park. And no complaints about Dunbar Rock and its superb and truly friendly staff. I plan to go back -- and I hope to see that camera table the divemasters promised to build.

-- D.D.

Our Undercover Diver's Bio: " I got my dive certification at the YMCA back in the 1970s, but I didn't do much diving until I loved to Los Angeles in 1990. Then I got recertified and rapidly received certificates for technical diving and rebreathers. I've been doing about 100 openwater dives a year for the last 25 years with a good local dive group, and I've dived all around the world but certainly not everywhere. I presently have more than 1,500 openwater dives under my belt and about 200 technical/rebreather dives, although I don't do those anymore. I just like to dive."



Divers Compass: My seven-night dive package for a double-occupancy room was \$1,995 per person and included Wi-Fi, airport transfers, laundry service on Tuesday and Thursday, use of the kayaks, tours to Guanaja, one night dive and unlimited shore diving . . . I tipped 10

percent on my dive package and gave it to Jennie so she could distribute it to staff, but I personally gave tips to the divemasters . . . Nitrox was \$10 per bottle, or \$120 for a week's worth of unlimited bottles; Dunbar also has access to helium and technical gas blending . . . Extra night dives cost \$40, with a minimum of six divers required . . . Dive groups of up to 26 people can rent out Dunbar Rock, starting at \$49,500 per week; Cabanas on Clark's Cay is a nearby, nice-looking resort with room for another 20 divers . . . Delta, American and soon Southwest fly to Roatan, with most flights arriving on weekends; there are USA routes through the Honduran mainland, but I'd stay away from there at this time . . . Lanhsa charter, Guanaja Air, Aero Caribe and Bay Islands airlines usually run flights from Roatan to Guanaja on Saturdays to coordinate with U.S. arrival flights; weight allowance is 50 pounds free plus a carry-on, and 50 cents per pound after that . . . You need a passport with six months remaining at time of entry . . . U.S. dollars are accepted, along with Honduran Lempiras; contact your credit card company prior to arrival to authorize charges, because Honduras is reportedly a hotbed for credit card fraud . . . There's a new hyperbaric chamber at the medical clinic near Guanaja's airport, funded partly by a grant from DAN because of the high rates of decompression illness among local commercial lobster divers . . . Voltage is 110 North American . . . No bugs or sand fleas on Dunbar Rock, although sand fleas are famously bad on Guanaja itself . . . Take your depleted batteries home with you . . . Websites: Villa at Dunbar Rock - www.dunbarrock.com; Cabanas at Clark's Cay - www.clarkscay.com; Mi Casa Too - <https://micasatooguanaja.com>

Random Thoughts on Dive Travel Glitches

avoiding cramped cabins, airport issues and nighttime noises

Married Divers Matter, Too. "We had a dive-master who totally ignored the two of us and just focused on the female diver, who was the only other diver on both dives."

There was a day when this complaint was common, but not so much anymore at most popular dive centers and liveboards. Still, there are testosterone-fueled divemasters out there, particularly in the Third World. Gail Morris (Piedmont, CA), whom we quoted above, was assigned that kind of guy at the Atmosphere Resort and Spa in the Philippines. "Since the visibility was about 10 feet, it was annoying and then dangerous when my husband was low on air. I wasn't low, but I had to keep swimming to the divemaster, who ignored my signals for 700 PSI, then 400 PSI, and then 200 PSI, when I finally had to grab his arm and make him take us up to the boat. There was boat traffic, so we were afraid to ascend without him." Thankfully these days, responsible dive operators don't tolerate dive guides who covet single women underwater.

A Divemaster You Don't Want to Stay Together With. If you're off the beaten path, it may be at a place where the divemasters play by rules you don't cotton to. C. Leroy Anderson (Salt Lake City), who has more than 1000 dives in his log book, traveled to the Indian Ocean in October to dive at Fifth

Element Resort on the French island of Reunion, east of Madagascar. He says, "I was almost out of air at 60 feet, so I informed the guide, who said this was 'OK' and not to ascend. When I was down to 250 psi, he still wanted me to remain with him at 60 feet. I did not want to drown, so I initiated an ascent. When I got to 30 feet, I had 150 psi in my tank and was continuing a slow safe ascent when the guide suddenly and aggressively grabbed my jacket and pulled me back down to 60 feet with him. He signaled me to follow him. I could tell I only had a few breaths left in my tank. We arrived at the boat anchor, then did a very rapid ascent to the surface, where I arrive totally out of air. I asked him why on earth he behaved this way on the dive and he said, 'In France, divers must stay together.' Even if one has no air left."

Cramped Cabins. If you haven't been on a live-aboard before, be aware that cabins are not hotel rooms. If you have not carefully researched your cabin configuration before you paid up, especially if you're short, tall or wide, you might be disappointed. On older boats, particularly, you might find that two people can't be standing up at the same time. The beds might be short and narrow, so there is barely room to get into yours, or if you're on a top bunk, the ceiling may be so low you can't sit up.

A Diver Boosts the #MeToo Movement in Egypt

Egypt is unfortunately known as a place where harassing female tourists on the streets is common. But when the hassling happened recently on a Red Sea dive trip, one diver took matters into his own hands -- and with his camera -- and Egyptian media backed him up by publicly shaming the harasser.

Underwater photographer Mohammed Hani was on a dive near Sharm el Sheikh when he noticed an uncomfortable encounter between a young female diver (whom he supposed was Russian) and her diving instructor, both underwater and above. He started tracking the incident underwater with his camera, following them when they surfaced, arguing, with the

woman looking for an escape as soon as she saw the boat. Looking relieved, she asked for help to board and to be protected from her instructor. The man doing the harassing threatened Hani twice, first when Hani tried to intervene and then after realizing Hani had photos.

Hani took those photos to the Arab news channel Alarabiya, saying he chose to "expose the man so that his company could deal with him legally in order to preserve the reputation of Egypt's tourism." Alarabiya published Hani's photos, and kudos to both for exposing harassers and making them think twice before they get grabby.

A good example of a bad cabin configuration comes from Richard McGowan (Fairfield, CT), who was on the *Roatan Aggressor* in October and said, "We had the bow cabin #1, which is the only dedicated full-sized bed; others have a twin on top. The bathroom is against the hull, which curves inward, so when I sat (I'm six foot), I had to lift my right leg a few inches up the hull side wall; otherwise, it would have pushed my legs together. Not a big deal. Another couple thought they had booked cabin #1, but they had booked through Liveaboard.com and paid the extra money for the room, while we booked directly through *Aggressor*. Their reservation came through for another cabin, and they were not happy, but it was not *Aggressor's* fault. They will be booking directly from now on."

Gail King (Port Orange, FL) also noted how *Roatan Aggressor's* cabins were small. "Two of us shared one drawer and small cabinet. The top bunk was a small single and too close to the ceiling, just really uncomfortable, even for a small person. The cabin is really suited to one person only."

Ruth Lindner (New York, NY), aboard the *Indo Aggressor* in October, says, "The boat itself was not at all what I expect from a modern luxury dive boat. The rooms were tiny with bunk beds . . . We paid a lot for this trip, and the boat did not measure up to any of the modern ones I have been on. More like those from the 1980s."

Kelley Price (Kirkland, WA), aboard the *Spirit of Freedom* in the Coral Sea in August, says, "I wish the website would do a better job of explaining bed size. We're used to a king-sized bed at home, so when you put us in a double bed, we're not very comfortable."

And there can be other cabin issues, as Donald Frazier (San Mateo, CA) reported about this same craft three months later. "My trip in November was sickening, literally. The cabin I was assigned to was not the one they had agreed to provide. It smelled like an outhouse -- the stench was so pervasive, sleep was near impossible. My sinuses were burning. Three god-awful days and nights later, they moved me into a cabin located next to a seawater pump that alternated on and off all day and night anytime someone flushed a toilet. Once again, sleep was near impossible, as the pump motor was so loud."

You can't do much when you don't get the cabin you signed up for, but you still must do your homework ahead of time. Read *Undercurrent* reports on the boat you select. Review the boat's website for cabin configuration. If you use a travel agent, work with a specialist like Reef and Rainforest, Island Dreams or Discover Diving, who knows the boat. (Online agencies do not.) Discuss the cabins with a staff person or contact the boat directly for information. Do your homework so you can be assigned to a cabin with some wiggle room. And if you're traveling on an *Aggressor* boat, look up the boat specs online -- their website offers good information on cabins and bunk size.

The Annoyances of Small Airports. If you're a seasoned traveler, you know to get to the airport a couple hours ahead of time, but some folks think that small airports in other countries might be quicker and painless. Au contraire. For example, several flights from the U.S. arrive and depart every Saturday at the little airport on Roatan Island, all within a window of a couple of hours, meaning great lines both ways and often utter confusion.

Michael Patrick Guerin (Beaufort, NC) calls it “the perfect storm.” It also might take you a couple hours to get through customs at many small airports, so don’t be so certain you can make that same-day dive boat or hook up with an old friend an hour after your plane lands.

Timothy Barden (Waltham, MA) notes that the Grand Cayman airport is undergoing renovations and expansion, a potential problem if you’re con-

necting to Little Cayman or Cayman Brac. “It’s wall-to-wall people, with many confusing signs directing you where to go. The signage isn’t always right, and the employees aren’t either. Build a considerable buffer into your travel itinerary. Two to three hours is a pain, but will be worth it if you get stuck in one of the endless lines at immigration or check-in.”

A common practice when departing Little Cayman is sending your baggage off a day ahead of

Why Are Red Sea Sharks Biting More Often?

If a shark decides to bite you, there’s little you can do. The question is, why are Red Sea sharks biting more divers these days?

Oceanic white-tip sharks, which swim in tropical and warm temperate seas, are often encountered at Red Sea dive sites, such as the Brother Islands near the Egyptian coast, but recently, they’ve started to bite divers more than they had in the past. Dan White, a British diver, posted a video online that he shot of a shark biting a diver in that area in early November. He was filming an oceanic white-tip circling his boat while he was doing a deco stop. It looked relaxed and was swimming about casually. But then about 20 divers from other boats surrounded it, and eventually it got spooked. The shark then made an antagonistic display, with its pectoral fins down and back arched, but the divers didn’t seem to notice the change in its demeanor.

Then the shark became interested in one particular diver wearing a shortie, probably attracted by the action of his bare white legs as he swam. The diver fended it off three times. A diver from a different boat and wearing side-mounted tanks saw what was happening, but unaware of the danger, took his eyes off the shark. In an instant, the shark bit one of his calf muscles cleanly off. All divers then scrambled from the water. The victim was recovered to his own live-aboard (luckily an ex-Royal Marine medic who was a passenger on White’s boat was there to help stabilize him), and he was motored back to the mainland. You can see White’s video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=X1zflop9zeY

Oceanic white-tips are ocean-roving scavengers constantly searching for a meal. They have wide-ranging tastes and will investigate anything, including resting seabirds and coconuts floating at the surface. In the Red Sea’s busy sea lanes, they have learned to follow the loud noise of freighters traveling to and from the Suez Canal because their galleys tend to dispose of waste over the stern. This has been going on for more than a hundred years.

Nowadays, Red Sea liveboards travel in convoys while making the long crossing from the mainland for safety reasons, but that means there can be a lot of divers in the water at one time -- and that can make easy pickings for the sharks. The liveboards, with their on-board generators, compressors and big engines, make the same sounds as the freighters that oceanic white-tip sharks have learned to follow. The sounds ring the dinner bell for the sharks, and this is why they will approach divers closely near where their liveboards are moored, looking for any sign of weakness.

Silent rebreather divers can attest to the fact that a large number of open-circuit divers together in the water can produce a deafening roaring noise from their regulators as they exhale air, which again can result in a problem with these sharks, as Dan White’s video shows.

Baiting the sharks doesn’t help matters. Diver Oliver Ohlendorf took pictures of a liveboard crew baiting the water at Daedalus Reef to entice an oceanic white-tip a week before the shark attack that White filmed. While Daedalus Reef is 125 miles from the Brother Islands, sharks there have been regularly seen feeding at the sewage outflows from moored boats.

No matter where you’re diving, on no account should any diver or boat crew harass any shark. It will usually make a close inspection, but then move on. If you’re in the water with an oceanic white-tip shark and feel uncomfortable, leave the water as soon as practical. Never swim at the surface in the presence of an oceanic white-tip, because that is where they commonly find their food.

Since White’s video went online, there have been more bites on divers by oceanic white-tip sharks. They haven’t been as serious, but they’re still very concerning. The Egyptian authorities’ reaction was to temporarily suspend diving activities at the Brother Islands for all of December in the hope that the problem shark or sharks will move elsewhere.

– John Bantin, author of *Shark Bytes*

you. As S. Smith (Everett, WA) notes, "It was disconcerting having no idea of the security at Grand Cayman airport," but it's a decades-old practice, and if you want your luggage to get home when you do, better abide.

But we have good news on St. Vincent, which at last receives nonstop flights from the U.S., making it a much easier destination to visit and more likely that your diving gear will arrive with you. David J. Inman (Devon, PA) says Air Canada was the first major airline to fly direct to the new Argyle Airport, and American will soon offer flights through Miami. "Travel to the island is now much less stressful, and I had substantial confidence that my dive gear would arrive with me (which it did)."

The Beat Goes On. Many years ago, I stayed at the high-end Young Island Resort in St. Vincent, but I was kept awake until the wee hours by the music and drum notes pulsing across the water from a bar on the mainland. I vowed never again to travel without earplugs, and they should be part of every diver's kit. Rik Pavlescak (West Palm Beach, FL) is one guy who carries them. During his October stay at Dive into Lembeh, when music blared long and loud from a nearby house, he says, "I was told the house is usually vacant but was being rented for a party that night. The noise

(essentially karaoke music) continued throughout the stay, and the story evolved into the house being rented out by an ex-military general with political connections. I had brought earplugs, so it did not bother me, and I gave some to other guests."

Dorothy McDonald (Strongsville, OH) dodged the noise at the Old Gin House in St. Eustatius, but others didn't. "We enjoyed the historic and cozy feel of [the place], but we are so glad that we upgraded to the ocean-view suite. Waves were the only thing we ever heard at night. In the main hotel, our fellow travelers complained of being woken up throughout the night every night because of roosters crowing and lots of street noise."

One solution, says Susan Bartley of Ripley, Ontario, is to bring a noise therapy machine. On her trip to Roatan's Media Luna Resort and Spa in December, she reports that the thumping of resort music in her cabana was "waaay too loud for those who want to go to sleep earlier. I brought a noise therapy machine and that helped quite a bit."

Me? I carry Bose noise-canceling headphones on all my flights, and many times I've donned them at night, in bed, to knock out noise. They're a little tough to sleep with, but they sure deaden the sound.

-- Ben Davison

What's What at the Latest DEMA Show

and do you really need to buy anything they're selling?

How much dive gear do you really need? Jacques Cousteau's divers made do with mask, fins, a regulator and a tank or two on their backs. We add stuff to make it a better experience, but it could be said that more stuff sometimes overcomplicates matters.

So what new equipment appeared at the annual Diving Equipment Manufacturers Association (DEMA) show? And does any of it really matter?

Only a small proportion of the exhibitors who showed at this year's show, held in Las Vegas last November, were diving equipment manufacturers, and new products scheduled to be sold this year tend to be examples of gentle evolution rather than anything truly revolutionary. The DEMA show has instead evolved into what is mainly a dive travel exhibition, along with the photo equipment needed to record any encounters on those travels. Dive resorts from every corner of the planet competed to

attract visitors from among the dive professionals who attended. Even the Italian manufacturer, Cressi, now promotes a Galapagos liveaboard, the *Galapagos Evolution*. It was also noticeable that fewer of the big-name personalities in diving were seen strolling the aisles, than in previous years. Maybe it's because they're all getting older -- like the rest of us.

What's New in Dive Equipment?

Technical diving and underwater photography have been the biggest growth areas in recent years, but when, not so long ago, it seemed nearly every equipment manufacturer showed a hopeful prototype of a closed-circuit rebreather, there are now just a mere handful of manufacturers with a core of properly developed models. The semi-closed models intended for the less-serious recreational diving market appear to have fallen by the wayside. So



The Reg-Mount

that leaves gathering images while underwater. Manufacturers of housings often just tweak their products to cater for new cameras. Nauticam stands alone in that it is developing optics for use in water with the **Nauticam MWL-1** supplementary lens, which, combined with a camera's prime macro, is intended for close-focus, wide-angle use. That lets a DSLR user swap between the two while underwater, just as a user of a compact camera with wet lenses could. Only time will tell whether the image quality will be good enough, but with such images now being mainly reproduced online, it's probably less important than it was (www.nauticam.com).

Regarding lighting equipment, advanced battery technology, combined with even more efficient LEDs, continues to make video lights smaller and better performers. The **Weefine 3000** and **Kraken 3000** are both interesting LED ring-lights that can substitute for a strobe by emitting an intense burst of 3000 lumen light that's triggered by the camera's on-board strobe and are useful for extreme close-up pictures. Although that makes it less able to capture fast action due to the longer duration of the pulse of light, it does mean the "modeling light" accurately represents the final flash, making things easier for the photographer (www.krakensports.ca).

Underwater photographers, who were limited to two or three manufacturers of conventional strobes in the past, can now enjoy a plethora of choice. New strobes were represented, among others, by iDiveSite and its **Simbiosis SS-03**, a less bulky offering than previous models but still combining a strobe with a 2800 lumen video light for those who like to switch between stills and video during a dive (www.i-divesite.com).

Italian manufacturer One UW announced an entirely new strobe, the **One160X**, a welcome addition to an otherwise limited range of underwater strobes (www.oneuw.com). **Retra** is a new kid on the block that hopes to start shipping its updated

new model, with built-in leak detector, next summer (www.retra-uwf.com).

Well-established Inon continues to be promoted by its CEO merely carrying a bag full of equipment around the trade floor and demonstrating to interested parties in the refreshment areas, thereby saving on the cost of a booth. He's been doing that for years, and nobody from DEMA appears to have challenged him (www.inon.jp).

Scared of flooding your camera? Rare only a decade ago, vacuum leak tests are now common on more expensive housings, and even the less expensive **Seafrogs** housing can be fitted with such an accessory. With M16 and M14 adapters, it can fit other makes of housing, too (www.seafrogs.com.hk). **10Bar** does something similar. And the **Weefine** iPhone housing has a similar system that confirms you've assembled your housing without the risk of a leak -- and a catastrophic loss of your iPhone data (www.weefine.com).

Some products have been further developed since the past year's DEMA. For example, last year we mentioned the **Reg-Mount**, which puts your POV camera ahead of your exhaled bubbles. This year, it has come back with alternative fittings for different regulators, alternative points for mounting your GoPro, and even a light -- although that can clutter the diver's view (www.regmount.com).

The Most Innovative Gear

The most innovative diving-focused product could be found at the **Atomics Aquatics** section of the Huish Outdoors booth -- and it's so simple, I can't believe nobody thought of it before. Open a tank valve at the surface and you'll spot how cold the air from it is. When the air from your tank is depressurized, as it is by your regulator, it expands and loses a lot of heat -- it's your lungs that warm up that cold air. No matter how warm the water is, you'll eventually get chilled, increasing your air



Simbiosis SS-03



Aria Snorkie-Talkie

consumption and cutting short your dive. **Scuba Heat** is a coil of copper nickel alloy that sits in your air supply, between the first- and second-stages of the regulator, and exchanges heat with the surrounding water to make it approach ambient water temperature, and thereby make it more comfortable to breathe. **Scuba**

Heat is expected to cost around \$350. That sounds pricey, but hey, at what price comfort? And don't think this is solely for cold water divers. No doubt there will be some similar copper-coiled pipes coming from China, if the idea catches on -- and those will inevitably cost less than a hundred bucks (www.atomicaquatics.com).

When it comes to cold water diving, one way to go is to wear a heated vest, and **FIXNeo** provided such a thing, safe enough to go under a wetsuit if required. Even tropical waters suck heat from your body, so these new heated vests could be a good application in conjunction with a lightweight wetsuit (www.fixneo.com).

Full-face snorkeling masks may have been banned in Hawaii, thanks to a number of dive fatalities by those who were using them, but competition in this sector is still fierce. The **Cressi Duke** takes on its Italian neighbor and rival, Ocean Reef, which is the market leader with its **Aria**. With an improved design that has the snorkel pipe set to one side in an effort to combat buildup of carbon dioxide, the Cressi Duke also includes better education on how to use it safely (www.cressi.com). Meanwhile, Ocean Reef raises its game by offering in-water communications with its **Aria Snorkie-Talkie** accessory. So much for peace and quiet while looking at the fishes (www.oceanreefgroup.com).

As we get older, we usually need our reading glasses for extreme close-ups of underwater critters. But if you need a minus-diopter prescription in your mask, that presents a problem to fitting both sets of lenses. The 10Bar has come up with **Mask MF Flip**

Frame, a mask that allows the user to flip down the "reading glasses," so to speak, which can be combined with a bright, mask-mounted LED. That's a solution for those who don't readily take to the bifocal solution offered by other mask manufacturers (www.10bar.com).

Packing a large pair of fins is problematic for traveling divers. **Seac** exhibited a new range of compact fins as a solution, although they're probably less effective for propulsion in the water (www.seacsub.com).

With so much black gear around, it's a joy to see new brightly colored silicone masks from the likes of Seac, Scubapro and Oceanic, and technopolymer fins like the **Apeks RK3** (www.apeksdiving.com). Aqua Lung has a range of colorful covers for its Rogue wing-style BCs.

The Latest in Tech Gadgets

Some computers are also available in bright colors now, including entry-level models like the **Aqua Lung i200c** and Italian manufacturer Ratio, offering full-color displays on its **Ratio Easy Dive** (www.ratio-computers.com). Monochromatic displays on dive computers are looking a little dated, especially on more advanced ones. The display on the **Aqua Lung i770R** is both colorful and links directly to a smartphone for both setting up and downloading (www.aqualung.com).

The **Suunto D5** is an elegant watch-style computer with a very clear full-color display, and, in a break with Suunto tradition, its battery is rechargeable. Designed to go down to 330 feet, it can be paired with a transmitter to display tank pressure and remaining air time. It also has Bluetooth connectivity with smartphones and comes with a choice of brightly colored silicone straps (www.suunto.com).



Suunto D5



Aqua Sketch Tablet

The D5 is probably Suunto's direct response to the threat posed by the superficially similar and also extremely elegant **Shearwater Teric** (www.shearwater.com).

The Italian company, Mares, introduced its **Mares Genius computer**. Mares' chief technology officer, Sergio Angelini, is a mathematical geek, and he gave me a rundown of all the parameters that can be entered to personalize it -- and a headache trying to keep up with him. If you want the full nine yards, you can get it in an article by Angelini at *Underwater Technology* (https://issuu.com/sut7/docs/underwater_technology_35.2; www.mares.com)

The French whiz kids at Thalattoo showed the **Maoui**, a new computer concept that debuted last year -- it mounts on your mask and promises a head-up display. Thalattoo is still looking to get it to market, so there is still a question about whether it will ever be available to buy (www.thalattoo.com).

The same might be said of the French **Serenity S1 Frioul**. It's a dive computer that works in conjunction with a beacon to help you navigate back to the boat. The three-item kit also allows those on the boat to monitor the various positions of several divers in the water, giving an extra degree of safety (www.serenityconcept.com).

The even more clever people at Ariadna Tech in Finland displayed the **Posio** dive computer that, by means of a separate unit strapped to your leg, can learn your fin strokes and then, in conjunction with surface GPS, show a 3D route you can take on your dives, effectively bringing GPS-style navigation to your dives. That leg-mounted sensor uses your swimming motion to build a real-time picture of where you are in the water. Is the **Posio Diver Positioning System** an example of more technology than we really need? (www.ariadna.tech)

The Miscellaneous

Every DEMA show offers a hopeful entrepreneur attempting to break into the dive market, and the inventor of the **Aqua Sketch Tablet** was no exception this year. He showed a frame that uses waterproof paper so that divers can take their own pre-prepared dive notes, printed at home on standard-size paper, underwater with them (www.aquaSketch.com).

Ocean Technology Systems showed its **Spectrum** full-face diving mask, into which you can fit your regulator's second stage. The idea is that it keeps the face warm and dry, eliminates jaw fatigue and prevents exposure to nasty water-based pathogens (www.oceantechnologysystems.com).

Among products that were a little hair-raising, the **Easy Dive Snorkelator** comes from the company that makes Spare Air. It combines a snorkel with a switchable Spare Air cylinder for those who want to snorkel and swim down from the surface. No mention of pneumothorax or emphysema, though, because what could possibly go wrong? (www.spareair.com)

Those who want the best will want gear made out of titanium, a lightweight and durable metal, but it comes at a pretty penny. All-titanium regulators have been the province of Atomic Aquatics up to now, so it's ironic that the man who designed that company's original item created the original design on which the Scubapro titanium **Mk25T Evo S620Ti** is based (www.scubapro.com).

For those of us who get a little weary when swimming any distance, there were, as usual, plenty of motor-driven aids available, including the arm-mounted **Scubajet**, a refined development of something we first saw at last year's DEMA show (www.scubajet.com). The **SUBblue** compact DPV is good for 30 minutes of in-water use before recharging (www.subblue.com).



SUBblue Compact DPV

If you're getting too tired to bother with the effort of actually diving and you have at least \$4,000 or more to spare, you can dive vicariously with a remote-controlled ROV such as the **Deep Trekker** (maximum operating depth ranges from 164 to 500 feet, depending on the model), which had its fine control and maneuverability features demonstrated in a clear acrylic tank for all to see (www.deeptrekker.com).

Stream2Sea showed a range of sunscreens, shampoos and sting-relief products that claimed to be kind to coral reefs and their ecosystems. There was no sign of its rival, Reef Safe, and its

oxybenzone-based products on display, which we denounced in the August 2018 issue of *Undercurrent* (www.stream2sea.com).

Finally, some excellent news from Fourth Element, a small but rapidly growing eco-conscious British company, which introduced its prototype **Surface** wetsuit made from recycled content. Its "Ocean Positive" lining is made up of 95 percent material from recovered plastic bottles. Barring any production problems, expect it to be on sale soon (www.fourthelement.com).

-- John Bantin

Big Trouble at Blue Heron Bridge

an aquarium is accused of plundering its signature marine life

Florida's diving community is fighting for better protection of Blue Heron Bridge, a popular macro-life dive site in the town of Riviera Beach. It's an iconic place because underwater enthusiasts have spotted more than 400 species of fish in its waters since 1993, according to the Reef Environmental Education Foundation. Many of them, such as the polka-dotted batfish, hairy blennies and longsnout seahorses, are incredibly rare to see. So, tempers flared high after reports that Moody Gardens, an aquarium and tourist attraction in Galveston, Texas, sent a group of four professional divers to the Bridge with collecting devices, a truck full of holding tanks, and legal permits to collect 4,300 animals during a week in early October.

There have been conflicting reports as to the scale of the fish collecting done there, but outrage by divers went so viral on social media that Greg Whittaker, Moody Gardens' animal husbandry manager, went on Facebook with a video to defend the aquarium's position, saying they were only targeting a dozen species of blennies and gobies. Jim Abernethy of Jim Abernethy Scuba Adventures in Lake Park, a town just north of Riviera Beach, posted his own Facebook video to trash Whittaker's response, saying Moody Gardens' permit was for 86 species. He says Whittaker failed to mention the wrasses, surgeonfish, stingrays, angelfish, porkfish, parrotfish, octopus, jawfish, hogfish, hamlets, doctorfish, goatfish, chromis and the butterflyfish. Moody Gardens' divers collected 50 each of 86 species, equal to the 4,300 animals they got permits to collect.

Although Whittaker says Moody Gardens' fish collecting was done in the name of research and in collaboration with Texas A&M University, Abernethy alleges that someone from the university called him to say they had nothing to do with this tropical fish collecting, he had personally counted the fish collected, and there were only 36. (It's rumored that the collectors were three A&M graduate students doing the dives to earn some extra cash.)

Abernethy tells us that he didn't believe Whittaker after hearing an officer from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) say at least 100 animals were taken, and that a dive instructor who was on site videotaping the collecting mission looked in one of the tanks and saw at least 200. (He didn't get to see into the seven-foot-round tank at the back of the truck.)

Whittaker says the divers went to three different dive sites, but Abernethy disputes that, saying two of the dive site names listed on the permits start with "Blue Heron Bridge." "Is it the policy of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums to put professional tropical fish collectors in at one location to remove as many fishes as they can?" Abernethy asks.

Judging by the number of scuba tanks filled at a local dive shop for the three fish collectors, and the shallow depth of the site, Abernethy did the math and challenges Whittaker's claim to the number of fishes collected -- it would have meant they only caught one fish every hour. Unlikely. The collectors had to drive 110 miles every day to put

the captured fish in a large enough tank, indicating there were a lot more.

Abernethy also believes the FWC officers went back to the fish collectors' hotel room, where they might have encountered fish illegally caught, and forced them to release the fish back into the sea.

Meanwhile, Whittaker is unrepentant, saying on the Facebook video that the claims by angry divers are far from reality, and repeating Moody Gardens would not take fish from a sensitive ecosystem -- even though they had applied for a permit to take 4,300 specimens. He says his staff felt threatened by the conservation advocates who were there at the time, and that's why they released some fish back into the water. He talks of "bigger picture goals."

Abernethy scoffs at that, saying, "Every conservationist knows it is better to leave animals in their natural habitat than to take them and place them in a restricted container." He disputes Whittaker's claim that Moody Gardens was removing them from water rich in harmful pathogens, calling it "comical."

Jenny Wuenschel (Hollywood, FL), who has done over 200 dives at Blue Heron Bridge, read with shock and horror about the "atrocities." "Divers from around the globe come to BHB to photograph the concentration of unique animals in

a small area," she says. "Now, because of lack of ethics and very poor collection practices, the animals are gone."

Blue Heron Bridge sits within Phil Foster Park, which is owned by Palm Beach County. Currently, the county prohibits anyone from collecting fish from the bridge, but before these recent complaints, FWC was handing out permits to groups wanting to gather sea life for educational purposes. They have now put that program on hold.

But a few months before the Texas divers came to town, a few local divers had already banded together to petition the FWC to make the dive site a no-take for tropical marine species. They spoke at an FWC public meeting in June, and the commissioners agreed to discuss the topic sometime in 2019. The group was pretty upset when they read diver Tom Poff's Facebook post on October 5, telling how his group of divers came across four men with professional-grade collecting devices including sheet net, and listing many species by then missing. They posted it on their own Facebook page, the Blue Heron Bridge Dive Club.

"Talk about the post going viral," says Joanie Tomlin, a member of that group. "It reached almost 90,000 people and 673 shares on our page alone. God only knows how far it went, but Trip Advisor, Yelp, Moody, Texas A&M's Facebook pages, FWC,

"I Very Quickly Realized It Was a Crocodile"

You may remember the scary story of David Shem-Tov, an *Undercurrent* subscriber who was grabbed by a crocodile in Raja Ampat (read his story in our August 2009 issue). Australian marine biologist Melissa Marquez now has a similar tale. Doing a night dive while filming *Cuba's Secret Shark Lair*, a program for Discovery Channel's *Shark Week* in the Cuban archipelago Jardines de la Reina, she was set upon by a 10-foot-long American crocodile.

She reports how, a few seconds after her buddy started to ascend, "I felt this really hard pressure on my leg and suddenly I was being dragged backwards. I very quickly realized it was a crocodile."

A subconscious voice in her head told her not to struggle. "What I did that possibly saved my leg: stayed calm," Marquez says. "I tried not to move my leg as it dragged me so it wouldn't clamp down harder. Crocodiles have an insanely impressive bite force, and I'm tiny. It could easily break the bone or take my leg off."

Marquez didn't try to fight it off. Because she was wearing a neoprene wetsuit, she hoped that the receptors in the crocodile's mouth couldn't taste any blood and thus assume her leg probably wasn't food. Luckily, it didn't attempt a death roll that crocodiles are known for.

Soon the reptile let her go, and Marquez inflated her BC and shot to the surface. She suffered pretty deep puncture wounds and, far from any medical help, she cleaned them with bleach, water and a high-pressure hose. That night she became feverish and dehydrated. She got some very strong antibiotics by IV drip which saved her leg from further infection and was eventually evacuated to a Miami hospital, where she says she became a favorite patient, "because everyone wanted to look at my croc bite."

That incident won't keep Marquez out of the water. "There is always a risk when you work with wild predators," she says. "There is always a risk to your life and we all accept it."

all commented on it. Really just about anywhere folks could write reviews, they did.”

Tomlin is now an administrator for a new Facebook page titled Blue Heron Bridge Preservation Initiative, with more than 600 members who are passionate about keeping Blue Heron Bridge a collection-free dive spot. She says the Facebook posts have turned into more concrete action.

That Moody event was the catalyst that pushed the topic up the agenda for the FWC’s December 12 meeting. “The public backlash was enough so that FWC may even vote at its upcoming meeting to permanently ban collecting, both recreational and commercial. So, in my opinion it was a win-win. It wasn’t as bad as people made it sound, but it finally got the results we have been hoping for over decades.”

Even DEMA got involved. CEO Tom Ingram, together with the organization’s legislative advocate,

Bob Harris, attended FWC’s December 12 meeting in St. Augustine to add support and state its stance against fish collecting at Blue Heron Bridge.

The result: The FWC commission made changes to the draft proposal that, subject to approval at its February meeting, will “prohibit the collection of marine life fishery species (species collected for and managed for the tropical aquarium trade) within the [marine] park and surrounding waters.” They also approved expanding the previously proposed area to include additional waters north of Phil Foster Park. Score one for the passionate fans of Blue Heron Bridge and its marine life.

What’s your view regarding fish collecting for aquariums? We’d like to hear from you. Write to BenDDavison@undercurrent.org, not forgetting to tell your town and state.

-- John Bantin

Why Divers Die: Part I

being lazy, getting fat and succumbing to panic are big factors

Do you remember when it was diving that used to be dangerous and sex was safe? It’s amazing that with so many dives being done worldwide every year, so few people get killed while doing it. That’s the good news from the most recent incident reports published by U.S. and British dive agencies.

Divers Alert Network (DAN) collects dive accidents and fatalities and issues an annual report. For its latest one, of 2015 incidents, DAN observed that American and Canadian recreational scuba fatalities were at a 20-year low. (The British Sub-Aqua Club, which also keeps records for dives in the United Kingdom, came to the same conclusion in its neck of the woods.) Still, 127 fatalities were reported to DAN that year, 43 occurring in U.S. waters. It’s no surprise Florida had the most, because it’s the state with the most diving activity.

We can put this low rate of attrition down to proper training, good oversight by dive center staff and the application of common sense. But of course, even one fatality is one too many. There are always lessons to be learned from the death of a diver, and since its founding, *Undercurrent* has published significant dive fatality cases so that readers can better prepare themselves for safer

diving. You only dive for pleasure, so why risk your life doing it?

Lost at the Surface

Divers need to be responsible for their own actions, but boat crews also need to be prepared for when things go wrong. As these incidents show, lazy and inept boat crews help to create some worst-case scenarios.

In September 2016, we wrote a story analyzing what went wrong when five divers were lost at sea while diving at remote Malpelo Island. They went into the water as dusk approached, without lights or any surface-signaling devices. The crew of the Colombian-based liveaboard *MV Maria Patricia* failed to keep a proper lookout, so the divers weren’t seen when they surfaced prematurely, and the boat had insufficient fuel to make a search once crew realized the divers were missing.

Remarkably, at the same time this was happening, another group of divers suffered a similar experience on the other side of the globe. Setting off from Mauritius, the group became separated from their boat in rough seas. They were found after many

Dumping Lead Down the Toilet Gets a \$197,000 Fine

We divers like to think of our fellow divers and dive businesses as environmentally sensitive -- we're in that business, aren't we? -- but then, along come scofflaws like Seasoft Scuba Gear in Lacey, WA, which has been dumping hazardous waste down a toilet, which flowed into a storm drain and then onto the ground.

You see, they manufacture dive weights from corroded lead shot collected at shooting ranges, and after the weights are manufactured, their toxic lead and arsenic are a useless byproduct. Rather than spend the money to properly dispose of it, Seasoft just dumped it, allowing it to eventually seep into the once-pristine waters of Puget Sound, as well as into aquifers.

Thankfully, the state's Department of Ecology had an eye on them and has fined them a whopping \$197,000 (good for them). Washington's Department of Health is now working with Seasoft employees to determine how much of this poisonous lead and arsenic they were exposed to.

hours, but what was telling was what one diver said later of the crew: "It was like the instructor had no safety training. He had no radio, no SOS equipment, no way of calling for help."

You'd think boat crew would have double- and triple-checks of divers back on the boat down pat, but they're still leaving divers behind in error, too.

Laurel Silver-Valker was a frequent passenger on the *Sundiver Express* out of Long Beach, California, and was one of the divers on a lobster dive off Ship Rock at Santa Catalina Island on December 29, 2015. She was last seen at 9:35 a.m., descending from the boat to a depth of 15 feet. When the divers returned to the boat, roll was called -- but four divers' names were missing from the roll, including that of Silver-Valker, 45, so those names were not called out. The boat went to another dive site, and it was noon before crew realized she was missing. Up to 30 divers searched for her for more than two weeks, but Silver-Valker was never found. And this isn't the first time the *Sundiver Express* has left a passenger behind -- in 2010, a court awarded \$1.68 million to a Santa Monica man who was abandoned by the *Sundiver Express* and floated for five hours off the coast of

Newport Beach until a boat full of Boy Scouts happened to spot him and scooped him from the sea.

And just last September, a pair of British divers surfaced during late afternoon and were invisible to their dive boat due to the reflection of the sun on the water. The crew called the emergency services, and the lifeboat crew, coming from a different direction, reported that they were easily visible with both marker buoys and flashlight signals as darkness approached. Come on, dive crews, make more of an effort to move the boat around a bit, and scan the waters when your customers are missing.

The Panic that Causes More Problems

European divers tend to dive deep. An analysis of BSAC's 2018 Incident Report indicates that many divers' rapid ascents were due to anxiety or panic. Another high proportion was due to poor buoyancy control from weighting issues or problems with gear, including careless use of a delayed surface marker. And a few were caused by regulator free-flows (in cold freshwater) or divers mismanaging their air supplies.

In the DAN report, a 15-year-old openwater diver who was out of practice went out with a newly certified friend who was making his first dive without an instructor. Panic ensued after one diver ran out of air; they fought over the remaining functioning regulator, and the expected fatal results happened.

Of the 56 reported incidents of decompression illness reported last year in the U.K. (where deco diving is more common), nearly half involved dives deeper than 100 feet, although an equal number appeared to be within the limits of the casualties' computers. Ten percent were a result of a rapid ascent and seven percent involved missed decompression stops.

If an affected diver can get to a hyperbaric facility soon enough, the result of a DCI may not be fatal. However, a rapid ascent can be, and many of those are due to divers overweighting themselves. An inexperienced novice 50-year-old diver, wearing a rented BC and using newly purchased gear, including wetsuit, went diving with too much weight. Combine that with a heavy steel tank and it leads to fatal consequences. Her computer recorded an uneventful dive profile until the 18-minute mark, when a rapid ascent from 41 feet to the surface was followed by an immediate return back to 41 feet. The equipment inspection report concluded that a catastrophic loss of buoyancy was a significant factor in her death.

Sometimes a combination of problems arises. A British instructor teaching a student unknowingly had a breach between the corrugated hose and wing-style BC he was using. He was unable to

maintain buoyancy at the surface, and the poor student was unable to keep him there. The divers who recovered the instructor's body reported that his wing was unable to contain any air.

Readers Have Their Say about Our Review of Sunset House

An article in our November issue seems to have caused a stir, as the majority of reader letters we received focused on our travelin' diver's review of the Sunset House on Grand Cayman and the comments made about shoddy accommodations, bad food, and too many novice divers. The ratio seems about 50-50 for those who agreed with the review and those who didn't.

Dear Editor: While I value the majority of the reviewers' opinions, it seems this person was very ill-informed of what Sunset House is about. My wife and I have visited about five times since the '90s, and it seems the same today as it was back then (although the lockers need to be replaced). How can someone who has over 3,000 dives, traveled around the world and lives in Bonaire, not know what to expect?

As you know, Sunset House has been around forever and is successful because people are there for the diving and feel the divers should be responsible for their equipment, etc. While I know that newbie divers can be problematic, they've never really lessened my enjoyment on a dive. On the other hand, perhaps this review will discourage other pain-in-the ass travelers from going to Sunset House.

-- Wayne Joseph (San Mateo, CA)

Dear Editor: Thanks for telling the truth about Sunset House. *Undercurrent* is the only publication that would dare do that, as [the resort is] well-funded and can buy lots of advertisements.

I took my first dive group of about 35 divers there in 1984, and it was great! It's also still very good if you are going to Cathy Church's place to get photo lessons, albeit the rooms and food are very expensive. But since we first started going, it seems they have gone slowly and steadily downhill over the years. We went back several times and each time seemed not to live up to the first. By today's standards, for experienced divers, they do indeed way overprice and underdeliver.

-- John M. Davis (Chattanooga, TN)

Dear Editor: As a faithful subscriber for more than 30 years, I read with interest the recent article on Sunset House. I have found it to be exactly as they advertise: a place for divers. The rooms are comfortable, the boats depart on time, the staff is friendly and

the diving interesting. As for being under the flight path for the airport, that is correct, but the planes are high enough, it is not a disturbance.

I have never experienced any of the failings described in the accommodations. As for the diving, it is what it is: good visibility, warm water with a reasonable amount of underwater life, and close to mainland U.S.A. It is not Micronesia or Fiji, nor does it pretend to be. As for "newbie divers," everybody has to start sometime. Be tolerant of others.

As one gets older, those are things that have more importance than "hairy chested" diving. The reviewer obviously did not do his homework, or he would not have taken a 5mm wetsuit for 80-degree water.

My only complaint about Sunset House is the boats are a bit long in the tooth and showing wear -- and one has to carry one's weights back and forth to the boats.

-- William King (Isle of Palms, SC)

Dear Editor: We were particularly pleased with the article on Sunset House and Grand Cayman. Your field reporter did a spot-on assessment of the resort and the island scene. We have been frequent visitors to Grand Cayman since 1987 and had partial ownership of a condo along Seven Mile Beach for 30 years. The island has changed for the worse since the late '80s. It is no longer a tropical paradise.

Sunset House is old and tired -- a remnant of old Cayman. Though we have never stayed there, we always visit the outdoor bar/restaurant and take a shore dive or two there. It's refreshing to see an honest report about a dive destination instead of the rose-covered view that dive resorts and some dive magazines offer.

-- Dennis and Louise Marquering (Corvallis, OR)

Our Reply: Read *Undercurrent's* Reader Reports to get a spectrum of reviews of any dive resort and make your own judgment as to what suits you best. www.undercurrent.org/UCnow/dive_reviews/all_destinations.html

Undercurrent's rule has been that we can correct errors in reporting, but not impressions.

And an instructor can get injured if a student loses buoyancy control. There was a case of that last April, when an instructor suffered a DCI after rapidly ascending with a novice diver in that way.

Not Fit Enough to Dive?

There is always at least one mention every year in the DAN and BSAC reports of unfit and/or obese divers suffering accidents and fatalities. As we get older, we lose muscle tone and often put on pounds of fat where muscle was before. In living the good life, many of us become obese, even morbidly so. The weightlessness of diving can be seductively insidious. But the sudden requirement to fin hard against a current, struggle with full scuba gear through the shallows on a shore dive, or even climbing a boat's steep ladder while fully loaded with weights and tank, can easily cause a heart attack.

A female diver with a body mass index of 43 (anything over a BMI of 30 is considered obese) had difficulty climbing a boat's ladder in rough seas and

succumbed to the effort, not responding to CPR. Similarly, a 58-year-old inexperienced male diver with a BMI of 39 and a history of medical problems, including diabetes, but with a medical form signed by a physician, endured a hard surface swim back to the boat and lost consciousness at the ladder. He was lifted onto the boat for CPR, which was unsuccessful. An autopsy revealed extensive narrowing of his coronary arteries, and the cause of death was determined to be atherosclerotic and hypertensive cardiovascular disease.

Then there are the medical conditions that can be exacerbated while diving. A 54-year-old rebreather diver told people before a dive that he was feeling unwell, but thinking it was as a result of the previous night's dinner, he went into the water anyway. The autopsy's main findings included heart disease and plaque-obstructed arteries, so what the diver thought were symptoms of too-rich food were probably related to acute coronary syndrome.

Late last summer, the Coast Guard was called to a bay where a man had been diving solo

No Abalone Diving in California Until at Least 2021

It's more bad news for California's abalone divers: Already having missed a whole season in 2018, they won't be able to go again for at least two more years. Last month, the California Fish and Game Commission (CFGF) decided to keep the state's recreational abalone fishery closed through April 2021 to give the shellfish population a chance to bounce back. They based the decision on low density surveys from key sites along the North Coast.

The season is usually open from April to November for recreational diving north of San Francisco, but has been limited in recent years and was closed completely last year. The trouble really began with the El Niño of 2014-16, which sparked extreme environmental conditions for coastal environments: a massive kelp die-off and exploding numbers of purple sea urchins, which compete with abalone to eat the bull kelp left the slow-growing sea snails starving and not reproducing. Last year, the CFGF changed the rules to allow recreational divers to take up to 20 gallons of purple sea urchins a day from the waters off Sonoma and Mendocino Counties to see if that would help in the recovery of the bull kelp and abalone. (In one case, experienced divers used a vacuum device to suck the creatures from the ocean floor.)

A group of avid abalone divers has generally expressed support for the continued closure, but some

have asked that a small number be allowed to fish to continue collecting data -- and to keep the sport alive. Lifelong abalone diver, Steve Rebeck of San Luis Obispo, criticizes the CFGF for not taking more action sooner, like when the abalone density surveys indicated that the population was dropping in 2012, partly due to an algal bloom that killed a lot of them the year before. "It was clear it was a problem," Rebeck told the *San Francisco Chronicle*. "The department didn't really address it correctly, in my opinion. They wanted to keep the fishery open."

Abalone were once so abundant, San Franciscans plucked them from tide pools and cooked them on the beach. Overfishing caused the state to stop commercial fishing in 1997 and to allow only recreational fishing of the shellfish, and only north of the Golden Gate Bridge. Red abalone is the only species that can be fished now.

Abalone divers have been commiserating in Facebook groups about the continued closure of the wild fishery. A Sebastopol diver recently posted: "I am just an old abalone diver who is dreaming of getting some more abs before I die." Who knows when -- or if -- that will ever happen, as it's probably safe to say that Northern California abalone populations will never be as abundant as they once were.

although he was accompanied by two snorkelers. Apparently, he had been suffering breathing problems for the previous three months and had cotton stuffed in his ears when his doctor advised him to stop diving.

Besides being foolish, divers can also be deceitful, especially when filling out a medical declaration. A woman died while diving with a Bahamas dive outfit, and it was later discovered that she was suffering from terminal lung disease but had falsified her answers on the liability release so that she could "do one last dive."

Little if any medical research is done regarding the effects of drugs under pressure. A 41-year-old diver with 400 dives under her belt had been pre-

scribed the antidepressant Prozac three years prior to her last and fatal dive. She drowned in a quarry after abandoning her group of four divers and ascending alone. Her body was found later, and an autopsy deduced, rightly or wrongly, that the drug's toxicity was a contributing factor in her death.

The DAN report shows that the largest group of dead divers in the U.S. and Canada were between ages 50 and 69 years -- obviously a dangerous age.

-- Ben Davison

Next month, we'll take a look at more factors -- malfunctioning gear, hyperhydration and running boat engines among them -- that increase divers' fatality risks if they're not careful.

Wreck Diving for Beginners

should a teenager with four dives really be visiting Chuuk?

What do you think about a novice diver taking his equally novice offspring diving deep inside the confines of wrecks?

Penetrating the sunken wrecks at Chuuk (also known as Truk) Lagoon can be a dark, claustrophobic experience, with narrow entrance points in many cases, and plenty of things to get snagged up with. So, it was with some alarm that I read an article by Jim Shepard in *Hemispheres*, United Airlines' in-flight magazine, kindly sent to us by *Undercurrent* subscriber Mark Kimmey (Manhattan, NY).

There were initial clues in the first paragraph that revealed Shepard is not an experienced diver -- although he describes himself as "scuba obsessed," the reference to his "oxygen tank" is always a dead giveaway. But it's not the author's lack of experience that concerns me. It's the fact that he describes taking his children, 20-year-old Emmett and 15-year-old Lucy, inside these wrecks. He stressed to their Chuuk dive guide, Tryvin, that they were novices and that prior to their visit, they had made only four dives to 40 feet. When he told his certifying instructor in Florida that their next stop was Chuuk, he was met with jaw-dropped disbelief.

That reaction is one anyone who has experienced getting lost inside a confined space while diving will appreciate -- and probably emulate. Despite diving it many times, I'll never forget the time I lost my way inside the wartime wreck of the *SS Umbria*, a passenger and freight vessel scuttled by its Italian

crew and lying on its side on Wingate Reef outside Port Sudan. I began to feel an awful panic building as I struggled to find my way from its dark recesses, meeting unforgiving bulkhead after unforgiving bulkhead, before I finally managed to reacquaint myself with an exit route. I still bear the psychological scars.

That wreck is not unlike many of those Japanese fleet auxiliaries sunk by American bombers during World War II in Chuuk Lagoon, another famous wreck location I've been lucky enough to visit more than once. The number of intact wrecks invites penetration by divers, and there's much to see: engine rooms with tools still hanging on their racks; engine valves neatly laid out on benches where they were being serviced just as the ship was hit; the engines and generators themselves, oil-level sight-glasses still intact; huge torpedoes stored and awaiting transfer to submarines; submarine snorkels and periscopes lying along ship companionways; a huge lathe lying at a crazy angle; the skull of a seaman unfortunate to have been caught by a blast; the occasional clock stopped at the time of its demise; trucks, Zero planes, and of course, the little compressor in a side compartment of the Fujikawa Maru's engine room that is often dubbed "R2D2" and has provided so many iconic images.

Chuuk is a wreck diver's paradise, but forever remembering my unfortunate experience on the *SS Umbria*, I was always careful to brief my small and slender Chuukese guide before I penetrated the

bowels of a wreck with him. I explicitly told him not to lead me anywhere a bigger man carrying twin tanks and a large camera rig would find it difficult to squeeze through in the darkness. Despite its popularity, Chuuk wreck diving is not diving to be taken lightly. There are old divers and bold divers but few old, bold divers.

Prior to actually getting into the water at Chuuk, Shepard writes that his two children "do

what they can to manage their anxieties while wrestling into their BCs." His other son, Aidan, wisely cited claustrophobia as an excuse and ducked out of the experience.

Shepard was not a stranger to the dangers lurking underwater. He reflects in the article how, during a brief underwater experience as a 13-year-old, his air supply had failed without warning and he'd come as close as ever to killing himself . . . yet he

Confused about Lithium Batteries?

The rules for flying with lithium batteries are tough, not always well understood, and enforced differently around the world. When one of our subscribers departed Cairo via Jet Blue for New York's JFK airport, screeners confiscated his wife's AA rechargeable batteries, "saying they needed to be in checked baggage." TSA wants batteries NOT to be checked, in case they short and cause a fire, so if we had put the batteries in our checked bags, they could have been confiscated when we got to the U.S.

"After finishing the screening, I asked to see a supervisor and find out how a diver could get to the Red Sea and take photos if batteries in checked luggage would be taken by the TSA and batteries in a carry-on would be taken by their checkers. The supervisor asked why we had so many rechargeable AA batteries (16). I told him that both strobes required four batteries, and we charged the second set while using the first set. The supervisor took my wife's batteries and put them in her strobes, then distributed the second set of batteries into each piece of carry-on luggage, and said we were good to go. As soon as we were away from the screening area, we took the batteries out of the strobes to prevent the strobes from accidentally powering up and creating a heating issue, then we put the batteries back into the original, and much safer, storage container."

Our subscriber arrived home with all his gear, but the rule interpretations don't seem quite right. You see, the rules depend on the gear's configuration and either Watt/Hour (Wh) rating for rechargeable batteries or Lithium Content (LC) for non-rechargeable batteries.

Batteries less than 100Wh or two grams of LC -- such as the AA batteries commonly used in much photographic equipment -- can either be carried in dive equipment onboard or stowed in your checked baggage. A traveler is limited to two spare batteries.

Laptops usually have 11.1-volt batteries, while mobile phones use 3.7 volts. Batteries more than

100 Wh but less than 160 Wh can either be carried on or checked if installed within your laptop, camera, or mobile phone, but you must carry on your spares (a maximum of two). If you have a video or powerful dive light with lithium batteries, check their size. They will be marked with Ah/voltage or Wh. Those of more than 160 Wh are to be packed in your checked luggage, and you are required to inform the airplane staff when you check in; then it is up to the discretion of airline staff (who presumably check with the aircraft captain) if they travel with you. Batteries in underwater lights are specifically mentioned in the rules, although even the most powerful Keldan lights have batteries of less than 100 Wh now.

There is a lot of inconsistency among security in different countries, including our own TSA. If screeners think you have too many spares -- the number seems arbitrary -- they may confiscate them. Our senior editor, John Bantin, was told to carry his spare AA batteries in his hand luggage when traveling from the U.K., only to have them confiscated when making a connecting flight in the U.S. because "they should have been checked in." He says that in Egypt, security staff make a habit of confiscating batteries -- especially those that fit their private radios -- from a carry-on, so he conceals them in his checked baggage.

Security staff can still be confused. One reader recently reported that when a Cairo screener found he was carrying on his regulator, he was told all scuba gear must be in checked baggage, "so he insisted I check my carry-on bag (I had already checked my luggage). I believe the screener was confused about which scuba items are required to be checked." However, Bantin says that the reinforced high-pressure hose of a regulator shows up as a coil of wire on the X-ray, so it's wise to check it.

Yes, it can be confusing. What to do? If you don't want to miss your plane, just follow airport security's directions.

still wanted to wreck dive and “more importantly, to take his children wreck diving”?

He tells how they squeezed inside both the *Rio de Janeiro Maru* and the *Shinkoku Maru*, “working their way down to the infirmary deep in the stern, where we find an operating table still featuring a haunted little spill of arm bones.” On the *Yamagiri Maru*, their guide, Tryvin, leads them through a small opening. “Imagine a gap just wider than your shoulders and not much higher than an ottoman. When a daughter disappears into the darkness of a tiny metal hole at 80 feet of water, a parent really should follow. Emmett then squeezes in after me.”

In each case, Shepard states that he has to memorize where the obstacles and openings are before Tryvin turns a corner and disappears in the darkness. And so it goes on: An exciting description of diving the wrecks of Chuuk Lagoon. At least he doesn't mention the tanks on the *San Francisco Maru* -- the Japanese staff car in its hold is close to 200 feet deep. They even do one last night dive back on the *Shinkoku Maru*: “One slightly lunatic addition on our next-to-last day.”

He writes, “One moment from that dive stays with me: Emmett discovering through a raised forward of the bridge a wonderful eerie glimpse of a narrow and encrusted metal staircase hatch leading down, down, down, through three and then four decks, deep into a blackness even our headlight-bright dive lights can't penetrate.”

Shepard reflects that they wished they'd brought more flashlights. “Imagine a slow-motion and labyrinthine steeplechase in the dark with all sorts of shattered and disintegrating metal structures across your path at random angles, and ceilings a foot or so above your head, and you get the idea. I follow Lucy's fins down yet another pinched and murky passageway ... but the good news is that this is an intelligently managed risk ...”

Shepard's a good writer and it's a wonderfully written piece, but what do you make of a novice diver taking his novice diver offspring on such dives? What risks did they seem oblivious to? The young people were lucky to experience the pinnacle of wreck diving so early in their diving careers, but were they also lucky in some other way? Would you have taken your 15-year-old daughter or son on such an adventure?

When sending us this story, Mark Kimmey wrote, “I was a little appalled by the idea of taking novice divers into wrecks without training and gear, especially those wrecks that may be starting to collapse. Shepard doesn't mention wreck reels, but he does comment that he wished they had brought more lights. Seriously, what kind of diver enters a wreck without lights?”

We'd like to hear what you think. Write to **BenDDavison@undercurrent.org** with your observations.

-- John Bantlin

Flotsam & Jetsam

Komodo Park Fees on the Rise. If you want to visit Komodo and see the dragons, be prepared to pay a whopping \$500 for the privilege. The administration is planning to raise the Komodo National Park's entrance fee for divers, currently \$12 per day, as part of their effort to boost the conservation area's prestige. They are also considering whether tourist ships entering the area should pay \$50,000, which would mean that only people with deep pockets can visit. Is that the end of liveaboard diving at Cannibal Rock?

Misinformation about Burst Eardrums. It seems former British Navy diver David Sisman was using poetic license when he told people he had Teflon eardrums. We mentioned his assertion in our November article about burst eardrums, but Paul Neis, an otolaryngologist, wrote to say that

eardrums are always reconstructed with human tissue. (We'd ask Sisman to reply but he has been dead for 20 years.) Neis tells us that the article was also probably referring to exostoses, commonly seen in cold-water swimmers, rather than adenoids, originally mentioned by subscriber Robert Levine (Englishtown, NJ) after he burst an eardrum while diving with a head cold.

Don't Book a Shark Dive on the Sharkwater Right Now. The website Ensenada.net reports that Mexican authorities, responding to a complaint about unlicensed trips to do cage diving with great whites at Guadalupe Island, boarded the *MY Sharkwater* early last month to make a surprise inspection. The research vessel is owned and operated by Fins Attached, a nonprofit based in Colorado Springs, CO, and it allegedly offered both cage diving and submarine trips for \$5,000 per person. Without the required permits, the *Sharkwater* and its unlucky passengers were ordered back to

Ensenada, where it must remain until the legal situation is resolved.

A Siladen Correction. In editing our travel stories, we ask writers for their final approval before we go to press, but in editing the October 2018 piece on Siladen, Indonesia, we failed and erred by implying the entire resort could be smoky due to trash fires outside their grounds. That's not true. Our sentence should say, "Too bad they couldn't do anything about the smudgy smoke from fires just outside the far end of the resort that could pose a hazard to guests with lung issues in the one or two villas at that extreme end." We apologize for our error.

Queensland Gets That Sinking Feeling. It cost \$3.9 million to prepare and sink the *HMAS Tobruk*, the Australian Navy's first heavy-lift ship, 15 miles off the Queensland coast. Intended as a world-class diving attraction, the sinking of the *Tobruk* followed a five-year campaign by the local dive industry and paid for by the state government. Unfortunately, the 416-foot vessel ended up on its starboard side, rendering useless much of the preparatory work to make penetration safe for divers. So the Queensland government is now spending another half-million dollars on a marketing campaign to promote diving on the portside-up *Tobruk*.

Fatal Shark Attack in the Sea of Cortez. Nahum Verdugo Aguilera, 35, was part of a group diving for shellfish from a fishing panga near the Mexican resort city of Puerto Penasco on December 18. After doing a duck step off the boat, Aguilera was seen floating at the surface shortly after. When two companions tried to get him back into the boat, they saw that his right thigh was lacerated, and his entire left leg and part of his abdomen were missing, and they realized he had been attacked by a shark. Seems like Aguilera jumped from the boat straight onto either a large tiger or great white shark, which had reacted instinctively by biting him. Because of

the extent of his injuries, Aguilera was thought to have died quickly.

Roatan's Island of Floating Trash. The infamous Great Pacific Garbage Patch has a sibling. A five-mile-wide sea of plastic is floating off the Honduran island of Roatan, near the town of Omoa, and includes broken footballs, soda bottles, toothbrushes and shoes. It's not just trash from Roatan -- Omoa's mayor says much of the stuff is clearly from neighboring Guatemala. If you're headed to the Bay Islands soon, let us know if this new "island" starts impacting diving there.

Goodbye, Bob Halstead. Born in the U.K. in 1944, Halstead was a physics teacher who took a teaching post in the Bahamas, where he fell in love with diving and gradually swapped careers to scuba full-time. In 1977, he fitted out his first dive boat in Papua New Guinea, followed by the liveaboard *MV Telita* in 1984, which became home to him and his first wife, Dinah. He wrote numerous books and dive guides, and won many awards for underwater photography, even being credited with first describing a specimen of rhinopias. Halstead was one of the dive industry's most prolific journalists, and continued to be after he moved to Cairns, Australia in 1996 with his second wife, violinist Kirtley Leigh, with whom he shared passions for both scuba and music. He passed on December 18 after a long illness.

Double Deaths in a Tulum Cenote. Two highly qualified German cave divers were found drowned approximately 4,000 feet from the entrance of Gran Cenote Kalimba in Tulum on November 21. It seems they underestimated how long it would take to get back to where they left their stage cylinders. Kalimba had a similar double cave diver fatality in 2004. Officers from Tulum's Civil Protection office shut down the cenote, which had been operating illegally since 2014, when it was officially closed after a swimmer died there.

undercurrent

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