

Over the week we dove North Seymour, Marchena, Gordon Rocks, and the northernmost islands, Darwin and Wolf. The diving, especially at the latter two sites, was everything that we had been led to believe — spectacular scenery, prolific sea life, and action everywhere, including all kinds of pelagics and school fish, sea lions and fur seals, dolphins, turtles galore, and last but not least, hammer-head sharks in every direction.

The nine crew members were by far the nicest, most helpful, and friendliest that we have met on any live-aboard. The 90-foot launch is well appointed, with plenty of room above and below decks for the 12 paying passengers. A large work area and E-6 processing are available for the underwater photographer. Each twin stateroom has its own shower and toilet and plenty of stowage space. The upper two cabins are the best, if you are not prone to seasickness. This is comfort plus-plus-plus — and the food was great.

Charters are typically 1 to 2 weeks. One-week charters do not normally allow trips to Wolf and Darwin, where land visits (an important part of the itinerary) are not possible. We were lucky with the weather and to have fellow passengers who were all keen to visit the northernmost islands. Our one regret was not booking for 2 weeks; a week is just not long enough.

Strong currents (that is where the best action is), with the need for drift diving and the use of inflatables, makes this a location for fit and experienced divers. One final point: in the light of prior experience as well as recent tragedies in Palau, we were pleased to note that air horns and inflatable safety sausages were made freely available to those without.

## Trouble in Tonga

In Vavua, Tonga, we were on a Moorings Sail boat and hooked up several times with Dolphin Pacific Divers. This was a most disappointing experience. First we rented six tanks at a hefty price, only to find them half empty. We were picked up at our anchorage for a morning dive, only to be

dropped in the water downcurrent of the dive site. We fought to exhaustion to complete the dive as outlined. The afternoon dive was almost as bad. We were instructed to do 40 feet for 40 minutes. We spent most of our time around 25–30 feet but at precisely 40 minutes were ordered out of the water with 2,000 psi left. — Chip Pough, Trooper, PA



# Disk Jockeying

## Everything You Ever Wanted to Know . . .

The computer on my desk lights up edge to edge with a brilliant color photo of an anemonefish. The music stutters a little, then picks up speed, turning into a mystic melody. A box in the lower left of the screen begins to play a movie of cruising sharks, schooling fish, and gliding manta rays. I've turned on and tuned into the world of interactive CD-ROMs.

When CD-ROMs (compact disk — read only memory) first appeared on the market, what impressed everyone most was the sheer amount of information that could be stored on a single disk — 600 times more than a conventional floppy. What could all this available memory be used for? The beginning rush targeted large reference works such as encyclopedias, phone books, and

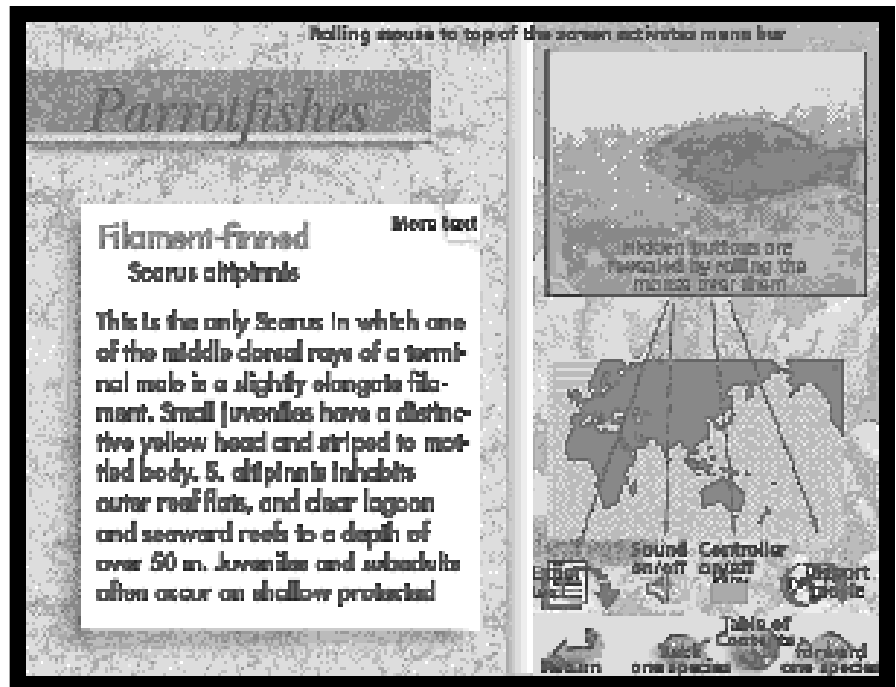
almanacs, but as sales for CD-ROM players in the home computer market have increased dramatically over the past couple of years, so has the selection of material. The broadening spectrum now lets you design your own MTV-style music video, help Sherlock Holmes solve a mystery, or browse 107 books on U.S. history. Anything of interest to divers? We took a look.

## Ocean Life

We found Ocean Life, a series on marine life produced by Sumeria, a San Francisco-based company. Volume 1, *Western Pacific*, was obviously their learning experience. From a main screen, button selections of fish families take you to written descriptions of species. Click on a small box in the upper corner of the screen, and it plays an action video of the species. Click on a fish icon at the bottom, and the screen moves to the next species in the family. This volume contains only about 40 species and lacks audio. The video sequences are small, and some are of such poor quality that they would be of little help in identification.

In Volume 2, *Micronesia*, improvements are immense. Large photos of fish species appear for each family as you move your cursor down a slide bar. Click on the species, and in addition to a vastly improved movie segment for each species, a pleasing voice describes behavior, range, and so on. A pull-down menu lists and accesses all families and species by name. Text searches scan all the files, and you can export both text and movies. Another movie section lets you view all the movies in a sequence, with narration.

*Micronesia* is a 2-disk volume containing more than 20



families and 150 species. Another new addition is a section on reef life that covers 15 behaviors, such as mating, predation, and nesting, all presented with action videos. A map section has been added, allowing full-screen viewing of a world political map, a world

relief map, and a regional map of Micronesia on which you can click for a close-up map of any area. By moving icons of map pins, you can get a continuous readout of the distance between pins. This volume lives up to its description as an interactive CD-ROM-based book.

## Lock It or Lose It

Even though most of the time I lug my essential dive gear in a carry-on, I still look longingly at my main gear bag as it disappears down the conveyor belt. Will it be there when I get there?

And if it is, will it be complete? In a recent incident in Washington, D.C., the FBI, following up a lead from American Airlines, recorded 29 luggage break-ins within 2 months by baggage handlers.

An Air Transport Association study states that only one in every 33,000 bags is pilfered. If true, that's not such bad odds, but I suspect once we enter the Third

World, those odds go up dramatically. In any case, it matters not whether the odds are good if you are the victim.

I always use a small lock on the main compartment of my dive bag, but it has four other zippered pockets as well. It's too much trouble to lock them all, so I use small key chains to secure the zippers. Although they don't lock the compartment, the time and dexterity it takes to remove the tiny ball from the connecting socket should insure that a baggage handler can't just slip his hand into the bag unnoticed and remove my favorite dive light.



In Volume 3, *Hawaiian Islands*, Sumeria continues to improve on the technology. They've added a multimode access that lets you browse by photo, name, or keyword, and a visual index of families and phyla. This volume contains photos and video for 90 species.

All of Sumeria's CDs are hybrids that will run on IBM

compatibles as well as Macintosh. For more information, contact 800-478-6374 in the U.S. and Canada (415-904-0889 in the Bay Area), Monday-Friday, 9:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Pacific time.

Ocean Life:

Vol. 1: *Western Pacific* . . . \$39.95

Vol. 2: *Micronesia* . . . . . \$49.95

Vol. 3: *Hawaiian Islands* \$49.95



## Oceans Below

This CD bills itself as “the closest you’ll ever come to diving without getting wet!” From a world map you choose your dive destination. Once there, you are presented with a set of icons. Select the binoculars, and you can view narrated movies of topside attractions. Choosing the fish brings up a limited selection of sea creatures that you click on to get an array of sparse and mainly useless information on each species.

Select the mask-and-snorkel icon to go diving; the image switches to a dive boat, and the audio gives a brief description of dive conditions, maximum bottom time, and depth. Now click the thumbs-down icon; you’re on your way to the bottom. A dive mask appears as a border around a movie of divers descending. The narration informs us that “the universal signal to get someone’s attention is to clank your dive knife against your tank.” (I hope not too many dive guides watch this video.)

Once you’re on bottom, a scene appears with several superimposed images of marine life. Clicking on each of these images activates a narrated movie about the subject. All are brief. Some tell what it is and something about it; others tell you nothing — such as, “From big eyes to small bodies to beautiful patterns, it takes all kinds to make up a reef community.”

Another section features a photo of dive gear. Click on the BC, and it will tell you what it is and what it’s used for. This CD is for kids and the non-diver.

*Oceans Below* . . . . . \$25

Available from  
Tiger Software,  
800-888-4437.

