

in your tank is safe to breathe? It isn't easy. Detector-tube test kits are available to test for carbon monoxide, but they're generally only accurate to within 20-30% — and they don't tell you anything about condensed hydrocarbons or methane.

The best thing you can do at this point is to talk to your dive-shop operator. Find out what he does to assure safe, high-quality air fills. Ask to see his last quarterly testing record. Trace Analytics of Austin, Texas, and Lawrence Factor of Hialeah, Florida, both offer quarterly testing programs for under \$300 per year. Trace's special PADI pricing is about half that, so there's really no

excuse for a shop not having its air tested. And while quarterly testing doesn't insure that every air fill is safe every day, it does imply a certain level of care and integrity on the part of the operator. The bottom line? Don't take your air fills for granted.

For further information, contact one or more of the following organizations:

Trace Analytics, Inc.
Ruby Ochoa
(800) 247-1024
fax (512) 328-4122

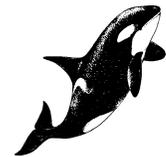
Lawrence Factor, Inc.
Michael Casey
(800) 338-5493

PADI
Roger Josselyn
(714) 540-7234

IANTD
Patti Mount
(305) 751-4873

TDI
Dave Sipterly
(305) 853-0966

CGA
1725 Jefferson Davis Hwy., Ste.
1004
Arlington, VA 22202



Close Encounter of the Shark Kind

Running with the Bulls off Florida

The letter below argues that you don't have to travel to exotic locations to get major thrills from the underwater world.

Dear *In Depth*:

Near West Palm Beach, there is a dive called "The Cave." It's usually reserved for advanced divers, since it's 140 feet down with occasional strong current. Bottom time is but 10 minutes. The idea is to hit the water, head for the bottom, swim quickly through the 60-foot tunnel, and beat feet for the surface. My dive buddy and our divemaster, a retired Navy Seal, normally refrain from such depth; besides being 10 feet beyond the recre-

ational limit, there's just no bottom time.

However, one particularly beautiful morning we decided to splurge. We are all advanced divers and experienced as a team.

After the usual details of time and terrain, our divemaster advised, "Expect to encounter something large." My buddy and I looked at each other, shrugged, and rolled backwards. We hit bottom in under a minute, squared away our equipment, and checked computers. The visibility was fantastic as we swam along the side of the underwater mountain. I had already forgotten our

divemaster's closing remark.

Within a minute we came upon the entry to the cave (really a tunnel). As previously agreed, the divemaster pointed at the entry and then swam over the top of the mountain to wait for us at the tunnel's exit. I looked, my buddy looked. No sweat, I thought, since we could see the other end clearly.

When we were no more than 25 feet in, a 7-foot blacktip shark shot out with lightning speed. *Wow, how exciting . . . Interesting — sharks run away from you . . . What incredible speed. . . .* Then it occurred to me that the black-tip was the

large something he had warned us to expect.

We continued cruising, swimming over boulders, enjoying the coral formations, looking toward the exit point. We had both passed the last boulder before the exit when, not more than 5 feet in front of our faces, this THING lifted off the bottom of the ocean floor: 10½ to 11 feet of full-grown bull shark. It looked mammoth, majestic, glorious. We had startled the old boy; we had awakened him from his slumber, invaded his space.

He (I'm just assuming gender here — I didn't check for claspers on the pelvic fins) began to thrash violently. Finally he attained forward propulsion and swam out of the tunnel, but he didn't leave. He circled out in the light. All I could think of was *Jaws*. My buddy and I stayed behind the boulder, watching as this submarine of a shark, with a body cavity as big as a 55-gallon drum, a 2½-foot dorsal fin, and black eyes, came swimming right back at us.

I began, "Dear heavenly Father. . . ." But just in case, my buddy and I slid down behind the big boulder, got on our backs, and waited for the big fish to slide right over us. Instead of swimming into the cave, the shark made a sharp 180-degree turn to the right and swam off into the blue mist.

It took me a minute to gather my wits before the old refrain, TIME-AIR-TIME-AIR-TIME-AIR, hit me. I looked at my computer and my buddy looked at his. I was down to 970 pounds of air. My U.S. Divers Monitor II was beeping, flashing, and doing everything it could to get my attention.

We hit the exit point of the cave to find our divemaster waiting for us. He had seen the giant emerge from his vantage point above the exit and had taken up residence behind another boulder.

On our way up, at about 100 feet, it occurred to me that I couldn't say exactly where the massive bull shark had gone. I remembered their reputation as curious rascals who often come back for a closer look. I began doing 360 turns all the way up. By the time I had corkscrewed my way to the surface, I had 230 pounds of air left. My buddy had a little more, but his eyes were abso-

lutely bloodshot. He claimed mask squeeze, but we both knew it was from high blood pressure!

I already knew it was a special privilege to be a diver and have all the beauty of the ocean available for personal viewing, but this experience was one in a million. I have a difficult time believing that a creature so magnificent could be destroyed just for a bowl of soup.

— Louie Carrillo
Ft. Lauderdale, FL



Backtalk on Tonga Other Readers Beg to Differ

Tonga is an interesting place: the only South Pacific country that was never colonized by a European power. Most Tongans do, however, speak some English. It's not exactly on the beaten dive path, but it appears from our correspondence that Tonga could be heating up. Chip Popugh, of Trooper, Pennsylvania, sent us a report on his bad experience in Tonga, complete with half-empty tanks, being dropped downcurrent from the dive site, and having some dives cut so short that he was ordered out of the water with 2,000 psi left. Following are reactions from other recent visitors to Tonga.

Dear Editor:

This letter is presented as partial counterpoint to that of Chip Popugh, with respect to the problems he encountered

with Dolphin Pacific Divers in Vava'u, Tonga (July 1994 issue).

We recently (June–July '94) completed a bareboat (sail-it-yourself) charter with the Moorings in Vava'u. In contrast to Chip's tank rental experience with Dolphin Pacific, we had no such problems. However, the single 80s that seemed an initial bargain at 10 pa'anga (about \$8.00 U.S.) per day, became less so when we discovered that this was assessed every 24-hour period until the tanks are returned, which is often difficult logistically due to the location of the Dolphin Pacific facility within the sailing area.

We also did one 2-tank rendezvous dive with Dolphin Pacific, and although their boat was somewhat spartan, we were