
refused to certify Alsip for diving. Disappointed, to say the least, Alsip requested a partial refund for the diving he had prepaid and Sand Dollar referred him to Caradonna Caribbean Tours (Longwood, Florida), with whom he had organized his trip. Alsip wrote Caradonna in October to say that he was deprived of two-thirds of the dives and “I therefore deem it fair and just that you reduce your billing by the same percentage.”

Caradonna responded two days later with a breakdown of the costs — which included air far, car rental, meals, and lodgings, and agreed to refund only \$87.50 of a bill that exceeded \$1,100. They noted that he had used other services and could not be reimbursed.

Alsip is unhappy with the decision. After all, he says, he only went to dive and his diving was curtailed.

I too would be disappointed if I were 86'd from diving, and I sympathize with him. But I think that Caradonna is correct and is under no legal or moral responsibility to refund Alsip's payments for air, hotel, meals, or car rental. I do believe that they are morally committed to refund the money for the missed dives, but I'm surprised — and pleased — that they did.

Ben Davison

Arms Race

A little light on lightweight strobe mounts

Most underwater photography is not for the casual shooter — it takes dedication, perseverance, big bucks, and a ton of equipment. An anal personality is helpful.

One who has indulged himself in this pursuit knows the importance of positioning the camera's strobes; it can make the difference between a great photo and a trash-can photo. Generally the best way to wrestle strobes into the right position is to mount them on flexible arms attached to a tray, or directly to the camera or housing. Ideally these arms should be easy to pack, sturdy, and lightweight.

Several years ago, Technical Lighting Control (TLC) introduced lightweight arms that, although expensive, provided a new degree of flexibility and usability. I rushed out and spent my money. Now, another manufacturer, Ultra Light, claims significant improvements over TLC's version of the arms. Not only are they supposed to be even

lighter and more flexible, they also have O-rings in their ball joints that, says Ultra Light, provide greater holding power to maintain the position of a heavy strobe.

To test these claims, I packed enough Ultra Light arms and trays to secure two strobes on both my Nikonos and my housed camera system and headed for Fiji.

Although it took me a while to get used to the new setup, the Ultra Lights were truly light and strong and a pleasure to use. The ball mount at the strobe made aiming much easier and caused less drag than my standard TLC arms. (TLC now offers a lighter set of arms for macro work.) They packed nicely too, breaking down into smaller and lighter components than the TLC system. A spring in the clamps made assembly easier (the trick was to hold the clamp together with one hand and spin the knob with the other). The knobs were much easier to tighten than the TLC's.

Quibbles, Gripes, & Kvetches

Although the flexibility of the ball joints was a plus for positioning the strobes, it also let the arms slip out of position when I handled the camera above water, especially when using large strobes such as Ikelite 150s. I learned to prevent this by carefully folding the arms and carrying the setup, but it was hard to get this across to the boat crew who handled the camera.

The tightening screw for the dovetail tray mounting brackets kept working loose. So did the adapters mounted at the ends of the camera pivot and the clamp securing the camera pivot to the Nikonos. Putting in a lock washer helped, but that's easy to lose when you remove the camera from the pivot.

The Bottom Line

Fortunately, the Ultra Light is fully combinable with TLC's equipment, so I can mix and match components as funds allow. Normally I would need two arms (\$48 each), three clamps (\$28 each), a strobe adapter (\$22) and a tray adapter (\$22) to mount one strobe on a system (total: \$224). Ultra Light offers special arms for the

Nikonos RS, and a quick-disconnect, along with many other accessories, such as adapters to fit most strobes, cameras, housings, and video systems.

Tip: Ultra Light's "camera pivot" designed for the Nikonos is basically a tray that you can swivel 90 degrees to easily change strobe orientation from horizontal to vertical. It's a nice feature, but useful only in special situations. It lists for \$200.

Ultra Light: 800-635-6611 at 3304 Keith Ave., Oxnard, California 93035. Dealers include Helix (800-33-HELIX)

and AB Sea Photo (310-645-8992).

P.S.: Ikelite has announced a similar set of arms it calls Quick Grip. These have a larger ball diameter (1.25 inches), so they may be less prone to slipping with a heavy load, especially on the surface. However, they are not compatible with Ultra Light or TLC systems. I have not tested these, but owing to Ikelite's reputation in the underwater photo community, I expect them to be well designed and backed by Ikelite's highly regarded service.

W. D.

Random Scatterings

News from on line and on letters

A British woman was attacked by a shark while swimming off **Australia's Heron Island Resort**. She managed to tear herself free of the shark and wade ashore to seek help. She was flown by helicopter from the island — 14 miles off the Queensland coast — to a hospital on the mainland, where she was reported to be in a stable condition. A great white? A tiger? No, she was attacked by a small whale shark in five feet of water, said a spokesperson for the resort. If true, it's the first time I've ever heard of the plankton eater attacking a person.

A tourist in the **Florida Keys** tried to reverse the role. Standing in shallow water, he spotted a 3-foot nurse shark, grabbed it by its tail, and hung on. The shark responded by turning around and biting the tourist's leg. Leg wrapped in a towel, the shark attacker retreated to a hospital in Marathon.

Shark experts and diving daredevils Ron and Valerie Taylor say they have tested an electronic device that repels sharks, and it actually works. The **Shark-Off device**, due on the commer-

cial market by May, comes in two parts. One is strapped to the tank and the other to a fin. An electric field is generated between them, providing a safe zone of up to 22 feet in testing by the Taylors.

I enjoy the pleasures of both land-based and live-aboard diving. Each has its pluses and minuses. Jeff Brundrett, Shawnee Mission, Kansas, pointed out one of the negatives of close-quarter living on a boat. During his March trip aboard the ***Nekton Pilot in the Bahamas***, a virus swept through the ship, affecting 60 percent of the crew and passengers. . . . Christopher James, Dublin, New Hampshire, also made a March trip on the ***Nekton Pilot***. "Definitely not a luxury craft, the ***Nekton*** is comfortable and stable and ideal for those who want to dive, talk about it, and go to sleep — for advanced divers who wish for unrestricted and unsupervised diving, it's terrific. Five dives a day are possible [one of the live-aboard pluses], always a 3,200-psi fill, good storage, hot showers, good food, great crew, and a relaxed atmosphere."

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John Q. Trigger

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