

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Kona Diving Company, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii *cool endemic critters and -- with luck -- a manta show*

IN THIS ISSUE:

Kona Diving Company, Kailua-Kona, Hawaii1

Aqua Lung's BC Recall3

What's a Heated Vest, and Should You Buy One?4

Komodo Resort Diving Club, Indonesia.....6

Send Us Your Reader Reports 8

"Ship of Gold" Treasure Hunter Captured in Florida9

Life and Death on the Reef....10

Lionfish Aren't the Only Invaders in Florida Waters12

Stop Panic Underwater.....13

Dead Diver's Wife Sues a *Shadow Diver* Star15

Put Your Name on a Reef for \$100,000.....17

Flotsam & Jetsam18

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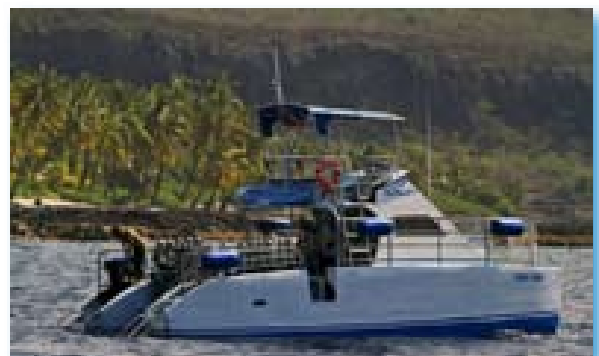
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Dear Fellow Diver:

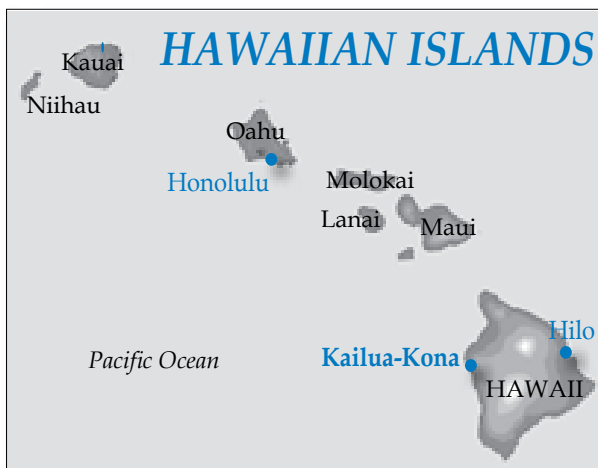
Groans echoed, along with whooping and blooping, underwater surround sounds that greeted me as I descended into Kona's Arches. Aware that humpback song can travel for miles, I scanned the deep blue in hopes of a rare social encounter, but without luck. Only our divemaster, Katie, briefly saw one whale, but topside all 12 of us were in awe when a small pod breached and tailed, and several calves somersaulted. It was a fabulous 15-minute acrobatic show, a great welcome to Kona. Regardless, I came here to dive.

When I e-mailed queries to several Kailua Kona dive shops, only Kona Diving Company responded promptly and personally to my every question. They were upfront about my needing a rental car to drive to the boat dock, Kona's cold and rough water conditions in February, and they encouraged the "weak of stomach" to use seasick meds. Their motto: Our passion is under the surface, our service is over the top. Picking them was an easy choice. As requested, I dropped by their downtown office the day before my first dive to sign the obligatory release, present my certification card, and meet co-owner Kerry Key. They gave me a map to Honokohau Marina and told me where to find their 34 foot catamaran Hale Kai, or "Ocean House."

The Hale Kai carries a maximum of 12 divers, divided into two groups, each with their own dive-master. There were new faces each day, often Canadian or Alaskan snowbirds seeking the sun, so there wasn't much time for bonding. The



The Hale Kai



first day's boat introduction (those who had heard the speech remained on the dock) included a briefing about the location of life vests, emergency oxygen and the defibrillator. Tank holders with a bench and cubbies ran down the center of the dive deck. There were mask and camera rinse tanks, a hot-water hose for washing off and hair conditioner "for the women." (Bring your own towel.)

On my first day, three divemasters, including Kerry, who did rescue training, were to guide the divers. (One diver was getting his open water certification, another his rescue training.) The catamaran was snug, but manageable. We were encouraged to use the marina restroom before departure because the boat head required a steep ladder descent below decks, and was off-limits to divers with dripping wetsuits. Hanging off the sturdy twin stern ladders was the chosen drainage site, and the crew actually asked if everyone was finished using the ladders before raising them.

Kona's underwater topography is interesting -- lava tubes, many of which you can swim through, are a unique feature -- but it's not colorful, only muted shades of green, beige and gray hard corals, with few soft corals. However, the unique tropical fish (certainly not Caribbean mainstays) make the diving interesting. At the Arch, a zebra eel viciously devoured a black urchin, unbothered by the quills. Nearby, I spotted a whitemouth moray. Several brown octopuses cavorted in the open, and I saw a little green-striped tasseled juvenile rock-mover wrasse, and belted and psychedelic wrasses. Billy, who had a signal for every critter, found a sponge crab under a rock, and I spotted a devil scorpionfish and a trembling nudibranch, which was new to me. At Pyramid Pinnacles, we searched for other endemic species, like the millet seed butterflyfish and potter and saddleback angels, but no luck.

While the air hovered around 80 degrees with 20-plus m.p.h. trade winds, the water averaged 72 degrees. I wore a fleece-lined body suit over Underarmour underwear plus a 5-mil wetsuit, hood, and gloves. I envied a few savvy divers and the crew who wore battery-heated underwater vests (see the sidebar on page 4). While we could stay down as long as we wanted -- some stayed as long as 80 minutes -- the chill led me to the surface after an hour. Billy analyzed my nitrox mix prior to every dive (32 percent for the first, 36 percent for the second). Diving between 50 and 75 feet, and with only two dives except for the last day, I wasn't concerned about my Nitrox levels. The other two divemasters were Luke Mason and Katie Key, the owner's niece, who each had around four years of experience and were friendly and knowledgeable. Both Billy and Luke repeatedly asked divers for readings on their air gauges until they were comfortable with their consumption. All three were great at critter spotting.

The camera table served as the "food buffet." Kona Diving provided plastic containers with dry turkey, roast beef and veggie wraps, all overwhelmed with sprouts. Everyone helped themselves whenever they wished, but the food was tasteless and boring -- they need a new caterer. The crew, who ate protein bars, referred to the wraps as "guinea pig and raccoon." There were also M&M trail mix and goldfish, a jug of cold water, instant tea, hot chocolate, soup, coffee, soda and super brownies.

Around 7 a.m. the second day, I looked out my window at a rainy and windy day. Partially wanting to scrap the dive, I called the shop, but Kerry told me "It's not prohibitive." So off I went for the 8 a.m. departure. At the Aquarium, we swam through a lava tube, timing our entrance with the surge, while Billy waited at the exit to ensure the six of us, finning in a line, had timed

our exits with the surge. Later, a sizeable manta swooped overhead, casting a shadow from the new-found sunlight. On the bottom, I moseyed past a wavy leaf scorpion, a purple flat worm, conch, titan and even a red spotted pipefish, a critter I might see muck diving. At Big Arch, rocking to-and-fro in the surge, I spotted a camouflaged frogfish, colorless on a rock. Colorful harlequin shrimp were snug in a piece of hard coral. I saw a unique decoy, a psychedelic scorpionfish and a wandering hermit crab. I've made plenty of dives in the Indian Ocean, but here on an unattractive bottom, I was sure seeing some new stuff.

On our third day, as we motored to Koloco Canyon, Katy spotted a hammerhead and quickly jumped into the water, sans wetsuit, only to watch him swim away. Cruising through the lava canyons of Koloco Canyon, I watched a horn helmet eating a black urchin at a snail's pace. While looking for endemic fish like potter's and flaming angels, psychedelic wrasse, black stripe coris, and Whitley boxfish, I was amazed to see a blue trevally and white-mouth eel hunting together. The eel would chase critters out of the rocks for the trevally to eat, then the trevally chased everything back into the rock to feed the eel. Fascinating symbiosis, for sure. I watched a seaweed-looking rock-moving wrasse and spotted the brilliant pink egg case of a Spanish dancer nudibranch. Billy placed an urchin next to a crown of thorns, a move designed to have his charges watch the crown feast, but neither critter moved. A great barracuda

Aqua Lung Recalls All BCs with SureLock II Weight Pockets

In the April 2013 issue, we reported that Aqua Lung was doing its second recall of BCs with SureLock II weight pocket handles. It recalled 110,000 of them because the company received more than 200 reports of the rubber handles detaching from the pockets. (Its first recall was in fall 2012). Now there's a third recall, and Aqua Lung has expanded it to cover all SureLock II handles, because it received 50 more complaints from divers of detached weight pockets. The recall is for its BCDs sold since September 2008. Whether you have an original rubber handle or one of the revised rubber handles from the previous recall, Aqua Lung wants to replace it with the latest generation handle. Bring it to your dive shop for an on-site replacement. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission notice lists the BCD models affected, and you can call Aqua Lung for more information at (855) 355-7170.

When we asked Aqua Lung for more background on the recall, marketing manager Lauren Schuil simply pointed us toward the company's general press release about it, which stated, "While there are no known occurrences of this happening underwater, and there have not been any reported injuries, Aqua Lung believes that a recall is the safe and prudent thing to do. The newest generation of handle does not rely upon rubber and is considered much stronger and safer."

What does this say about the safety of weight-integrated BCs in general? Even the dive veterans we regularly ask for expert opinions are split on this one. Ken Kurtis, owner of the Reef Seekers dive shop in Beverly Hills, CA, says he had never been a fan of them. "The addition of the weights, along with a tank, BC and a regulator make the unit incredibly heavy if you (or a helpful crew member or buddy) are lifting it. And the argument of 'Well, just put the weights in AFTER you've donned the unit' is simply not the way people in the real world dive it. And because the weight pockets sit higher up than a weight belt, it changes your center of gravity, which I don't like."

But John Bantin, our London-based dive equipment tester, is a fan. "Including the weights within the BC means that the upward force of the buoyancy is countered by the downward force of the ballast, resulting in an absence of the stress on the diver's body that is encountered when using a separate weight belt, plus superior comfort. However, this brings with it design problems in order to make emergency weight jettisoning possible."

The first integrated weight designs relied on Velcro that lost its stickiness properties as it got older, resulting in lost weights. Many different brands of BC have come up with different weight-retaining solutions since then, but Aqua Lung has been caught in the spotlight because its design was paired with bad manufacturing issues. "Other companies have not been so unlucky with their design and manufacturing solutions," says Bantin. "Don't let this problem send you back to the old-fashioned discomfort of a separate weight belt."

As for me, I've never liked weight-integrated BCs, and find no discomfort in the old-fashioned weight belt. Also, the crew on board hauling up my unweighted BC offered a big smile for me, not for Bantin.

-- Ben Davison

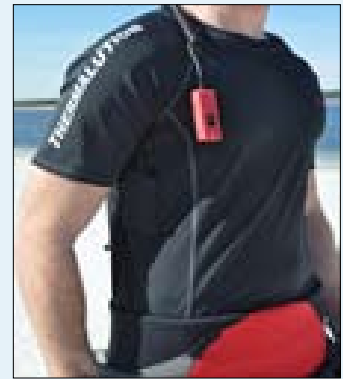
hung in the blue as I headed back to the boat, swimming through a school of Moorish idols.

Kona has gained great fame in the last decade for its manta night dive, a nightly orchestrated gathering of mantas observed by far too many humans, so it gets oversold. I had booked weeks in advance, but when I got my confirmation, the manta dive wasn't on it. Just two dives, no mantas. To do the manta dive, I either had to drive back to town then back to the boat, or hang at the marina in my wet clothes for two hours until 4 p.m. for a dusk dive prior to the manta

What's a Heated Vest, and Should You Buy One?

In this story on Kona diving, our reporter envies the heated vests she sees fellow divers wearing, and how toasty they look while wearing them in those cool waters. Are these battery-powered vests worth spending up to \$1000 on? John Bantin, our veteran dive gear tester, has tried on a few, and here are a couple of his picks sold in the U.S.

The Thermalution Compact Dive Series (70mm): "I first tried this out in the some-would-say balmy Caribbean waters of Grenada in the Caribbean. (Am I a man or a mouse? Squeak!) The undervest worked well under my wetsuit. It's made of a Lycra-like fiber, and has a non-metallic heating panel built into the back. Two pockets take the twin battery-packs, the size of a cigarette case. They're connected to the vest via cables with wet-connectors. Strangely, the designers have put the receiver unit for the wireless connection in the small of the back, so you wear the vest under your suit, and the controller straps onto a forearm. There are three progressive settings, and an LED indicator that goes from green through orange to red. To confirm that the receiver is working, it vibrates for a second, twice for the mid setting, and three times for the highest heat setting. It gives a single long vibration to confirm it's shutting down -- it's a bit like having a small mouse inside your suit with you.



"The controller's battery life is around 18 months, so I guess that will be an ongoing expense when the time comes to replace it, because it is factory-sealed. The main batteries are simply disconnected from the suit and reconnected to a multi-voltage intelligent charger. They take around eight hours to fully charge, and are claimed to be good for around 500 recharges. A fully charged pair of batteries are said to last for between three and four hours, so that should be enough to suit even the most adventurous diver." (\$500; 2.5 pounds; www.thermalution.com)

Typhoon Icebreaker: "High-tech in design but low-tech in operation. It uses a flexible intelligent polymer containing thousands of conductive carbon particle chains in panels within a neoprene vest, which, with the aid of Velcro-covered sections, can be adjusted to fit almost anyone. Power is supplied as a rapid pulse. The designer promised it could be completely soaked and, as it contained no electrical components, would still work safely. The current flows and it gets warm. It's that simple. It uses so little power to heat up that a relatively small 4A/h lithium-iron battery is used. That holds enough charge for around 70 minutes and more - but you don't switch it on until the last part of your dive, or you carry more battery power. Once the material reaches a certain temperature, it self-regulates. The conductive particle chains in the suit vibrate when the current flows. They get warm but the material that forms the heating element will not exceed 108 degrees Fahrenheit - warm, but not warm enough to cause discomfort.



"With no thermostat, how do you turn it on and off? You must adapt your wetsuit or drysuit by punching a 13mm hole through its fabric to fit the electrical connection. On the inside of this waterproof bulkhead connector is a lead and plug that connects to the heated vest's lead. On the outer side is a two-pin (plus guide-pin) waterproof connector. Mount the battery-pack where you wish and feed its lead to this. Connect when you get cold. Disconnect if you feel too warm. The wet-connector comes with a blanking plug-end to the battery lead to stop unwanted discharge through the water over the longer periods when it may not be connected. The battery-pack is small enough to fit a BC pocket. The best place to fit the bulkhead connector is on a thigh, as you can see it and get to it easily." (\$1,000; 0.44 pounds; www.exo2theheatinside.com)

dive. I chose the latter, and dried while eating at a small fish restaurant. As it turned out, I found that dusk dive at Garden Eel Cove to be a waste of time. Having had to book it to join the night manta dive, I felt I was being snookered into it so that Kona Diving could fill a boat showing less experienced divers a sandy bottom of garden eels, conch and a cowrie. Well, a few new divers did appear enthralled, and my dive was salvaged by seeing two free-ranging 10- to 15-foot mantas.

In the 40 minutes it took to motor to the manta site, one woman became miserably seasick. It was dark, well after 6 p.m., when we arrived near the airport site, and already 17 snorkeler boats were moored. Unless I wanted a leftover wrap, there was no dinner. I had to force myself to get back in the water. About 7:30 p.m., we were briefed to sit in 35 feet of water holding a bright flashlight over our heads to attract plankton to bring in the mantas. One diver couldn't equalize his ears to descend, another had to be helped down by Luke, and the seasick woman didn't make the effort. Luke told us to hold onto a boulder or put one in our laps, though they had us previously add an extra four pounds of weights, essential for novices, especially with the current. Luke also placed a milk crate near our part of the circle with four additional lights. I don't know if it was my pink hood, but eight mantas buzzed me from all directions for forty 40 minutes. To have them in my face was absolutely thrilling. After the dive, on a cold ride back to the marina, the three of us were raving but feeling terrible for those who didn't make it. Our night was a lucky one -- the mantas sometimes show briefly, or not at all. The miserable conditions that night might have attracted lots of plankton. Regardless, for someone hell-bent on seeing mantas, the show is spectacular if they bless you with their presence.

Kailua-Kona itself is touristy and aging, with a lot of souvenir shops and open air restaurants located between sandy areas. Streets are colorfully lined with fuchsia- and white-colored bougainvillea and plumeria tree flowers. The flowers mingle with mango, coconut and queen palms, monkey pod trees, and large banyan trees. Shoppers, runners, triathaloners in Ironman T-shirts, weekly ship cruisers, surfers, bicycle riders, deep sea anglers, snorkelers and divers fill the streets. Canadians, Alaskans, Japanese and Aussies appear to outnumber mainland Americans.

While there are endless hotels, I selected the Marriott's convenient convention hotel Courtyard King Kamehameha, with 400-plus rooms sprawling around Kona's Kamakahonu Bay. Recently renovated, my room was spacious, with a desk, sitting area, couch, Wi-Fi, minibar, small coffeemaker, balcony lanai and a comfortable king bed. The bathroom was child-sized, room for one with a tub and waterfall shower. I purchased yogurt and cereal rather than take time to dine in a restaurant before the prompt 8 a.m. daily boat departure. The staff was warm and friendly, the housekeeping very good. Restaurants in the area are endless; all seem to serve fish and seafood, typically sushi or fish and chips made with ono (wahoo) or ahi (tuna), with hamburgers as an alternative. Edible Food served acai with fruit, blintzes with bacon and eggs, vegetables, avocado and strawberries, all beautifully plated.

Kona Diving Company cared about its divers. While they'll keep your regulator, BC and wetsuit overnight, you're responsible for the rest of your gear. Like all Kona shops, you have to make your way to and from your hotel in your rental car, then take a real hot shower, then find a place to eat.

Kona Diving Company, Hawaii

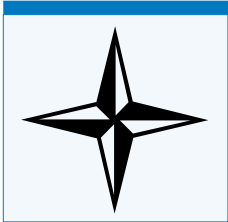
Diving (experienced)	★★★
Diving (beginner)	★★★★★
Snorkeling	★★★★
Accommodations	★★★★
Food	★★★
Service and Attitude	★★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★★

★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent
World Scale

But it's obvious that their clients, the majority of who were repeat clients, don't object.

If I were to return, it would not be in winter -- the weather in February limited my ability to get to some of Kona's sites. In July, they offer the adrenaline of diving with tiger sharks, even at night. Jack's Locker offers a night dive where you hang on a rope and observe weird gelatinous critters. If you're an experienced diver with a rented car, you may not wish to stick with on dive operator. Go to Undercurrent's reader reports online and you'll find that several dive shops offer somewhat different trips.

-- N.M.



Divers Compass: Several airlines fly to the Big Island, and if you have time, you can often depart from another island such as Maui (totally different diving) at no increase in airfare . . . I stayed five nights in a non-water-view room at nightly rate of \$178 . . . Kona Diving Company charges \$60 per dive, plus \$10 for Nitrox; the rate drops to \$50 per dive if you buy a four-day package . . . Kona's trade winds produce large swells, but they also serve the purpose of keeping the air free of volcanic ash from the other side of the Big Island . . . It's a \$33 taxi ride

to the airport from the Courtyard King Kamehameha if you don't have a car . . . Websites: Kona Diving Company - www.konadivingcompany.com; Marriott Courtyard King Kamehameha - www.marriott.com/hotels/travel/koacy-courtyard-king-kamehamehas-kona-beach-hotel

Komodo Resort Diving Club, Indonesia

exciting diving at budget prices

Dear Fellow Diver:

In preparing for my first trip to Indonesia, I had a tough choice: Raja Ampat or Komodo? So as to not bust my budget for the first seven days, (with nine more after that), Komodo Resort Diving Club, averaging \$250 per person, per day, for room, food and diving won out.

Built from the ground up by a couple of Italian fellows, the Komodo Resort is on the desert-like Sebayur Island, smack dab in the middle of the Flores Sea, about halfway between Labuan Bajo (where one arrives by air from Bali) and Komodo Island. I came without my BC and wetsuit because the resort advertised all gear for rent; some of their rental stuff is a little long in the tooth, but serviceable. Most divers, mainly European, also seemed to be renters, not bringing much beyond their cameras and masks. With no real "dedicated dive shop," I would have been out of luck had I needed any nonessential accessory.

The wooden dive boats, like most in this area, are slow for those who are used to high-speed boats, but they have enough room so that I didn't feel cramped. After getting underway, most people scampered to the top to flop on giant bean bags under a canvas top. Slow boats with rides up to an hour meant limited range: Any island in the north and east areas that are surrounded by Komodo, Rinca, and Flores Islands was accessible, but not those to the west and south. Nonetheless, the sites we reached had plenty to hold my attention. If I may use Palau as a measuring stick, the reefs on Komodo's north and north-east sides had more diversity in both corals and reef animals. I saw vast areas of unique Flores Sea animals and critters, things I did not know even existed,

as well as huge barrel sponges, impossibly long moray eels, large Napoleon wrasses and pleurobranchus (beautiful sea slugs), all set in a coral background showing little sign of bleaching and only a few dead patches. While the ocean surface appeared glass-flat, upon closer inspection, I saw water boils all over the place, caused by current upwellings. The ocean was raging under that seemingly calm surface -- a good sign for marine life.

Since this arid part of Indonesia has less rainfall, the Komodo Resort owners have planted trees and foliage to mitigate the barrenness. The resort's architecture tends toward a typical tropical motif, with straw or palm roofs on the 14 wooden, air-conditioned bungalows. Though I saw few winged pests, mosquito nets enshrouded the soft beds. While the resort has a desalinization plant, water was limited, and short showers were mandated. And you flush your toilet the old-fashioned way, by filling up the bowl with a bucket after you deposit your toilet paper in a bin -- an annoyance, but better than fishing your spent toilet paper out of the toilet when you mistakenly put it in there. Glad I brought hand sanitizer. Out front, I had a small patio and deck with a couple of chairs, but a few steps more and I was on the beach and in a lounge chair under an umbrella. Walking back to my bungalow one afternoon, a guy walked out on his porch butt-naked, hung something out to dry and walked back inside. Oh, those Europeans.

While they have a variety of boats, I was normally on the largest, which held two groups of five to seven divers plus a divemaster for each group. Before each dive, I tuned into their extensive briefing, with hand-drawn pictures showing the reef topography and the life one might encounter. Head divemaster Roberto, an old salt, was the chief diver at a Hilton Maldives resort when I once stayed there, though we didn't cross paths then. Having dived all over the world, he is a no-nonsense Italian -- not overbearing, but once you get on board the boat, you follow his rules. Tardy divers got an earful. (The boats frequently needed to arrive at a spot by a specific time to catch the currents in the proper orientation and maximize what the spot could offer.)

Normally, I'd take the 8 a.m. two-tank dive (some days there were three-tank trips), which returned before 1 p.m. for lunch. On afternoons, I either took a 3 p.m. boat dive or snorkeled the house reef, which, with all its diversity, was terrific. I saw no need for a tank because the best areas were very shallow at low tide. I saw a school of 300 brassy trevally at 10 feet, a three-foot-long barracuda slumming it in the shallows at five feet, shrimpfish, needlefish, pipefish, an invasion of horned sea stars feeding off the grasses, and both soft and hard corals that one would not find in such good condition at that surface level in most populated areas of the world. Though I didn't find the beautiful but deadly blue-ring octopus, I was assured they're present.

The dining area is open-air with a big roof. With Italian owners and managers, what else to expect from the chef but good food with, well, a heavy Italian/European influence? This happened particularly at dinner time, which



Komodo Resort Diving Club

We Need Your Reader Reports

You may still be browsing through our *2015 Travelin' Divers Chapbook* (or you can get it at www.undercurrent.org/members/UCnow/chapbook2015.php), but we're already starting to gather reader reports for the 2016 edition.

To send us your reviews of dive operators, liveaboards and resorts, complete the online form at www.undercurrent.org/members/UCnow/SubRRTopMA.php. You can also follow the link "File a Report" on the left side of our homepage (www.undercurrent.org); or after logging in, follow the "Reader Report" link in the top navigation bar.

is served in three courses, with Italian or Indonesian choices for each course, usually including both options with a seafood course. Lunch is similarly broken down between two different offerings. Breakfast is served buffet-style. The small bar, a stone's throw from the beach and pier, has a mix of large bean-bag-type cushions, chairs and tables. It looked better than its limited drink menu, but didn't prove to be much of a venue for socializing divers -- a lot of people only used the spot to hook up to the Internet.

People dined together in their individual groups, with not much cross-talk between them. There were a lot of Italians who hung out together and with the staff, and the Asian divers kept to themselves. I connected with two Swiss expats living in Malaysia, who joined my partner and me when we took the Rinca Iisland excursion to see the Komodo Dragons. Apparently, an American travel agency is beginning to sell this destination, which should bring more of my countrymen here.

On my first two dive days, I either dived flourishing reefs with no current, or a small island that had currents on either side which that we were told to avoid. It wasn't until dive day three at Makasar Reef that things heated up. That day was all about the current, similar to Palau's Ulong Channel, but the rollercoaster was over barren terrain until we got dumped on a splendid reef loaded with titan and yellow margin triggerfish, turtles and schools of spadefish. Normally, clown triggerfish run off before I can get my camera level with them, but a nest guardian refused to budge and then tried to run me off with two fake charges. I'll admit it -- I flinched.

The next day, we hit Saba Kecil, a raging current drift dive first along a wall, then across a slope with ledges and overhangs -- places I could duck in to get off the express. But reef hooks should be mandatory, because the currents rip too hard to mess around with ducking into quiet spots. It's better to hook out in the open and take the force of the currents head on. I closely monitored my computer to make sure I wasn't blowing through my air due to having to kick really hard. Between the dives, crew offered up tea or water and cookies. At a high of nearly 80 degrees, water temperatures were warmer than Hawaii but cooler than Palau and Yap.

That night, my buddy and I did a dive at Mini Wall, about 10 minutes from the resort. Halfway through our dive, several divers from a nearby liveaboard jumped in, and with all those lights going, the scene looked like something out of James Cameron's film *The Abyss*. But there were indeed critters, notably two stonefish species, a crawling cowrie and a large grand pleurobranch.

A three-tank excursion to the north end of Komodo the next day brought raging currents. Castle Rock

Komodo Resort, Indonesia

Diving (<i>experienced</i>)	★★★★★
Diving (<i>beginner</i>)	★★★
Snorkeling	★★★★★
Accommodations	★★★★
Food	★★★★
Service and Attitude	★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★★

★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent

World Scale

reminded me of Blue Corner, though it's more of a mound than a corner. Sea life was everywhere. Trevally, turtles, dogtooth tuna, jacks, small black- and white tip-sharks, and big schools of smaller reef fish hovered at the edges of the 70-foot visibility. During the second dive at the Cauldron, I traversed in and out of current zones, with no warning when the current would stop or start. One of the divemasters handed my buddy and me hooks. I wanted to wave my arms and hand signal, "You had those all this time and didn't pass them out earlier?" Instead, I gratefully took them and hooked in.

At Crystal Rock, I also hooked in to watch the spectacle. A massive oceanic grouper seemed to preside over the area, while jacks, trevally, barracuda and an occasional small shark moved among the reef fish. After a time, I unhooked and drifted back to a calmer spot where I spotted lionfish, various sea slugs, blue spotted ray, and a yellow and black Spanish dancer on the move. Definitely, this day was the highlight.

I give the Komodo Resort top marks, especially considering its isolation and price. Sure, one has to make adjustments to resort life style on a private island in the middle of nowhere, but I left impressed with what they put together in just a couple of years. A great house reef and some spectacular current diving mean real potential, and if they get faster dive boats to increase the range, it will enhance the notion that this is a go-to destination for a decent price.

But two things concern me. Between the piers at the Labuan Bajo harbor, where we boarded the boat for transportation to the resort, I saw all manner of plastic clutter bobbing about. I stopped counting items when I reached 30 -- and that was just between two piers. There wasn't a dive day when I didn't travel to a dive spot and see plastic floating on the surface, even plastic on the bottom. One day, an empty motor oil bottle washed up on the resort's beach. Not good.

And while I saw all sorts of reef fish and muck critters, the larger apex types were few. I saw the occasional dogtooth tuna, trevally and lone barracuda, but the schools were small. Perhaps my expectations were out of line or I

The "Ship of Gold" Treasure Hunter Captured In Florida

After being accused of cheating his investors out of their share of one of the richest hauls in U.S. history -- \$50 million in gold bars and coins from a 19th-century shipwreck -- and spending more than two years on the lam, Tommy Thompson was captured by Federal marshals last month at a Hilton hotel in West Boca Raton, using cash to stay under the radar. The U.S. Marshals Service called him "one of the most intelligent fugitives ever sought" by the agency.

Thompson, 62, made history in 1988 when he discovered the sunken SS *Central America*, also known as the "Ship of Gold." The side-wheel steamer went down in a hurricane about 200 miles off South Carolina in 1857; 425 people drowned and tons of gold from the California Gold Rush was lost. In a modern-day technological feat, Thompson and his crew brought up thousands of bars and coins, and in 2000, he sold much of them to a gold marketing group for about \$50 million. But the 161

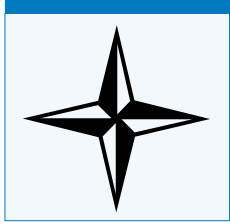
investors who paid Thompson \$12.7 million to find the ship never saw the proceeds. Two of them sued -- one was the company that publishes the *Columbus Dispatch* newspaper in Ohio, and had invested about \$1 million.

A warrant was issued in Columbus in 2012 after Thompson failed to show up for a hearing on the lawsuit. Thompson vanished from his mansion in Vero Beach, FL, where a search found prepaid disposable cell-phones and bank wraps for \$10,000 in cash, along with a book titled *How to Live Your Life Invisible*, according to court records. One marked page was titled, "Live your life on a cash-only basis."

Thompson was arrested on January 28, along with his longtime companion, Alison Antekeier. The pair had been paying cash for a room at the Hilton, rented under a fake name used by Antekeier. They had no vehicles registered in their names, and Antekeier used buses and taxis to get around. The couple made initial court appearances in West Palm Beach, but authorities will seek to return Thompson to Ohio.

was just unlucky and wasn't at an individual reef at the right time. But over-fishing is taking its toll in Indonesia, and the pollution was depressing. The nation needs to get serious about its waters if it wants to maintain Komodo as an ecotourism destination that's known for more than just its Dragons.

-- S.D.



Divers Compass: Several airlines fly to Labuan Bajo from Denpasar, Bali; I chose Garuda Indonesia because it is purported to have the better operation, and it offered a free checked bag if it's full of "sports equipment" (a.k.a. your dive gear) . . . At the Labuan Bajo airport, I was met by resort staff, who took me to the local office to fill out paperwork, then drove me to the harbor, where I took a chartered boat to the resort, which can take anywhere from 90 minutes to three hours; you must make arrangements prior to arrival, and for sure pay extra for the faster

90-minute ride . . . Depending upon the value of the dollar against the Euro, a week runs about \$1,500-\$1,900, double occupancy, with three meals and two daily dives . . . The resort has a decent library of sea life ID books . . . Charters are available to see Komodo dragons or take a pink-sand beach snorkeling excursion, but there's a four-person minimum . . . The resort only sells hooks, it doesn't lend them out, but either the lines were too short or the hooks too big for my taste; hooks would definitely have been useful on half my dives . . . Night dives are available on request . . . Website: www.komodoresort.com

Life and Death on the Reef

the tale of an Indonesia dive gone wrong in so many ways

After his stay at the Komodo Resort Diving Club -- which he reviewed in the previous article -- our correspondent, S.D., moved on to the next part of his dive trip, Lombok Island, right next door. But his experience there was like night and day, with a fatal turn at the end, as he explains below.

* * * * *

I will confess that I did less than stellar research on the island of Lombok prior to my arrival. I knew the southern part held diving treasures, but I thought it was too far from the airport -- it wasn't. I was looking at the wrong airport, the one that isn't used anymore. I thought that because the Living Asia Resort on the northwest side of Lombok, just north of Senggigi, had a satellite office for DSM Dive on its property that this was a selling point -- it wasn't. That it took me four separate attempts over several weeks to get an email confirmation for the days I wanted to dive should have been an indicator. That said, the Living Asia Resort facilities were nice, and their staff very attentive. However, I didn't research closely where we would be diving, the Gili Islands. Had I done so, I would have seen the warnings and steered clear.

Locals say that the reefs were in good shape 25 years ago. Today, the Gilis are a disaster area, at least the spots we dived. The reefs are fished out, dynamited to near death. The bones of dead coral lay everywhere, with pockets of living coral fighting for life. A few reef fish were scattered about here and there.

While there is much more to my story than the diving, to come from Komodo Island to this . . . well, I was shell shocked. I had four dives scheduled with DSM and seriously considered canceling the second day. But then I saw my first ever blue ribbon eel. I started finding slugs, then mantis shrimp. A small eagle ray hovered in the currents. If I turned to muck diving, it wouldn't be a total

waste of time. I would just have to be patient. Then again, if I was planning a muck diving trip in Indonesia, I wouldn't come here. There are better places.

DSM Dive's main base is on Gili Trawangan, but they pick up most divers by van at Lombok resorts and shuttle them to the Gilis in an old wooden dive boat they overpack; I counted more than 20 divers one day. No telling how qualified they were. Nobody asked to see my PADI card, I just had to write down the number. At least they kept the dive groups small, with four or five divemasters on board. But gearing up with 20 people on board was cumbersome and done in stages, with the first group gearing up and going in, then the next group, and so on. All the divemasters seemed to know the area and their stuff, though one did bark at me for using too much air to dry out my first stage cover.

Looking back, I should have cancelled the second day's dives. Not because of the location or because of my reservations regarding DSM's operation, but because of what happened.

We were a group of six -- the divemaster, my dive buddy and me, another couple and a Frenchman who apparently had the equivalent of an advanced certification. While four of us got to the bottom at 30 feet, the couple had some issue during the descent and returned to the surface. Meanwhile the French diver just took off, pulling himself past me by grabbing on to coral and pulling so hard it broke off. Our divemaster signaled my buddy and me to stay put, and she went up to check on the couple. The French diver was almost beyond the limits of the 55-foot visibility, but he kicked back and passed us in the other direction, ping-ponging back and forth at a high speed across the reef.

My dive buddy came to the opposite conclusion that the divemaster wanted us to group up and go on, so an underwater argument broke out over what to do.

The other couple started back down, so the divemaster returned and started looking for the French diver. He was 50 feet behind us and at least 10 feet deeper, oblivious to what we were doing. My buddy banged on my tank to get the divemaster's attention, and pointed her to the guy. The divemaster brought him back, literally holding on to him by his BC. When we started again as a group, the divemaster still had not let go of his BC.

About 20 minutes into our dive, the French diver apparently signaled the divemaster that he was out of air, so she got us together, made the out-of-air gesture in reference to him, made a big circle gesture and gave the thumbs up sign, as well as a few other signs I couldn't follow. It was confusing, but I took them to mean, "Dive's over. We're surfacing!" I focused on what the divemaster was trying to tell us, so I didn't know whether the guy was out of air, just low on air, or something else was wrong. Just before they surfaced I saw him fumbling with his BC controls and I did see some bubbles come out, but it was almost perpendicular to his body, which is a bad orientation to bleed air out of it if he were ascending.

The two of them started up from about 28 feet. I couldn't tell if he was using her backup regulator. My dive buddy, who saw the same gestures I did, came to the opposite conclusion that the divemaster wanted us to group up and go on. So an underwater argument broke out between my buddy and me over what to do. I had started my ascent, but she wanted to proceed with the other couple who had not seen the divemaster's gestures. Ten feet lower than I, my buddy got fed up with arguing and headed down. I was at eight feet, past my safety stop, so I got back down to 15 feet and started timing myself. But I was conflicted. It seemed obvious to me that the divemaster wanted us to go up, but then you don't leave your buddy. I started second-guessing -- maybe I misread the signals, or maybe I should go back down.

I looked up at the diver and the divemaster, whom I could clearly make out, but couldn't glean any more information about whether it was a surface call; she was engaged with the other diver. So I

rejoined my buddy, pressing on for 20 minutes until someone got low on air. Back on the surface my buddy and I, who have done more than 100 dives together, got into an argument. She wanted to know why I went up instead of staying with the group. I said the divemaster wanted us to surface. She said the divemaster wanted us to group up while they surfaced. I disagreed. She disagreed with my disagreement. Stalemate.

The divemaster and the French diver were no longer in sight, and neither was the boat. I figured they got picked up and the boat went to pick up others who entered the water before us. We bobbed in the water for close to 10 minutes until the boat did show up, empty of divers. We picked up one other group and then headed back to the beach.

When we got in, one of the staff members started ripping on us. Why didn't we surface? Why did we not go up with the divemaster? Why did we decide to stay down? Why did we not end our dive when the divemaster called it? I glared at my buddy and said, "See? I told you."

Then we got the word. The French diver was dead. When he hit the surface, he rolled his eyes, vomited, and died in the divemaster's arms. She had had a difficult time getting his body back to shore. She tried to flag down a boat but they apparently thought she was doing a mock rescue diver exercise and were slow to respond. I apologized profusely for not going up with her, but she was just glad to see us back safe, and especially glad to see that we had safety sausages to display in case the boat had trouble finding us.

Lionfish Aren't the Only Invaders in Florida Waters

Two women diving beneath Blue Heron Bridge near Palm Beach, FL, during their Thanksgiving vacation spotted a bright yellow fish about four inches long they had never seen before. Some divers might have just admired it, snapped photos and kept swimming, but Deb Devers and Lureen Ferretti reported it to the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF), a Key Largo-based nonprofit organization that serves as a regional clearinghouse for control of exotic marine fish species.

Lad Akins, REEF's director of special projects, said their instincts were right on. The fish was a mimic lemon peel surgeonfish, also known as a chocolate surgeonfish, native to the Indo-Pacific and the first of its kind documented in Florida waters. Devers kept track of the fish, and in December, she and Akins captured it alive using hand nets. It was shipped to the Ripley's Aquarium of Canada to be displayed as an educational tool on the hazards of invasive species.

Akins said the removal might have averted an ecological disaster similar to the spread of lionfish, another Indo-Pacific invader first sighted off Florida's Dania Beach in 1985 and believed to be an abandoned aquarium pet, now well-established in the Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and Caribbean. "We don't know what the effects would have been if the fish had become established and began reproducing," Akins said. "But if we wait to find out, then it's too late."

He says taking out the surgeonfish was the third successful preemptive strike against a non-native marine fish species in Florida coastal waters. In 1999 and 2002, REEF staff and volunteers captured four large Indo-Pacific batfish from Molasses Reef in Key Largo. In 2009, they removed a whitetail dascyllus damselfish from the east side of the Blue Heron Bridge. In 2012, two Miami divers speared an exotic humpback grouper on a reef off Biscayne National Park and turned the carcass over to REEF. Akins said none of those three species are known to have reappeared in Florida waters since their removals.

"Some people might say, 'Oh big deal, we took this little fish out of the water.' But that's the way the lionfish got started. If only we could have taken the initial few lionfish out of the water in the first place. We're relying on divers, snorkelers and fishermen to be our eyes and ears. It's a perfect example of how early detection and rapid removal can be successful in stemming an invasion." Anyone who spots a strange-looking fish that they suspect is invasive is advised to take a photo and report the sighting at www.reef.org.

-- Sue Cocking, Miami Herald

The deceased diver was around 60 years old, overweight and based upon what I saw, his diving skills and training were inadequate. He violated a handful of rules on that dive, including going off on his own, exerting himself and damaging the reef. One of the other divemasters later said that on the previous day, the guy needed help with his BC control. I wondered why they had let him back in the water after that.

I can't be sure of what happened. Did they attempt an emergency ascent from 28 feet? It kind of looked like it. Did the diver blow bubbles during the emergency ascent? Not doing so could be fatal. My dive buddy later told me that the divemaster had said she saw bubbles coming out of his mouth, but he was not on her backup regulator because it was "tangled."

And that was my last dive in Indonesia. DSM shut down operations for the rest of the day. Nobody really wanted to go back in the water.

* * * * *

Ben's comments: It must be a horrible experience to watch a diver on your excursion die in the water. Of course, there is nothing our correspondent could have done about it. Though he confessed great remorse for not surfacing, it had no effect on the outcome.

It's my view that if I'm on a group dive with a divemaster, who has rules such as "We'll all stick together," and she says to surface, I will. And I expect the other divers to do so as well. I believe a divemaster is in charge, and if the request is reasonable, I follow it. On the other hand, if I'm diving with other divers in an unorganized fashion -- go in when you want and do what you want to do -- I might think twice if I were asked to surface, though I'd keep in mind there is a boat above and the divemaster is part of the crew. She ought to know what she is doing and I don't want the boat to leave without me.

If I'm diving with a buddy and he signals his desire to surface, no matter what the cause, I believe I'm obligated to accompany him, unless he uses hand signals to free me of that responsibility. Still, when our writer's buddy refused to surface, I understand why our writer returned to her. He was not surfacing because he was in danger, and he wanted to give her the safety of a buddy pair.

Clearly, buddies must establish their own rules ahead of time and follow them. Plan Your Dive. Furthermore, while too many divemasters give casual and incomplete briefings, the divemaster should be clear about what she expects. If she says "When I give the sign to go up, we all go up," that should be the rule everyone follows. When you're back in the boat, you can hash out whether that was the right thing to do. But don't get into underwater or surface arguments; you're seriously upping your risk. If it turns out you think your divemaster made a spurious request, find another divemaster. But most likely, you'll conclude that if she told you to surface she had your safety in mind.

Stop Panic Before It Starts Underwater

simple exercises every diver should do

Experienced divers are, for the most part, calm and collected, but there can be an unknown kernel of fear lurking inside that can explode if the situation underwater takes a turn. That's known as panic -- going from cucumber-cool to out of control. Though new divers are more apt to panic, experienced divers are also at risk of doing the same should a dive go awry.

Some divers are more susceptible to panic than others because they have higher anxiety levels. A 2000 study by David Colvard, a psychiatrist and divemaster who researches dive panic, found

that 45 percent of men and 57 percent of women with a history of panic attacks reported panicking on one or more dives, compared to 19 percent of men and 33 percent of women who had never panicked before. They are more likely to panic when faced with a flooded mask, poor visibility or buddy separation. Even experienced divers with hundreds of dives experience panic for no apparent reason, most likely because they lose sight of familiar objects, become disoriented and experience sensory deprivation. So how can divers learn how to prevent panic before it even starts? It's all in how you breathe, Colvard says.

How can divers learn how to prevent panic before it even starts? It's all in how you breathe.

He came to that conclusion years back when a dive shop in his hometown of Raleigh, NC, asked him to help a woman who had had a bad dive experience in Mexico and was headed to Hawaii for her honeymoon. She wanted to dive with her husband, but was apprehensive about it. "I said I would help, but I first had to figure out what to do," he said. He couldn't find any

good information about easing panic until he came across breathing exercises created by Tom Griffith, then the Director of Aquatics and Safety Office for Athletics at Pennsylvania State University. "They were from back in the '80s, and not much had been done since then," Colvard says.

When Colvard's "patient" first put her face in the pool, she nearly jumped out of the water, so Colvard decided to use Griffith's breathing exercises to get her relaxed. "After starting the breathing exercises, she could put her face in the water, then put her mask on in the water, with the gradual focus of exposure to the water and getting desensitized to it," he says. "I eventually got her underwater and into the deep end of the pool, where she took her gear on and off. She went on her honeymoon, hired a private divemaster and dived successfully."

Colvard recently revamped his website, www.DivePsych.com, which focuses on dive-related panic, and he has put Griffith's breathing exercises there, free for anyone to download and listen to (they're in audio mp3 format). When Colvard and Griffith first teamed up to promote the exercises, we wrote about them in Undercurrent, stating, "It's the best effort in the diving community to come up with a practical means to control diver stress. The program will no doubt keep many divers active who might otherwise surrender to stress and stop diving."

Before you stop reading here, because you're thinking, "I'm an experienced diver with plenty of panic-free dives under my belt, I don't need these," you're wrong, Colvard says. "The most surprising thing I've found researching this is the longer you dive, the more likely you are to have a panic-related accident. Your level of training or number of dives doesn't guarantee you won't have a problem. We intuitively assume that those factors would reduce your risk, but the fact is, you can't control everything." Also, if you are trying to get your spouses or children into diving, understanding the importance of deep breathing, plus following the exercises, should be a part of their curriculum to better ease them into the sport.

The two-hour program is divided into four 30-minute segments. Part one is "The Causes and Symptoms of Diver Stress," with Griffiths explaining them (this one can be skimmed; even Colvard says he doesn't agree with everything Griffiths says here). The second part, "The Calming Breath Response," is the most important one -- a lesson in breath control, relaxation and "belly breathing." Colvard taught the technique to the woman going to Hawaii, and uses the tape with his anxiety-suffering patients. He says the breathing technique can be taught within five minutes, but you need a feedback mechanism to ensure you have it down. "Place one hand on your chest, and one finger on your belly button. When you breathe, your chest should stay still while your belly button goes in and out, and that's how you know you're using your diaphragm. Also, do this while you look in the mirror -- the only thing about you that should be moving is your belly."

Part three is “Mental Rehearsal for Controlling Underwater Stress,” using imagery to help listeners relax, breathe slower and think clearer; it’s a technique top athletes use prior to competition. And part four, “Systematic Progressive Relaxation,” leads you through guided-imagery exercises that makes you aware of any physical stress, then offers techniques to directly relieve it. Colvard says the exercise helps divers inoculate against stress underwater.

In a standard dive accident involving panic, he says, “most divers were already anxious to start with, and probably weren’t aware of it beforehand, then multiple things that went wrong and were unexpected.” That’s why he advocates that new and veteran divers alike do belly breathing before they get in the water. “We were taught to ‘Stop, Think, Breathe and Act,’ but no one tells you how to breathe. Most people breathe with their shoulders, not their diaphragms, but that area is the whole key to controlling the anxiety breathing. If you are tangled in kelp and stuck, could you learn these techniques at that moment?”

While Colvard’s 2002 study showed that divers with a history of panic attacks are more likely to have them underwater, not all of them do. But regardless, of the divers he surveyed who have had a panicky experience underwater, 90 percent of them went back and got more training. “It was like a wakeup call to say, ‘Hey, I need to learn a little more here.’ An experience like that does behoove you to get more training.”

--Vanessa Richardson

Dead Diver’s Wife Sues a *Shadow Divers* Star

grief and greed made this case go on too long

We’ve written many stories about how the deaths of divers have a big impact on the families they leave behind. The death of a loved one often does funny things to people’s logic, emotions and common sense. And when a lawsuit results from grief and sorrow, all bets are off. Sometimes a person sues everybody he or she can imagine for the death of someone they cared about. And sometimes people are just plain greedy. Today, lawyers often sue everyone with the slenderest of connection to the death, in search of deep pockets.

For David Concannon, the defending attorney in this lawsuit, it was one of the craziest, wild cases he’s been involved in during his 25-year career. “The plaintiffs’ attorney sued everyone he could possibly think of, and allege everything he could think of,” he says. “It was a spray-and-pray, shotgun-style defense.”

On July 30, 2008, Terry Sean DeWolf, 38, was one of a group of people diving at the *Andrea Doria* wreck, 50 miles off the coast of Nantucket, MA, and 230 feet down on the ocean floor. The Italian luxury liner, which sank in 1956, is popular with divers, not only because of the technical challenges it presents, but also because it is considered a trophy dive: The wreck, now deteriorating rapidly, is dotted with relics such as embossed china cups and dishes. But it is also considered the Mount Everest of diving, a perilous plunge that, including DeWolf’s death, has claimed the lives of 16 divers.

DeWolf, a diver for 20 years with at least 100 technical, deep-compression dives under his belt, was one of 10 divers on the M/V *John Jack* that sailed out of Montauk, N.Y., toward the wreck. Richie Kohler, a veteran technical diver who had gained fame from the book *Shadow Divers* and then from co-hosting The History Channel’s *Deep Sea Detectives* program, was aboard as the trip leader, having chartered the *John Jack* as part of his 2008 *Andrea Doria* Expedition. DeWolf signed a liability waiver that eliminated any claims against Kohler, thus he expressly assumed the risks of diving the wreck.

DeWolf successfully completed the first day of diving. On the second day, he entered the water at 7:50 a.m., but did not resurface at the expected time around noon (a lot of decompression time was required). He was found lying on his back at 235 feet, his rebreather mouthpiece not in his mouth and the breathing loop open, weights still in place, and alternate air sources not deployed. His body was recovered 10 hours after he went in the water. After examining tissue samples of DeWolf's heart, the medical examiner in Suffolk County, NY stated that DeWolf died of natural causes, namely a severe case of myocarditis, infection of the heart muscle. That condition caused DeWolf to have a heart attack as soon as he went underwater, lose consciousness and sink like a stone.

“Even at closing arguments, it wasn't clear what allegedly killed DeWolf, other than it was Richie Kohler's fault.”

DeWolf was survived by his wife Tammy and three teenage daughters. Two years after her husband's death, Tammy hired attorney David “Mac” McKeand to file suit in Texas on behalf of herself, DeWolf's estate, and their children. Tammy asserted claims against five defendants: The *John Jack*; Kohler; A&E Television Networks (the cable network that carried the History Channel, on

which DeWolf had watched Kohler on his show *Deep Sea Detectives*); ITI Holdings, Inc, the company that owns the TDI dive training agency from which Kohler got his credentials as a dive instructor; and Lamartek, which manufactured the Dive Rite rebreather DeWolf was using on his fateful dive. Tammy also sued DeWolf's dive instructor and that man's dive shop, but they later settled.

The New York-based owners of the *John Jack* didn't respond to the suit (the owner had died and the boat was then sold), but the judge dismissed them as a defendant due to lack of jurisdiction. A&E Television Networks also stated it shouldn't be a defendant, because it had no connection to Texas or to DeWolf and had no affiliation with Kohler's charter. In her affidavit about why A & E should be a defendant, Tammy stated that she and Terry “first learned of Richie Kohler” from watching its show *Deep Sea Detectives* at their Houston home, DeWolf would not have heard of Richie Kohler if Kohler had not been on the show, and based on the show, she thought Kohler was highly qualified. The judge disagreed with her, and dismissed both A&E and ITI Holdings, owner of TDI.

In defense of its Dive Rite rebreather, Lamartek replied that Tammy wasn't diligent in following up with authorities after her husband's death. On August 1, 2008, the day after DeWolf died, the medical examiner tentatively concluded that he had drowned, and also arranged for his dive equipment to be inspected. But it wasn't until April 21, 2009 that McKeand called their office to follow up, saying that “the statute of limitations against the product manufacturer is running out.” Two weeks later, Tammy called the medical examiner's office herself to say she didn't want DeWolf's equipment sent anywhere yet, but would “reflect on this information before deciding where she wants the equipment sent.” DeWolf's dive gear remained in the evidence room, until August 2010, when staffers finally shipped it to Tammy.

Why did Tammy and McKeand wait so long to get DeWolf's dive gear? Concannon believes he knows. “McKeand spoke to other lawyers who have handled rebreather death lawsuits, and I am certain they told him that he didn't want the dive computer, saying something like, ‘If you don't think it's useful, then don't get it from the medical examiner. Tell them to keep it because the battery will die and data will be lost, but it won't be your fault because you don't have it.’”

McKeand charged a variety of confusing and often conflicting arguments against Kohler at trial. For example, he said Kohler did not earn his instructor certifications, even though Kohler didn't need to be certified to lead the expedition, and DeWolf never received any scuba instruction from Kohler -- he already held all of the certifications that Kohler was certified to teach.

McKeand never picked a theory for his case, says Concannon. “Throughout the trial, he was saying it was not clear how DeWolf died. He never said anything about the medical examiner's ruling of

myocarditis, but he listed other reasons -- defective rebreather, lack of experience, negligence, he had a mild case of myocarditis, then he didn't have one. He wanted to argue that DeWolf got lost or was unable to surface, not that he had a heart attack and dropped. Even at closing arguments, it wasn't clear what allegedly killed DeWolf, other than it was Richie Kohler's fault."

During the trial, Kohler testified that when DeWolf's body was recovered, he looked at the dive profile on his dive computer, which showed that DeWolf had moved laterally near the surface for a minute or two, then stopped moving and dropped straight down to the ocean floor, where he remained until his body was discovered eight hours later. Kohler had asked for the dive computer, but it had never been produced. In his closing argument, Concannon referred to a medical examiner staffer's testimony that he had shipped the dive computer to Tammy, plus testimony from one of Tammy's relatives that Tammy received the dive computer and put it in her car.

After a six-day trial, the jury took just one hour to return a unanimous decision that DeWolf was entirely responsible for his own demise. A month after the trial, the judge said the liability release DeWolf had signed applied to the case. That means the case should have been dismissed right off the bat. But DeWolf's widow, who appealed many times during the trial to have the judge reconsider rulings, didn't want to let those results stand. She brought an appeal last year, alleging a variety of errors in the trial court's rulings and its conduct of the trial.

But after reviewing the trial records, the Texas Fourteenth District Court of Appeals concluded that the trial court didn't make any errors, and that Tammy was often "not diligent in investigating and pursuing her potential claim." For several reasons, the appellate court overruled Tammy's appeal and re-affirmed the original judgment in favor of Kohler.

In his statement about the Kohler case, Concannon wrote, "Throughout the case, there was nothing but sadness and compassion for the diver's family. However, discussion with the jury after the verdict revealed they had little sympathy for the diver's wife. There is no doubt in my mind that this case began at the intersection of grief and greed, and it proceeded from there."

And it's not over yet. Concannon told *Undercurrent* that Tammy and her lawyer will probably appeal to the Texas Supreme Court. Stay tuned.

-- Vanessa Richardson

Want to Put Your Name on a Reef? Got \$100,000?

Martin Wasmer is well known in money management circles, but now his name will be associated with scuba diving, too. The CEO of Wasmer, Schroeder & Co., a portfolio management company for high-net-worth individuals, was the first to contribute \$100,000 to a new artificial reef project off Florida's Gulf coast, near Naples. Now, Wasmer Reef will be reported on all future nautical charts in perpetuity, 10 miles west of Gordon Pass and 12 miles from Marco Pass.

Using \$1.3 million from the BP oil spill, a loosely knit group of Collier County volunteers called the Economic Recovery Task Force has launched an ambitious plan to deliver tons of concrete beams, pipes and other construction debris on six reef areas, each containing six football-field-sized locations. They say their artificial-reef program is the largest in the western hemisphere. Reef construction started in December, and organizers expect marine life to proliferate where there was only sandy bottom before in 30 to 60 feet depths.

As of press time, there were only five \$100,000 reefs left. The task force is accepting the money through the Collier County Community Foundation so that the donations can be tax deductible. Organizers hope to eventually raise another \$1.7 million in total from private sources to complete the \$3 million project. If you're interested in having your name live forever on nautical charts, contact the foundation at www.cfcollier.org/artificial-reef-fund with your \$100,000 check. However, a \$2,500 donation will go toward an artificial reef module made of limestone rock -- maybe you can try requesting an engraving on it before it goes under.

Flotsam & Jetsam

Beware Mosquitos in the Pacific. If you're traveling to a Pacific dive destination, take every measure to avoid mosquito bites, as the number of travelers returning from there with dengue fever or chikungunya is on the rise. Both viral illnesses are transmitted by mosquitoes and have similar symptoms, including high fever, severe headaches and vomiting. Last year, 68 cases of dengue fever were reported in Fiji. Last month, Tonga declared an official dengue fever outbreak, and there are also cases of travelers returning from Indonesia, the Cook Islands and French Polynesia. There is no vaccine for either virus, and as one doctor told the *New Zealand Herald*, "The only thing people can do is to protect themselves from getting bitten from mosquitoes." Apply insect repellent containing DEET at all times, and wear protective clothing and shoes.

Divers Find A Trove of Gold Coins -- and Don't Keep Them. Some unsuspecting divers found what is now the largest discovery of its kind off Israel's Mediterranean coast -- a glittery trove of 2,000 gold coins exposed during recent winter storms. Members of a local dive club were in the ancient harbor of Caesarea National Park when they spotted what looked like a gold coin from a game. It didn't take them long to figure out it was the real thing. They immediately showed their discovery to the club director, who then notified the Israel Antiquities Authority. The coins range in age from the mid-900s to 1036 A.D. Authorities hailed the divers as "model citizens, for reporting the find instead of taking any of it home.

Farewell to the Ultimate Shark Lady. Eugenie Clark, who perhaps did more to help us humans understand the importance of sharks to our oceans than anyone else, passed away last month at age 92. A founder of Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, FL, Clark's early experiments proved lemon sharks could learn, and she found a previously unknown breeding site for nurse sharks off Key West 10 years ago. Clark authored two best-selling books, *Lady with a Spear* (1951), on her early work in Micronesia and the Red Sea, and *The Lady and the Sharks* (1969), along with 175 research papers. Several species of fish are named for her. Mote Marine Lab's executive director David Vaughn accompanied Clark on the last trip she made to her beloved Red Sea last year. "[We helped her up from her wheelchair and put the tank on her back," Vaughn said. "When we got Genie out to waist-deep water, she knelt down and just took off. We had a hard time keeping up with her."

He Sucked My Blood Underwater -- Then We Started Dating. Nose bleeds are common when diving and there's not much blood, so if a fellow diver tries to suck the blood from your nose, well you'd think this guy is either a vampire or one sick puppy, right? Not Shu Pei, a diver who tells the *Malaysia Chronicle* how she fell in love with a fellow scuba student named Richard. "At our first openwater dive, in Pulau Dayang, I had a nosebleed due to the pressure at sea, and Richard did something very unexpected. He brought me to a corner, used his mouth to suck up my nose blood, and spat it on the floor. After a few minutes of that, I felt much better and was no longer choking on my nose blood. He placed a cold compress to ensure my nose no longer bled. And that's actually when we started dating!" Shu Pei and Richard are now happily married, with two kids in tow.

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