

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Magic Island and Atlantis-Dumaguete, Philippines

creature comforts, incredible sea life, affordable prices

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Dear Fellow Diver:

After a lifetime of hemming and hawing about whether the trek would be worth the effort, I selected the Philippines because I wanted to see the unusual critters of the Indo-Pacific and, going that far, I wanted to stay a week each in two different venues without breaking the bank. I wanted good accommodations, good food, good people. I got it all, and I think you can, too.

Frankly, however, getting there is not half the fun, especially if you change planes. Sipping my welcome drink (it should have been a good-night toddy) at 2:30 a.m. at Magic Island seemed a bit out of sorts -- my partner and I transferred in Seoul and flew directly to Cebu City, where we were met at midnight by a van for the two-hour trip to the 10-cabin resort near Moalboal. I quickly discovered that the gain far outweighed the pain. After the very first dive the next day, I tried not to get too excited while reviewing my photos. On my house reef checkout dive, hundreds of hydra-tentacled Lampert's sea cucumbers swarmed on blue sponges. Clusters of soft Xxenia coral pulsed madly. An olive Ridley sea turtle swam by, pausing to munch on a sponge. Messmate pipefish were foraging vigorously. And 15 minutes into my second dive, my guide showed me one of the crown jewels: a pygmy seahorse.

Drifting slowly along the offshore wall, I would see astonishing sights. A pink and white soft coral crab looked like a peppermint with spikes. The reef seems to be lit by gas flames. Beautiful pale blue



Magic Island's Outrigger Banakas



social tunicates, then an ornate ghost pipefish -- the cover girl of Reef Fish Identification for Tropical Pacific, by Gerald Allen et al. -- along with brilliant nudibranchs, camouflaged whip coral shrimp, and false clown, tomato and other anemonefish. At Magic Island's twilight mandarin-fish-mating dive, I surfaced with 190 photos of this little bundle of romance. One swam right up to my camera, lips puckered for a kiss. Visibility ran less than 50 feet, but no problem for shooting the marvelous critters.

Most of Magic Island's 10 cottages, with woven walls and wood floors, offer small front porches overlooking the Strait of Tanon; the others overlook a nice swimming pool. The louvered windows and shrubbery made for plenty of privacy. Simple furnishings included a king bed with nightstands, and a desk large enough to work for my camera workstation. A small bathroom and shower had plenty of hot water.

The compact dive center had a well-ventilated gear area and a separate room with rinse tubs, boat assignments and illustrated dive briefings. Outside, divers could rinse off and hang gear on a roomy open patio. Staggered departure times meant only one group of four to six divers needed to suit up at once. Magic Island had three beautiful, white, outboard-powered outrigger bankas, each narrow and about 40 feet long. The crew loaded gear on board and changed everything over between dives. Entry was by backroll, exit by climbing the ladder after handing up weights, BCs and fins to a divemaster.

Usually, we departed for the first two dives at 8:30 a.m. after an illustrated briefing, returned to the resort for lunch, and then headed out again at 2:30 p.m., though some folks made afternoon or evening dives off the beach. (The shallow resort reef was usually filled with the lights of divers.) One banka was filled with serious photographers, mostly male and some sporting \$5,000 worth of equipment, and the other banka that was mostly female divers seemed to have the most fun. Our experienced divemasters were Dennis and Manuel, locals in their 30s and 40s who had a keen eye for small stuff. (All our divemasters and crew smoked during breaks, downwind of us.) Jo, the Dutch dive operations manager, spoke good English, but most of the dive staff's English skills centered on diving vocabulary. The resort is owned by a Dutch couple living abroad and managed by two local women.

Every dive brought the unusual. At Eyoy Point, the brown, hairy, long, ape-like "arms" quickly identified an orangutan crab. After one lunch on a beach, we did a drift dive through an enormous bait ball of sardines. On a night dive at Pescador Island, I spotted many species of unusual lionfish and scorpionfish. After I referred to my ID book, I learned a green moray was in fact a fimbriated moray -- its dark splotches made the differences between similar species. I felt like Charles Darwin contemplating the theory of evolution. Regardless of the unique critters, be forewarned. A fish longer than a snorkel is rare. Small outriggers filled with subsistence fishermen lined the wall. At low tide, people walked on the exposed reef, gathering any edible creatures they could find. The contrast between the lean bodies of locals and the ample figures of many of the resort's guests spoke volumes. As did the food they consumed, myself included.

Breakfasts started with rich coffee and perhaps a banana smoothie or fresh orange juice. I was a sucker for the buttery, slow-cooked ham, cheese and mushroom omelet. My group opted to have lunches and dinners served family style (go without a group and order off the menu), so dinners were kicked off by plates of appetizers like shrimp kebabs, followed by plates of delicious grilled tuna steak or dorado simmered in wine sauce, chicken (from curry

to Florentine style), beef or pork. Vegetables included simple garden salads and beans. Tropical fruits such as sliced mango were often served. During the meals, I enjoyed the malty San Miguel Cerveza Negra, and, if I could handle it, a dessert such as "mocha magnifico," a nut-encrusted layered concoction dusted with cocoa powder.

The meals offered by Magic Island occurred in a variety of locations that join the local culture. For example, during the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Magic Island's fourth banka, we were treated to a lunch of grilled whole fish, rice, and salad at a nearby beach, where local women offered beach wraps, necklaces and carved items for sale. I came away with \$5 worth of small wooden sea turtles as gifts.

Not everything goes well for everyone on a dive trip, unfortunately. A serious and skilled photographer in my group lost several diving days when his wife inadvertently poked him in his (one good) eye. It became infected, and after seeing a local doctor, he stayed in his darkened cottage for the next three days. It was fortunate that his marriage is a good one.

On the last day of my stay at Magic Island, I enjoyed an excursion to Kawasan Falls, passing a landscape steeped in the culture of another world, including flooded rice fields and ponds dedicated to aquaculture. People crouched on their haunches, tending small fires next to their small bamboo homes. Kawasan Falls was a beautiful series of cascades and pools along the course of a small, cool stream that winds through a mountainside forest. That night, we enjoyed a special feast of a whole pig roast, and music by a small local group.

The next day, I was off to Atlantis Dumaguete. En route, near Oslob on the southeastern coast of Cebu, a "whale shark excursion" was scheduled, as if the animals would appear on demand. They did. Within minutes of getting into 25 feet of water at Aaron Beach Resort, five surrounded me, mouths wide open as they followed the track of the canoes circling in front of the resort. They often swam an arm's length, but once, when I thought another diver was nudging me, I turned around and quickly realized I had just been tail-pushed by a cruising whale shark. It turns out local anglers have learned that feeding and caring for the whale sharks brings in lots of happy-tourist money. According to the attraction's website, the odds of seeing the whale sharks -- year-round -- are virtually certain.

Getting off the ferry on the island of Negros, we were greeted by smiling Dumaguete personnel wearing short-sleeved logo shirts. Taking our luggage, they led us to a shiny red bus and a trip through the city of Dumaguete, a bustling university town with an urban, high-rise, traffic-filled feel to it. The resort's 40 rooms are arranged in attractive white two-story buildings that overlook a clean pool and lushly manicured grounds. Their thatched roofs, exposed beams and

What's With All the Photo Bullies?

It is sometimes very hard for more than one "serious" amateur dive photographer to share the same dive boat, let alone take turns photographing the same subject. Like Gollum wearing the gold ring of invisibility in *The Lord of the Rings*, holding a big camera rig seems to turn some people into selfish creatures who no longer can see other divers at all. Their tunnel vision creates an almost total lack of awareness of how their behavior might be offending other divers. That lack manifests itself in the behavior of photo-hogging.

Fortunately, my group in the Philippines was good about sharing. But I witnessed one incident where, as the first diver to spot a subject was lining up his shot, a second diver from an entirely separate group actually inserted his camera (and head) between the (smaller) camera and photo subject of the first diver. A third diver tapped his tickle stick on the strobe arm of the rude diver to get his attention. The offended diver made dramatic faces and pretended to jab the rude one with his tickle stick behind his back. But none of this had any effect, as the crazed subject-hog kept snapping photos, then swam away as if the other two divers had not existed at all. The other two divers looked at each other and shrugged their shoulders.

dark woodwork were in harmony with the tropical setting. Toward the water, a spa, dive center and restaurant was to one side, and a souvenir/dive accessories shop and reservations desk on the other. The restaurant occupies half of the shoreline. Atlantis Dumaguete's fleet of three red speedboats and two elegant white 70-foot long bankas were anchored offshore, with the impressive 107-foot-long liveboard, the Atlantis Azores, moored a bit further out.

As I sunk to the bottom of my first dive at Apo, I immediately spotted a venomous, eight-foot banded sea krait swimming toward me.

In the first 15 minutes of my first dive at Atlantis, I came across a wunderpus octopus, which was only officially recognized by scientists in 2006 (wunderpus photogenicus). Though small, its distinctive brown and white coloration and active behavior were indeed eye-catching. By the end of the day, I'd seen a robust ghost pipefish, a mimic octopus, pygmy

pipefish, a red Olivar's squat lobster with bugged-out white eyes, and a nearly transparent bubble coral shrimp, whose blue-striped appendages reminded me of a cleaner shrimp dressed in a Halloween skeleton. All four of my dives bottomed out in the 60- to 70-foot range for extended periods, so I switched to nitrox the following day. The current was often strong enough to make me glad I'd brought my stainless steel tickle stick to hold my place when taking photos; the shop also sells them.

Most of the dives off Atlantis were over sandy bottoms (so-called "muck" dives) or on shallow reef structures, and the marine life varied enough from Magic Island so that staying here the second week was a great choice. A flamboyant cuttlefish seemed unperturbed by my presence. A spiny devil scorpionfish settled its body deep into the coarse sandy bottom, leaving only its bulbous orange eyes and thick lips protruding. A thin blue ribbon eel, its yellow-tipped jaws agape, rose out of its hole.

I came to think of Atlantis as a sister to the CoCo View Resort in Honduras -- it was so clean, well run and a photographer's dream, thanks to a huge climate-controlled camera room. A padded, U-shaped blue work surface ran waist-high around the perimeter of the otherwise white room, with space for about 20 photographers. There were many 110- and 220-volt outlets, even a big stack of dry towels. Two rows of roomy open storage compartments ran under the entire work surface. Hoses ran to compressed air nozzles for various cleaning chores. A flat-screen TV hung at one end of the room for photo review and resort presentations. Dumaguete's dive gear area was large enough to handle a resort full of divers. Specific dive schedules were posted daily, listing the time, boat, site, guide name, type of dive (e.g., muck, featured creature) and diver names. Along with many large posters of coral and critters we were likely to see, there were wooden boxes full of laminated dive site maps and laminated photographs of marine life.

In the middle of the week, we dived Apo Island, then Siquijor the next day, on Titan, a 70-foot banka outrigger with a large glass-windowed cabin (and head) and long central table upon which our meal was served. We dived from one of three small fiberglass speedboats. As I sunk to the bottom on my first dive at Apo, I immediately spotted a highly venomous, eight-foot banded sea krait swimming toward me. Of course, its mouth is so tiny that it is no threat to humans, so after my heartbeat went back to normal, I started noticing things. Coral in shades of yellow, green, and brown were plentiful, their polyps extended; they looked very "alive." Mushroom leather coral created the effect of huge, floppy, upside-down hats. Stands of soft finger coral stretched



Atlantis Dumaguete

from top to bottom of the reef in places, and in one area was a large forest of staghorn coral. During our surface interval, I explored narrow footpaths between the structures -- bamboo homes, little storefronts, a basketball court ("No shoes, No play") -- noticing laundry on the lines, motorcycles and bicycles parked here and there, small outriggers on the beach and skinny roaming dogs. In the afternoon, we dove a large sandy patch where hundreds of small bubbles percolated to the surface, fed by unseen volcanic forces below. Nestled into the coral, giant fluted Pacific clams displayed their brilliantly colored fleshy mantle.

Perhaps because so many divers might be leaving all at once, even when using the smaller boats, the diving at Atlantis Dumaguete had more of a frenetic feel to it; there were as many as five boat dives scheduled each day, at 8:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 1 p.m. and 4 p.m. We usually kept the same guide throughout the day. They were mainly young men in their 20s and early 30s; all were friendly and enjoyed pointing out critters and anything unusual to anyone who wanted to take advantage of their expertise. I usually dived at least 65 minutes, often without a buddy or a gripe.

My last four dives were book-ended by unsuccessful attempts to find the reclusive blue-ringed octopus at Bahura. I did find a magnificent giant octopus species, hidden inside a coral head. It peered out at me with one goat-like eye. I managed to get some great images of the tiny, white-headed popcorn shrimp that liked to nestle deep in its anemone companion. When a school of hundreds of voracious striped catfish came along, it was great to watch them scouring the bottom with Dyson-vacuum-like efficiency. One of my biggest finds was a peacock mantis with so many eggs it needed to grasp them in several rows of its claws. None of my group found a blue ring during the entire week, but overall, I'd seen many of the top "finds" of the Asia-Pacific in my first-ever trip to the region.

One of our last evenings featured a six-course Filipino dinner buffet, including whole grilled fish, a pig and three desserts. Courses included biko, a sticky rice cake made with coconut milk, sugar and ginger topped with caramelized cream; ginisang gulay, a spring roll; and Bicol Express, a stew filled with coconut milk, fish, onion, pork and garlic, and spiced with chilies. All accompanied by a band that favored Beatles tunes, including a passable "Hey Jude."

Atlantis' Tokos restaurant featured an extensive and varied menu. Breakfasts included eggs Benedict, pancakes with banana, yogurt, honey and toasted almonds, and omelet Florentine (made with local spinach and American cheddar cheese). Three lunch and three dinner options were handwritten on a blackboard outside the dining area. Lunch choices included a wonderful roasted tomato cream soup or mixed green salad, pork medallions with bacon-fried potatoes, a grilled tuna sandwich and fries, fettuccine with crostini bread and pad Thai chicken, followed by, say, chocolate crepes with chocolate sauce. Dinner started with soups such

Magic Beach Dive Resort

Diving (<i>experienced</i>)	★★★
Diving (<i>beginner</i>)	★★★★
Snorkeling	★★★★
Accommodations	★★★★
Food	★★★★1/2
Service and Attitude	★★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★

Atlantis Dumaguete

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

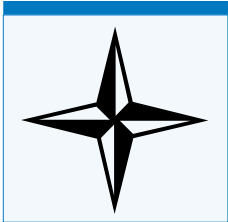
★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent

World Scale

as a creamy Asian potato with crispy wonton, or appetizers like a caprese salad with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Entrees included pork chop a la Milanese with tomato pasta and pepper sauce, Asian crusted fish fillet with wasabi mashed potato and tomato beurre blanc, and pesto potato gnocchi with shaved parmesan, topped off with sweets like chocolate soufflé or raspberry panna cotta. Red and white wines typically cost \$11 a bottle or \$3.95 per glass) and beers came from all over the world (e.g., Guinness for \$2.75 a pint, Heineken for \$1.95 a pint).

I've written several articles for Undercurrent, paying my own way, of course, not telling anyone what I'm up to, and I like to think I have a critical eye and write with a sharp quill when justified. Truth is, there wasn't much to kick about on this trip (well, maybe the smoking dive crew). In fact, it opened my eyes to an entirely different culture, making my explorations on land the desert, topping off an already incredible meal of a dive expedition. I found the Philippines to be a safe and welcoming country -- and surprisingly affordable -- with plenty of creature comforts and incredible sea life, as long as you're satisfied with the little things in life.

-- S.P.



Divers Compass: My total cost for the two-resort package, including diving, meals and transfers was \$3,499 (approximately \$1,400 for Magic Island, \$2,100 for Atlantis Dumaguete); for a non-diver, the total was \$2,445 . . . The round-trip flight to Cebu from a major Midwest airport cost me \$1,075; I checked four bags, each less than 50 pounds, with no charge by Korean Air . . . Both resorts included everyone in our tip envelope, from divemasters to maids, and a 10 percent cash tip was recommended; Magic Island has a surcharge for using a credit card . .

. Reef protection program fees were \$35 at Magic Island, and the Kawasan trip was \$27.50; at Atlantis, the marine park fee was \$90 for five days, and nitrox was \$100 for four days . . . Both resorts offered free WI-FI, hair dryers and safe deposit boxes . . . No immunizations were necessary . . . Both resorts used cell phones on their smaller boats, which carried oxygen and first-aid kits for emergencies, but there were no life jackets on Magic Island's bankas. . . Both resorts had plenty of bottled and purified water and "healthy choice" breakfast foods, and they accommodated gluten-free and other special dietary requests . . . Throughout my two-week trip, both air and water temperatures hovered in the low 80s, visibility was in the 35-foot range, and divers' ages ranged from 40 to 70 . . . Websites: Magic Island Resort - www.magicisland.nl/en/home; Atlantis Dumaguete - www.atlantishotel.com

Belize, British Virgin Islands, Hawaii

a KKK leader's resort, a dive shop's faulty rental gear

The Ku Klux Klan on Ambergris Key. Over the years, several *Undercurrent* readers have stayed at the Seven Seas Resort, on Belize's Ambergris Caye. Let's hope never again. It seems that a fellow named Bill Wilkinson, who was once reviled across America when he served as Imperial Wizard of the Invisible Empire of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan from 1975 to 1984, owns this little run-down tourist resort. As the *Daily Mail* reported on March 17, "Wilkinson organized hundreds of marches across America to stir up racial hatred . . . He set up a para-military-style training camp to equip Klansmen with the combat skills needed in the event of a 'race war'. . . Then in 1984, Wilkinson resigned from the organization, left America for Belize and acquired the Seven Seas Resort . . . But the unsuspecting guests at Seven Seas know nothing of the dark past of the resort's owner . . . Tanned Wilkinson spends his days milling around the dated property chatting with guests or taking a dip in the swimming pool . . . Bizarrely,

Wilkinson seems convivial with the local black population. A front desk worker told the *Daily Mail*, 'Mr. Bill doesn't bother us too much, he lets us run the hotel. He lives in one of the condos on the second floor and comes in and out, he spends a lot of time on his computer.' The Belizian workers have some knowledge of their bosses' controversial past as the head of the KKK, but seem to have little understanding of the power and influence he wielded all those years ago . . . News reports in 1978 say Wilkinson was deported from Britain after trying to start a KKK movement there . . . In astonishing 37-year-old photos, Wilkinson is seen at a cross-burning ceremony in a farmer's field in the English countryside . . . According to Wilkinson, he chose to come to Belize 'to do scuba diving and fishing.'" Read the entire story and see the photos at www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2990509/The-KKK-s-violent-Imperial-Wizard-pictured-time-vanished-America-1984-paradise-holiday-resort-owns-country-tiny-white-minority.html

More about Kona, Hawaii. Reader Lynda Durfee (Alexandria, VA) says she has to take issue with our article about Kona Diving Company in the March issue of *Undercurrent*. "Seems the reporter didn't do his/her homework before arriving in Hawaii. The diver should have contacted the shop regarding transportation and gear storage before booking the trip. I've done the manta dive several times (with Jack's and from the *Aggressor*), and the signature dive is always preceded by a twilight dive at a nearby dive site. The first dive gives the divers a chance to check their weights, gear, etc., and for the divemasters, to note those who might have problems on the manta dive. Also, if you're cold on the first dive, you'll need to add a hood, gloves, vest, etc. Unless your writer was promised a 'meal,' I wouldn't be complaining about the food. Most dive boats provide just snacks. If the diver had checked ahead of time, he/she would have known there would be four hours between the morning and night dives, and planned accordingly. These snarky comments marred what was otherwise a detailed report on the underwater topography and critters. By the way, the snorkelers don't get in the way of the divers. In fact, all those lights shining down from the surface make it even better for the divers kneeling on the bottom."

To Avoid Hypothermia, Divers Should Stay "in the Hood"

Steve Muscat, chief diving medical officer for the government of Malta, says most of the hypothermia problems he sees as a dive doctor are usually a result of thermal cooling of the head. Heat loss from the head in cold water can account for more than half the resting metabolic heat production.

"Dive schools do not usually give head protection to novice divers in warm water for the initial dives, as this gives a greater sense of freedom, reduces claustrophobia and enhances hearing," Muscat wrote in his regular column, "Dive Medic," for *Asian Diver* magazine. "The reasoning is that there is then a greater chance of their booking a course for more dives. The problem is that dive schools commonly end up losing business because the diver has ear and sinus problems related to exposure."

Even experienced divers can have problems due to badly-fitting or inadequate hoods. Case in point: A very experienced dive instructor did two consecutive dives on the MV Rozi wreck in Malta at 100 feet, with a sea surface temperature of 77 degrees, and 59 degrees at the bottom. He was wearing an 8-mm wetsuit with hood attached. But when starting his safety stop at 15 feet at the end of his second dive, he experienced an earache on the right side, and sudden vertigo. Recognizing the condition, he wisely went back down to 30 feet, where his symptoms subsided, then slowly made his way to the surface, swallowing hard all the time. When he went to Muscat for examination, the diver had typical signs of middle ear barotraumas -- bruising of his eardrum and blood-stained liquid in his middle ear. He had never had any similar symptoms prior, nor a history of common cold or allergy conditions.

Unfortunately, the episode repeated itself less severely with both ears three months later. Muscat recommended using a double hood, a single-lined 1-mm hood under his wetsuit hood, which worked wonders, but he also advised the diver to give up his career as a dive instructor to better protect his ears.

Muscat's advice: Avoid ear issues by always diving wearing a comfortable, well-fitting hood if your dive is going to exceed 20 minutes in water colder than 77 degrees. And doing a long surface interval to let your body regain thermal normality is essential for multiple dives.

What's to Become of Jacques Cousteau's *Calypso*?

It was the ship that launched a thousand childhood dreams. The *Calypso*, with Captain Jacques Cousteau at the wheel, took generations of would-be explorers across the oceans to discover the marvels of the "silent world," as he called it. Now, nearly 20 years after it sank following a collision with a barge in Singapore one year before Cousteau's death, squabbles between the ocean explorer's family and a Brittany boatyard threaten to the ship for good.

In December, after a long legal battle, a French court gave Cousteau's second wife, Francine, a deadline of March 15 to remove the *Calypso* from its dry dock. She also had to settle a \$405,000 bill for renovations or face having the 140-foot vessel auctioned off. Pascal Piriou, head of the shipyard in Finistère, said that, after years of bitter disagreements with Francine Cousteau, he wanted to be rid of the *Calypso* and would seek a legal order allowing him to sell the historic ship. He told the French media, "I think we could find some rich people who might come up with the money. There's an enormous amount of work to be done (on it), but it's doable."

But as the March 15 deadline approached -- and passed -- Francine Cousteau appeared unperturbed by

the threat. A statement from the family organization, Equipe Cousteau, read: "Equipe Cousteau is serene and confident and will bring about a happy ending to this episode that will be announced as soon as possible."

Pascale Bladier-Chassaigne of the Sea and River Heritage Foundation told the *Guardian* newspaper in England that the *Calypso* was unique and, as it is possibly the best known boat in the world it should be saved. Unfortunately, because it was made from wood, it would be no good as a diveable wreck or an artificial reef.

But good news comes from Leslie Leaney, publisher of *The Journal of Diving History*, who was told by her sources that the Cousteau Society, the *Calypso*'s owner, has been working on an agreement with Monaco since January. "They are very close to announcing plans to restore the *Calypso* and put it on display in Monaco as part of a larger exhibit based on the years of collaboration with Cousteau," she wrote in an e-mail. "Despite reports in the media, the ship will not be sold. The threats of seizure and sale by the shipyard were not carried out and based on the best information there was little to no chance of this result. There should be a formal announcement of the arrangement within a month. Both the Cousteau Society and Monaco have confirmed the negotiations. So there is hope."

Lee Little Haponski (Austin, TX) raves about the Black Water Dive offered by Big Island Divers in early March. "We got to the dock around 9 a.m. as the manta divers returned, and it was 10 a.m. before we entered the water. We had the maximum of six divers plus one divemaster and the captain. They require divers to have at least 50 total dives. The protocol is three divers on each side of the boat, clipped to a 40-foot-long line; each diver enters off the stern, accompanied by the divemaster. Timed for up to 50 minutes, the hunt is on for the small, deepwater dwellers that migrate into the shallower waters at night to feed. I find it a thrill to watch the strange, small, translucent jellies, shrimp and worms floating and zipping around the black waters above the 6,000-foot-deep trench just off the Kona coast. Watch the Jack's Dive Locker Black Water dive video on YouTube for a good preview. Sharks often show up just to check out the action. We had a black tip and one or two gray reefs circle around a few times below us." (www.bigislanddivers.com)

Have Braces on Your Teeth? Lee Haponski adds, "I planned to check out how diving with braces on my teeth works. I took a new Trident comfort-bite mouthpiece, which they happily put on my rental regulator even though they use the same mouthpiece on the rental gear. It works great and had no discomfort from my teeth."

S/V Promenade in the British Virgin Islands. Veronica Harding (Valrico, FL), onboard in March, says the *Promenade* is a great way to experience the best of BVI diving. "She's a comfortable 65-foot trimaran with five passenger cabins for 10 passengers. The three aft cabins share two heads/showers between them. The beds are very comfortable, but the cabins are small. The public areas, such as the cockpit and salon, are large, airy and well appointed. Meals were wonderful . . . We were fortunate to have between five and seven crew members, depending on the day, for only seven of us passengers. Divers ranged from beginners

to one doing her 1,000th dive. They always had two guides in the water to ensure the experienced divers didn't have to come up early due to beginners low on air. Once they saw that some of us were experienced, competent divers, we could have gone off on our own, but why would we want to when we had a local guide who led but let us go entirely at our own pace? Lobstering was my husband's focus, and Captain Chad got us to a spot that yielded enough lobster for dinner for the entire boat. It's a point of pride of his to find spots that are seldom or never dived by others, which made for some very pretty and interesting dives. The exit is set up nicely as well, with the ladder extending far down into the water. I have bad knees, so the crew insisted on taking my gear once I was on the swim deck so I didn't have to climb higher. This boat is all about service! The British Virgin Islands is generally not about big animals, though we did see a couple of whales breaching while we were under sail. Undiscovered spots aside, we did dive the iconic *RMS Rhone* . . . The crew made sure that at least three daily dives were available, including a night dive. The other entertainment options are numerous and varied -- floats, kayaks, trips to uninhabited islands, fishing, a dinghy ashore to visit iconic bars, you name it." (www.yachtpromenade.com)

Problems with Dive Aruba. Reader Damien Gambill (Salt Lake City, UT), a PADI master instructor, sent a newly certified couple to Dive Aruba in December, and they had all sorts of problems with rental gear, which, as Damien points out, really shouldn't happen at any operation. His student, Keven Godfrey, says, "My wife, Penny, and I went on a two-tank dive with Clive of Dive Aruba. Let's say I am thankful for our training. My pressure gauge stuck at 500 psi, and I ran out of air at 50 feet. I had to get to Penny quick and grab her air. It also worried me when Clive wanted us to start back up at 300 psi, when I know getting back on the boat still with 500 is safer. My BC also had one of the buckles torn off and just tied on; thus, I could not adjust it, so it impaired my ability to breathe . . . The dive computer Damien sold me said no dive for four hours, but when I asked Clive, he said, 'Oh, you're fine to dive again.' I was going to dive again, but I had problems with his equipment again, so I aborted. Clive rushed us and did not explain much or give us adequate time to check our gear. We had another two-tank dive planned for Thursday, but cancelled it." Of course, the cautionary note here is to refuse to take any rental gear that isn't fully operable, like the BC (that wouldn't help for the pressure gauge) and insist on proper instruction for the new equipment. By providing faulty gear and rushing his customers, this operator lost a lot of business.

-- Ben Davison

No Two Dive Computers Are Alike

a study shows they're not all as conservative as they claim

Dive computers have replaced decompression tables in most types of diving since they came onto the market some 30 years ago. According to Divers Alert Network (DAN), during that same time, the overall incidence of decompression sickness (DCS), at least in sport divers, hasn't changed. While data dispels the old worries that abandoning tables for computers would result in increased DCS, they indicate that computers are no panacea. And questions still linger about how safe dive computers are, especially when comparing brands -- or even models within the same line -- to each other.

There are dozens of dive computer models on the market, and they differ in design, quality of manufacturing, and, in particular, which decompression algorithm they use. But the manufacturers generally don't disclose publically information about their algorithms, their operational use, or their DCS risk. According to Petar DeNoble, senior research director at DAN, there are at least two reasons for this: Dive computers aren't regulated by any official organization, and validating decompression safety is complicated and expensive. So while manufacturers do test dive computers, they don't have to generate all the data necessary to support claims that their computers control or reduce the risk of DCS.

Generally, most sport divers tend to prefer computers with more conservative algorithms because they're not into personal risk-taking. However, without the detailed knowledge of how each dive computer manages decompression, it's hard to know which computers are more conservative than others. And as a new study shows, some dive computer algorithms even decrease or increase their conservatism during dives, depending on the diver's depth and duration.

The maximum no-deco stop time for 50 feet ranged from 60.7 minutes to 83.7 minutes -- that's a 23-minute difference in the time a diver can spend at 50 feet.

To most sport divers, computer algorithms are mysterious, complicated, and impossible to comprehend fully. So we rely on the good will of the computer manufacturers and presume their computers will give us a safe dive. Some divers want to know more, however, so at the risk of boring our readers with too many details about decompression profiles, let us summarize a study in the journal *Diving and Hyperbaric Medicine* by dive algorithm expert Martin

Sayer, head of the U.K. National Facility for Scientific Diving.

Sayer and his team tested 43 individual sport-diving computers using square profiles, which are more suitable for scientific testing, and are often followed by technical and military divers, who make decompression stops. Although sport divers tend to make multilevel, no-decompression dives, square profile results are important in order to understand more about one's own computer or when scouting around for a new dive computer. Tested three times at their default settings, they were compressed in a recompression chamber to five simulated depths -- 50 feet, 65 feet, 100 feet, 130 feet and 165 feet. At each depth, they recorded when each computer registered "no decompression," and then when various decompression times were indicated or exceeded.

In studying the differences between 0-, 5-, 10-, 20- and 30-minute decompression intervals, they discovered considerable variation in the times recorded for all the depth/decompression combinations, and the largest differences in permitted times didn't always belong to the same computer unit. For example, the average maximum no-decompression stop time for 50 feet was 69.7 minutes for all computers, but it ranged from 60.7 minutes (for the Apeks Quantum) to 83.7 minutes (for the Oceanic Atom 2). That's a 23-minute difference in the time one can spend at 50 feet! The average maximum no-decompression stop time for 100 feet was 18.4 minutes, but the times ranged from 15.7 minutes (Uemis SDA), to 22 minutes (Oceanic Datamask Hud).

The computers tested generally tended to be more conservative than standard USN decompression tables at depths shallower than 100 feet (and particularly at 65 feet), but less conservative than the tables between 100 and 165 feet. The differences were not always consistent between a manufacturer's computer models. In some comparisons, there were large differences at shallower depths, but then those differences weren't evident at deeper depths.

Some specific examples: For no-decompression dives, the Oceanic Veo 250 gave no-decompression times that were less than the average at 50 feet and 65 feet, but above the average at 100 and 130 feet. The Mares Nemo Sport was among the more conservative computers at 50 feet, but was the least conservative at 130 feet. Similar anomalies were found in decompression dives. The Uemis SDA gave longer than mean times at 50 and 65 feet, but shorter than mean times for the deeper depths.

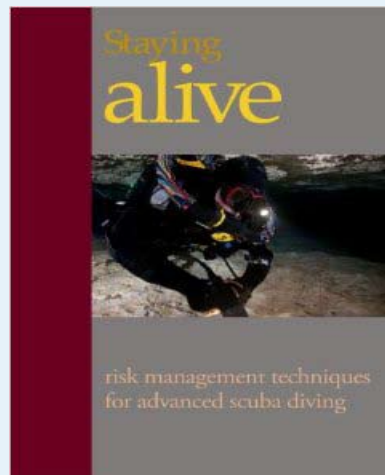
There were some general trends within the major brands -- Mares computers tended to be the most conservative overall, followed by Uwatec and Suunto. In both no-deco and decompression tests, most Oceanic computers gave the longest times. Overall, results from models made by the same manufacturer were reasonably close, unsurprising, since they use the same form of algorithm for their family of computers. But each seems to use a different model, which they often modifying without publishing the criteria they use for those modifications.

For example, Oceanic uses a modified version of the standard Haldane model (which assumes that all gas is dissolved into the tissues, and remains dissolved as long as maximum tissue tensions are not exceeded). Suunto uses its reduced gradient bubble model (RGBM), designed to protect a recreational diver from the effects of micro-bubble buildup. Uwatec uses versions of the ZH-L8 ADT, their own eight-tissue algorithm (it divides your body into eight “compartments” and mathematically follows the uptake and release of nitrogen in each area.). Mares uses its Mares-Wienke RGBM, a Haldanian model with some extra safety factors. The differences between models weren’t always consistent across the depth range, so significant theoretical similarities must exist.

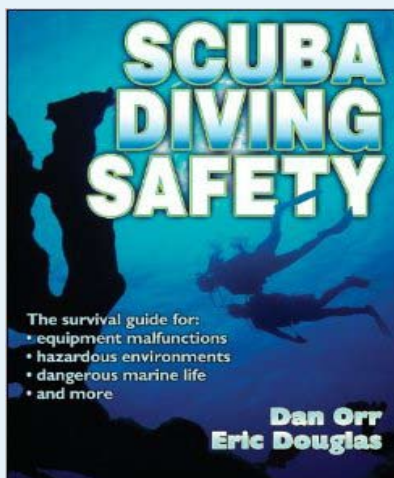
Two Good Reads for Reducing Your Dive Risks

You’ve no doubt read the many stories we’ve written about divers who found themselves in dangerous situations underwater and were faced with life/death choices. Some were smart enough to know what to do and get out of their snarls safely, but far too many did not. Two books on dive safety are must-reads for anyone who takes diving seriously.

Steve Lewis is a dive instructor, expedition leader, industry consultant, and columnist who has authored several dive safety textbooks. In his latest, *Staying Alive*, he revisits the survival guidelines originally proposed by legendary cave diver Sheck Exley, and illustrates them in eight chapters: attitude, knowledge, training, gas supply, gas mix, exposure, equipment and operations. Lewis writes in a conversational manner, mixing discussions he has had with other dive pros on the topic with historical background about how dive training and safety was improved (you’ll know all you want to know about Boyle’s Law), and examples of disaster scenarios to try at home. One good chart to keep handy is a “reaction cheat sheet” that will make sure you know what to do about underwater mishaps such as lost masks or buddies and low air.



Staying Alive is a lot of text, and most of it is Lewis’s own recommendations about what to do and not to do. However, if you prefer a little voice in your brain to talk you through, Lewis’s easy tone and detailed explanations do the trick. If you’re a technical diver or want to try it, Lewis has detailed information about gas supply, gas toxicity and operations. Any type of diver will benefit from his advice about gear. While it’s not a book you can flip through to get the exact what-to-do just before you get into the water, it’s a good book to review at leisure when you want to think about how to do it right the next time you dive.



Scuba Diving Safety by Dan Orr, the former CEO of Divers Alert Network and Eric Douglas, its former director of training is more a book for divers to know how to take care of other divers who’ve gotten into trouble. This is definitely a good book for a dive operator or trip leader, with its details about how to create an emergency assistance plan, conduct a missing diver search, and what information to collect about each diver just in case. However, sport divers planning trips with their buddies will get a lot of good advice. The authors offer useful details about how to rescue a conscious diver compared to an unconscious one, and how to do surface rescues versus ones underwater. There are chapters on resuscitation and towing and removing divers from the water, all with photos and images. The “Diving First-Aid” chapter is an essential reference guide for all divers.

Too many divers do not think about potential trouble, but rather defer to the dive crew. But a smart diver understands just how independent and alone he is. If you’re keen on self-preservation, these two books belong in your diving library. You can purchase them both from the Books section on

our website (www.undercurrent.org)

Sawyer ends the study by stating, "In a computer-driven era, it remains disappointing that dive management decisions . . . continue to be based largely on subjective assessment. This will remain an issue until there is an accepted 'gold standard' for decompression modeling. [Otherwise,] it will remain difficult for there to be any consistent approach to the manufacture of decompression computers."

Undercurrent columnist John Bantin, a veteran dive equipment tester, looked over Sawyer's study and notes that some results are out of date due to manufacturers' changes to algorithms since then. "What he says, especially about Oceanic computers, was correct once, yet he fails to mention that for at least three years these computers have been supplied with dual algorithms. This was caused in no small part by a campaign by myself and other dive writers that the DSAT algorithm Oceanic originally employed was not suitable for decompression-stop diving (or no-stop diving deeper than 100 feet, for that matter). Oceanic therefore introduced the Pelagic+ algorithm as an alternative algorithm available with virtually all its products.

"Alas, the default setting for Oceanic computers is still DSAT algorithm, and dive store staff fail to point out that the Pelagic+ algorithm is much more suitable for serious diving (and akin to the algorithms used by the other manufacturers). Buyers are more interested in peripheral functions they can understand than the invisible algorithm that might keep them safe from injury. So if you use a modern Oceanic computer, I advise you to set it for Pelagic+. Incidentally, today, Suunto, Mares, Cressi computers and many other brands now use the algorithm developed by Bruce Wienke, with very similar results."

Sawyer admits some of the computers he tested were out of date, due to limited research funds that couldn't buy the latest and greatest models. "However, the samples we have tested and are continuing to test are representative of what may still be in use today," he told *Undercurrent*. "Divers just don't throw away a computer when a new model comes out; if they do, some sell them."

And while there are also new versions of the computers being released, it's with minimal notification to the consumer, says Sawyer. For example, compare the no-decompression stops listed in the October 2008 manual and the August 2011 versions of the Suunto Vyper Air manual -- Sawyer's team saw significant differences, particularly in the personal factor and altitude settings. "The implication is that the two versions must be alluding to different versions of the decompression algorithms, or at least how these are modified with personal or altitude settings," he says. "This suggests that Suunto released different versions of the Vyper Air computer, but with no differences in the model name, so divers would get a different performance than expected if they were changing their settings based on the 2008 manual but had a 2011 version of the computer. Suunto could have allowed for this by using version numbers of the computers, but didn't.

Don't Count on Getting That Dive Trip Deposit Back

It's an annoying thing that gnaws at the heart of a diver who has to cancel a trip: not getting your deposit back, even if you cancelled far in advance of the start date. It hurts even worse when the dive operator gets full fare from someone else who took your vacated spot.

Subscriber Ralph Bishop (Ithaca, NY) wrote us to complain about Big Fish Expeditions, a dive trip outfitter based in British Columbia. He had booked a trip to Scotland to dive with basking sharks, but had to cancel due to unforeseen retirement. Even though Bishop canceled more than six months in advance, Big Fish did

not return his \$500 deposit. "This despite the fact that the trip is sold out already, and doubtless they will sell my place," he says.

Unfortunately, Ralph, I checked the Big Fish website and in its FAQ page, it says the deposit is non-refundable and non-transferable. Truth is, I myself hate these kind of rules, but they are everywhere in the industry, and regardless of whether they resell your spot, the rules are clear. I think it's a black mark on the industry, but that's what we as travelers face. It stinks and we're stuck.

However, for the rest of you, Big Fish has one spot left on its July 12-18 Scotland trip to see basking sharks. Big Fish won't say whether that's Bishop's old spot, but it's now up for grabs. Try not to cancel.

So although we cite computer names/models [in our study], they can still be different versions of the same unit being tested.

“Overall, the points we are making are no different from those made by John: that computer manufacturers are not good at informing the consumer of what the basic/default operations of their computers are, or when and where changes to the algorithms are being made. That means many divers may not be using their computers to their full potential.”

While this study was aimed at the use of dive computers by occupational divers, Sawyer is now attempting to examine the effects on recreational divers by doing a series of multi-level dives over a number of days but using repeated standardized “recreational” dive profiles. He expects to report those results later this year.

(On a separate note, there were 28 battery changes and 19 computer failures during the trials. Some data-download failures were due to low battery power, others occurred when the downloaded data didn’t equate to the dive profile. It’s unclear whether the download errors were representative of real-time problems that could affect a diver’s ability to get valid information, and thus, abort a dive. But if you assume it could, then, the researchers say this equates to a battery change or failure every 37 hours or 54 hours of diving, respectively.)

“Decompression management by 43 models of dive computer: single square-wave exposures to between 15 and 50 msw,” by M.D.J. Sayer, E. Azzopardi and A. Sieber; *Diving and Hyperbaric Medicine*, vol. 44, pgs. 193-201.

-- Vanessa Richardson

How Do You Handle a Bully on the Boat?

the debate continues

In our February issue, we featured two different itineraries on the Fiji-based liveaboard *Nai’a*. One of the writers almost had her trip ruined by an angry passenger we nicknamed Mac. An example: After bumping into her on a dive, Mac flipped her off and screamed “F*** you” through his regulator. Joshua, the *Nai’a* cruise director and divemaster, did not do a great job handling the obnoxious fellow. His reply to our writer when she complained: “This guy has been diving since the ‘70s, and you just can’t talk to a guy like that.” However, when a diver bullies another -- and to go farther, when a threatening male bullies a woman -- limits need to be set.

I expected feedback about that *Nai’a* review -- and I got it, from *Nai’a* staff, former passengers, and *Undercurrent* readers who had similar experiences in other places. Their range of views shows how difficult it is to manage an unruly diver -- and who should be the one to do it.

Why Can’t We Be More Like Peace-Loving Fijians?

We’ll start with Rob Barrel, owner of the *Nai’a*. He wrote, “I will not defend Mac’s behavior, but it is wrong and offensive to say our cruise directors tolerated it because he pays big bucks and might leave a big tip.” He said Joshua told him that he saw Mac get our writer’s attention during the nasty dive, but at his distance, he couldn’t tell that it was an aggressive move. Also, in response to our writer’s complaints and his own observations, Joshua made several announcements to the boat about diving nice, and being aware of the coral and fellow divers. Joshua also says he talked to Mac after the finger-flipping incident to try to get him to apologize, but Mac refused to do it because he thought our writer was the one in the wrong.

“Joshua called me from the boat for advice,” Barrel says. “I advised him to talk to both of them quietly to attempt to diffuse the issue, bearing in mind the other 16 passengers whose holiday would be affected

if Mac went ballistic -- which was likely -- at the public humiliation of getting grounded from diving. We have had difficult passengers aboard the *Nai'a* over the decades, and the crew has become masters at diffusing personal conflicts using the Fijian talanoa process, defined as 'frank expression without concealment in face-to-face dialogue.' I am very sad that your writer and Mac were not able to use talanoa, and that their conflict has spilled into the pages of *Undercurrent*."

Ah, it would be nice if we were all peace-loving Fijians, but when you have a bullying diver who is at risk of ruining everyone's trip, it really can't be up to the two divers, who are largely strangers to each other, to be in charge of restoring their relationship without intervention from those in charge. There may have been peacekeeping efforts behind our writer's back, but she was unaware, and not told how the staff planned to handle the situation. As far as she knew, she felt threatened and was blown off.

"It's Their Job, and They Need to Do It Well"

We ran Joshua and Rob Barrel's responses by our writer. She stands by the fact that the only comment Joshua made to her about Mac was the "This guy has been diving since the 70s . . ." She says, "Joshua went on to say that such a diver is oblivious to his actions, and that he probably thought he could do no wrong based on his profession and social position, and such people do not take kindly to being told otherwise, especially by someone younger than himself. Joshua went on to say that such a diver is oblivious to his actions, and that he probably thought he could do no wrong based on his profession and social position,

Regulator-Ripping Diver Sentenced in Underwater Attack

The man who has become the poster child for the debate over the harvest of aquarium fish pleaded no contest in February to tearing the regulator from the mouth of Maui-based reef activist Rene Umberger in West Hawaii waters last May. We gave the details of the underwater attack in our June 2014 article "An Underwater Attack Makes World Headlines." Umberger and five other divers with underwater cameras were filming Jay Lovell, an aquarium fish collector of 30 years, harvesting fish at 50 feet off the Kona coast when Lovell swam toward Umberger and ripped the regulator out of Umberger's mouth, an act that was captured on video and received national attention.

In Hawaii's Third Circuit Court on February 17, Lovell received a deferred six-month prison sentence on the charge of second-degree terroristic threatening. He must also obtain an anger management assessment, per the terms of a plea agreement forged between the prosecutors and Lovell's defense attorney. If Lovell stays out of trouble for one year, he will not have to serve the time and the incident can be expunged from his record.

Umberger told *Undercurrent* that the trial was not resolved the way she wanted. "The original plea offer was to include some time in jail and, what I thought was most important, anger management training. I also thought his permit should be revoked, at least while he was on probation. But the deal the attorneys struck had very minimal penalties. I could have said 'I reject that offer,' but in a very odd coincidence, Lovell's sentencing date was rescheduled to happen on the same day that Hawaii County was debating new laws about licensing fish collector that I had been working on for two years. There was no way I could sit at trial all day while the county council considered the laws, so I was forced to accepting the minimal deal." Umberger did take the stand briefly during Lovell's sentencing to ask that his fishing license be suspended during the deferment period, but Judge Ronald Ibarra told her the court must abide by the terms of the plea agreement.

Lovell had little to say during the proceedings, except that he was a law-abiding citizen and would continue to be so. Ibarra said the sentence gave Lovell the chance to keep the threat off his record. "You are lucky you aren't here facing a more serious charge." But Lovell had more to say on the matter when interviewed by *West Hawaii Today* after the court hearing. "They came out looking for me that day, I didn't go looking for it. It does look like we're going to get protection from this and the next time they'll be the ones who get arrested." He was referring to a bill introduced this session by Hawaii state representatives that prohibits the harassment of anyone engaged in marine or aquarium fishing (it was later deferred till the next government session for consideration).

Umberger is not surprised by his change of face. "He cried on TV during his sentencing, but as soon as it's over, he goes outside to talk to the press, and there's no remorse. He probably is out there raping the reef right now."

and such people do not take kindly to being told otherwise, especially by someone younger than himself. I offered to show him the video of the incident, but he said he didn't see it. That might have changed his mind about the problem.

"In regards to Joshua trying to get Mac to apologize, this is the first I've heard of that. If Mac thought I was in the wrong, why did he not come to me to ask what happened? Instead, he verbally assaulted me as soon as he saw me on the boat after the incident. Joshua did tell me that he had to tell Mac to stop bad-mouthing me to other passengers, so that is something. I discussed the Mac issue with Joshua and his fellow cruise director, Amanda, many times. Yes, it can be difficult having to manage conflicting personalities, but it is their job, and they need to do it well.

*"After enduring another hour of Dumb's interrupting and listening to himself talk, I let him know that I thought he was a loud-mouthed ****."*

"I consider myself a reasonable person who would have been fine with a calm, frank discussion about what was going on. But I did not get the feeling that Mac would have been amenable, and certainly not without someone like Joshua as a mediator. Honestly, I was scared to say too much or to confront Mac. There was a real possibility that he would go 'ballistic' on me and physically abuse me again. That is exactly why I wrote in my story: 'Now I wonder if other women on that trip, or other liveaboards, have likewise swallowed poor treatment in the name of appearing affable.'"

"There Is Only So Much One Can Do"

A few readers did come to the defense of *Nai'a* and Joshua. One is Mary Marshall (San Diego, CA), who was on that same cruise. "I was aware of some personality conflict between two divers on the other skiff, but it is a testament to Joshua's appropriate handling of the situation that it wasn't allowed to disrupt the cruise. After Mac was transferred to our boat, I didn't have any problems with him above or below the surface."

Sandra Brammeier (Palm Beach, FL) was aboard the *Nai'a* in March 2014, when Joshua and Amanda were making their debut as cruise directors, and says "[Spending] the kind of money required to go on the *Nai'a*, I wouldn't let anyone 'ruin' my trip, I'd stand up for myself. If others were having trouble with the same diver, then maybe a good tongue-lashing from one or all of them would have helped. Joshua could have talked to this guy until he turned blue for all you know. There is only so much the dive staff can do when it comes to the conduct of people onboard, and often some divers think they are 'above' the crew . . . It sounds like he moved them as far apart as possible. The *Nai'a* is huge, and there is plenty of space to avoid having to deal with somebody if you really wanted to . . . There is only so much one can do when two adults are acting like children, one is a bully, and the other is pouting. In this case, everyone would have probably been happy to set Mac adrift in a rowboat, but you just can't do that, you have to make the best of it." However, we must point out that our writer was not pouting. She was fearful in the face of a rude, threatening male. It is a bullying issue that a dive crew must understand and contend with.

Like some readers, Steven Webster (Carmel Valley, CA) has a conflicted view about what he would do. "Throughout my life, I have done everything possible to avoid a physical fight (mainly because I'd lose and that hurts). But if I were the person bumped and flipped-off, I would have let Mac know that if he did it again, I'd kick him in his man parts. It sounds like Joshua and Amanda tried as best they could. Again, were I on the cruise, at some point, I would have gathered the other divers together and, as a group, told Mac that if he didn't shape up, we would ask the *Nai'a* to ban him from future charters. I have led groups on the *Nai'a* annually for the last 15 years, so I have known four sets of cruise directors. They were all excellent, Joshua and Amanda among them."

Yes, Steven, *Nai'a* has always been a favorite of our readers, and keep in mind that the two reviews we ran in our February issue were quite positive. This was one incident, and we're highlighting it not to indict

the *Nai'a* crew, but to point out to everyone in the industry that bullying problems should not be swept under the deck mat.

Putting Dumb and Dumber in Their Place

I'll leave you with another story, not a man bullying a woman, but of two unruly divers who nearly ruined a trip. Fortunately, this one has a happy conclusion. Tom Lopatin (Lake Hopatcong, NJ) was aboard the *Nimrod* for a 10-day sail from Cairns, Australia, to the northern Coral Sea, and he immediately spotted two troublemakers, brothers whom he labeled as Dumb and Dumber. "Dumb was an egomaniac, 'a legend in his own mind.'" From the get-go, he dominated every conversation at every meal, (we all sat at one large table), and constantly complained, with comments like, 'What a shitty dive that was,' to the consternation of divemaster Alan Raabe (now captain of the *FeBrina* in Papua New Guinea and a legend in many divers' minds), and the annoyance of the rest of the guests who didn't share his opinions.

"At dinner on the third day, after enduring another hour of Dumb's interrupting and listening to himself talk, I let him know that I thought he was a loud-mouthed **** who was ruining the trip for everyone else, that he should learn to let others speak without interruption, and that no one else shared or was interested in his negative opinions about the diving.

"Dumb barked something about resenting being spoken to in such a rude manner, and bolted to his cabin to sulk. Dumber said something about not speaking to his brother that way, and followed him. After dinner, my wife said she wasn't sure I had done the right thing, and it made me wonder if I had been too harsh on Dumb, that perhaps the incident was uncalled for.

"But the next morning, Alan thanked me for what I had done, that he had been biting his lip up until then, because Dumb was a guest. However, that after the incident, he pulled Dumb aside and said something like, 'Tom is a good lad and I won't be having you upset him like that anymore, and you better 'straighten up and fly right' for the remainder of the trip.

"When Dumb and Dumber came up for breakfast, it was as though they had been 'born again.' They were quiet, polite, no dominating conversations, or complaining about the diving. Dumb even went so far as to make duplicate copies of a video another guest had filmed of a pod of orcas we snorkeled with, and mailed them to all the guests -- including me."

--Ben Davison

A Tragedy of Dive Errors

Major bends in Rangiroa leads to a \$7.8 million settlement

When dive industry professionals gather to create a quality film showing off dive gear in a beautiful dive setting, you would think they'd have the sense to hire the right people to make it, that the dives are planned in advance, and everyone is aware of what the others will be doing during the dives. It's called common sense, right? In this case, there was pretty much a total lack of common sense in the planning for a dive film to be made in French Polynesia, and that led to a gasp-inducingly inept dive in March 2012 -- as well as what could be the largest payout ever to settle a dive-injury-related lawsuit.

To celebrate its 40th anniversary, Bare Sports, which makes wetsuits and dive accessories, hired Bonnier Corporation, the publisher of *Scuba Diving* magazine, to create something memorable to commemorate the event. Bonnier decided to use one of its divisions, Warren Miller Entertainment, which makes action sport films, to create a "webisode" film featuring Bare Sports' dive gear. They decided to shoot it at Rangiroa Atoll, 220 miles northeast of Tahiti, and specifically in Tiputa Pass, a deep, wide passage with a current that

can rip at 10 knots when it flows from the ocean to the lagoon, making it a gathering spot for sharks, eagle rays and other majestic predators. But its depths and strong current means Tiputa Pass is not a good site for standard openwater divers to jump into unprepared.

In early 2012, Bonnier and Warren Miller put together its team for the film, which included Michael Prickett, a Hawaii resident hired to be an underwater cameraman for the Tiputa Pass shoot. They also hired the Rangiroa-based dive operator Top Dive to conduct and supervise the webisode dives. On March 13, Prickett arrived in Rangiroa, along with Tim Willison, who worked for Warren Miller Entertainment, Peter Falk, who worked for Bare Sports, and Ryan Miyamoto, another freelance cameraman. They met Top Dive employees Nicolas Bernard and Audrey Clement, who would be modeling Bare Sports gear in the webisode. As divemaster, Bernard would be in charge of the filmed dives.

Later that day, Prickett, Falk, Miyamoto, Bernard and Clement motored out to Tiputa Pass for the first webisode dive. The Top Dive crew filled the tanks with a 32-percent mix of nitrox, but neither Bernard nor his staff bothered to ask beforehand whether their passengers were certified nitrox divers -- none were. Bernard and Clement told Prickett to use a Suunto Vytac dive computer, while Falk used a Suunto Cobra computer. However, if the divemasters had bothered to ask whether the men knew how to use those computers, they would have learned that Prickett had never used a dive computer. Bernard led three divers through the dive (Falk didn't dive that day), and they stayed close together, following and filming dolphins.

The divemasters didn't bother to ask beforehand whether their passengers were certified nitrox divers -- none were.

On March 14, the group motored back to Tiputa Pass, when the outgoing ebb tide significantly reduced the visibility due to the detritus and debris coming from the lagoon (sport divers always ride it when the tide is coming in and the water is clearer). Bernard announced that it would be a drift dive. Neither Prickett nor Falk had the experience to do a drift dive in Tiputa's strong current. Bernard had not prepared a pre-planned dive profile or even prescribed a maximum depth or time for that second dive. He had programmed Prickett and Falk's computers, but he set Prickett's Vytac computer in meters, and Falk's Cobra computer in feet, without telling the men about the differences. He gave the group a short pre-dive briefing and told Prickett, Miyamoto and Falk to go over the side first so they could shoot his and Clement's entry into the water from below. However, after everyone was in the water, Falk immediately had problems with his mask and returned to the surface. Prickett followed him up to see if he could help. After Falk got a new mask from the boat, both men re-descended, only to discover that Bernard had already finned off with Miyamoto and Clement to see dolphins.

Setting off in search of their divemaster, Prickett and Falk descended to 50 feet, then found themselves in a strong downcurrent, at the peak of the outgoing tide, which dragged them down to 211 feet -- their Nitrox 32-percent mix only allowed for a maximum depth of 130 feet. Neither man knew how to use his dive computer, and when they compared what they were looking at, they thought they weren't reading it right, because they didn't know Bernard had programmed one in feet and the other in meters. Falk started breathing too rapidly and quickly ran through most of his nitrox. Back at 100 feet, Falk signaled his depth to Prickett, who saw Falk's pressure reading and realized he did not have enough gas to reach the surface on his own. Giving up his search for Bernard, Prickett took hold of an agitated Falk and started to ascend, buddy breathing with Falk, who had run out of gas. Because Falk was breathing too quickly, Prickett's air also ran out at 30 feet. Hence the dilemma: drown or risk getting bent from the rapid ascent. With no choice, both rushed to the surface.

At the surface, they saw the boat and shouted until it motored over to get them. Unfortunately, the driver, Manu, didn't speak much English, and neither of the two divers could make him understand the DCS that loomed over them. As soon as the men climbed into the boat, Prickett started feeling the

telltale muscle pain, vertigo and the lower body numbness of DCS. But instead of rushing them back to shore, a non-understanding Manu kept looking for Bernard, Clement and Miyamoto, who were still in the water. The three eventually surfaced some distance away. By the time Manu got them aboard, Prickett was suffering severe DCS symptoms in his central nervous system. Before the group could find a safe spot safe to try an emergency, in-water recompression, Prickett fell to the deck, paralyzed and unconscious.

Bernard said he thought Prickett had 25 years of diving experience. Prickett said his 25 years was as a surfing cameraman.

Top Dive had no recompression facilities, so the two men's treatment was delayed for hours until they could be flown back to Tahiti, where they underwent recompression treatment. Falk spent only three days in the hospital, but Prickett stayed there for more than a month and left in a wheelchair. Prickett, who still can't walk, still suffers from muscular spasms, vertigo and incontinence, and has permanent injuries to his lungs, back,

and legs. He has incurred a pile of medical bills for surgeries, nursing, drugs and physical therapy, and his career as a cameraman is over.

Prickett filed suit in California's Superior Court, claiming gross negligence by Bare Sports, Bonnier and Warren Miller Entertainment for, among other things, failing to select a safe dive site, not checking their contractors' dive experience and training in nitrox or dive computers, and sending them overboard alone into a deep, dangerous current without any markers or signaling devices.

During the police investigation, Bernard said he was unaware Falk and Prickett had gone down after changing out a mask, but that didn't stop him from continuing his dive -- a violation, per French Polynesia law, of his role as divemaster to supervise all divers and make the group surface. Bernard said he thought he was in the presence of experienced divers, and that Prickett had 25 years of experience. Prickett said he was only a standard openwater diver, and his 25 years of experience was as a surfing cameraman. Falk had less than 15 dives, none from a boat, none drift diving, and none with a diving computer. And despite Bernard having set a dive profile for 80 feet, he brought Miyamoto, who only had less than five dives and was only certified to 60 feet max, down to 130 feet.

Bernard admitted he hadn't told the three divers beforehand that they were going to breathe nitrox. What's more, a dive expert who checked the gear testified that Falk's computer had been calibrated for a 31-percent breathing mix while the actual breathing mix was 32 percent. That would cause the dive computer to register a deeper maximum depth than the depth required by the actual mix used. Falk's hyperoxic threshold was surpassed by as much as 260 percent. The same applied to Prickett's computer, but it indicated he was making an air dive, not a nitrox dive.

Because Bernard had programmed both of their computers, and set one to display depth in feet, the other in meters, this added to the two divers' confusion underwater. The dive expert also testified that the dive profiles recorded by Bernard's and Clement's computers showed totally different dives than the three other divers, a sign that they had been independent and had not dived the same dive. They had not been under divemaster supervision.

To top it off, investigators found that certification cards of most Top Dive's instructors were no longer valid, due mostly to their not having medical check-ups. Furthermore, the dives recorded on their computers grossly surpassed the depths to which openwater dive clients are permitted to descend. Top Dive's records showed that they frequently had more divers in groups than were permitted.

Bernard was indicted by Tahiti's criminal court in January 2013 for the many errors he made on that dive. The trial has been postponed until later this year. Currently, he and Clement are still listed on Top Dive's website as running its Rangiroa dive operation.

Back in California, Prickett's civil trial started last December. Experts called in to testify opined that the parties involved in the making of the film did a poor job in pre-planning and failed to hire experienced divers who knew what they were doing.

"Bonnier and, through their subsidiary, Warren Miller Entertainment, were the ones that selected everybody who was going to be involved in this," Bret Gilliam, a defense dive expert witness for Bare Sports (and an *Undercurrent* contributor) testified during the November 2014 pre-trial deposition. "What they did was basically made a poor selection. The Top Dive unit wasn't properly prepared or qualified for what they were being asked to do. They didn't have the proper equipment or the proper protocols for supervision and response, and they had no aspect of foreseeable contingency protocols in place. In addition, the supervisory role that should have been played by some members of the Top Dive team was essentially omitted completely because they tried to use Nicolas Bernard and Audrey Clement as diving supervisors when, in fact, their primary role was trying to serve as on-camera talent. It's a hopeless contradiction. It doesn't work."

But Bonnier and Warren Miller Entertainment hold the ultimate responsibility, because no one on their teams for the Bare Sports film had a diving background. "They seemed to think this was something they could do just like they might do a surf film or a ski film," Gilliam testified. "I don't think they were capable of assessing Top Dive." In fact, Top Dive ultimately was chosen by the Tahiti Tourism Board because they were willing to swap their services for nothing, only film footage.

"I've been involved in scores of filming projects . . ." Gilliam testified. "We're trying to get the most qualified team who thoroughly understands not only the responsibilities . . . that support getting the project done, but also the necessary response and protocols for contingencies, foreseeable hazards, how they're going to respond to that. From what I can see, every step of the way here, we have no one who really was capable of making that assessment. Willison, who identifies himself specifically as the producer and director, has no diving background whatsoever. I don't see how they could have made any evaluation because they they didn't know what they were doing."

The trial lasted five weeks. Then on January 13, the second day of jury deliberations, Bonnier, fearing the verdict wouldn't go its way, decided to settle. Prickett later allowed the settlement documents to be

Mea Culpa

We're not perfect, and thanks to some eagle-eyed readers, here's our chance to make amends and correct our errors.

In our latest mid-month Dive News e-mail, we wrote about the Coolpix, Nikon's new underwater camera, stating it was waterproof down to 130 feet. William Johnson (Los Angeles, CA) reminded us that the maximum depth for an openwater diver is not the same as for the Coolpix, which can only go down to 100 feet (but he said he has pre-ordered one anyway).

In the March issue article "Want to Put Your Name on a Reef," we must have been facing backwards when we said the artificial reef being built near the city of Naples was on Florida's Atlantic coast. David Findley (Des Moines, IA) caught that one: "I'm sure you realize that Gordon Pass, near Naples, is in the Gulf of Mexico, not the Atlantic as you stated."

And we were swimming backwards on our recent

trip to the Grenadines. Says Marty Glesecke (Dallas, TX), "Thanks for the special report on Petit Mustique Dive Lodge. But weren't *you* 3,200 miles due west of Senegal, rather than Senegal being 3,200 miles due west of you? One could travel due west from the Grenadines to Senegal, but that trip is closer to 22,000 miles." Thanks, Marty, we corrected it on our website, but because nothing else in the story is true (remember, you read it on April 1), does it really matter?

John Bantin, one of our regular contributors, wrote to chastise me about my comments last month' about Aqua Lung's recall of its Sure Lock II weight pockets. Bantin expressed his preference for weight-integrated BCs, while I prefer the old-fashioned weight belt, and I wrote, "The crew on board hauling up my unweighted BC offered a big smile for me, not for Bantin." Not true, Bantin tells me. "Actually, Bantin passes up his weight pockets before passing up his tank! That's the point of the releases." Touché, John.

If you catch errors, please let us know, and we'll express our mea culpas and correct our mistakes.

unsealed, and court records showed that Bonnier paid \$7.5 million to Prickett, with Bare Sports paying another \$300,000. That amount is the most on record paid out for a dive-related injury case. While it goes a long way toward compensating Prickett for losing the profession he's had for 25 years, it came at the tragic expense of his health -- and through the malfeasance of companies that should have known to hire the right people to make an underwater film in a strong current.

-- Vanessa Richardson

Flotsam & Jetsam

Can't Get Enough of John Bantin? You know our expert dive gear tester appears regularly in our issues, but have you seen the commentaries and thought-provoking pieces he writes for our blog? In fact, Bret Gilliam, another top *Undercurrent* contributor, wrote in to say this about Bantin's latest post, "This is one of the best articles on the subject of primary rebreather hazards that I've ever seen. . . All aspiring rebreather divers need to print this and save it for future reference." Read our blog (www.undercurrent.org/blog) to see the post Gilliam is referring to -- "Near Misses with Rebreathers" -- as well as other good commentary by Bantin, Gilliam and other dive veterans.

Cayman Dive Pioneer Bob Soto Passes On. Since he opened one of the world's first dive resorts in Grand Cayman in 1957, Soto was revered as one of the founders of the Caymans tourism industry. After serving in the Home Guard as a 16-year-old during WWII, Soto was introduced to the underwater world as a hard-hat diver in the U.S. Navy before returning to Grand Cayman to establish Bob Soto's Diving. In a 2013 profile in *Grand Cayman* magazine, Soto recalled bringing five sets of scuba gear to the island and charging tourists \$7 per trip. There was no dive certification training at the time, so he used his navy training guides to teach the basics to adventurous tourists. "I built my own backpacks out of plywood and aluminum metal, and

I would break up batteries, get the lead out and melt them down to make lead weights," he said. Soon he was taking out 100 to 150 people a day, and was made a Member of the British Empire in 1997. Longtime friend Ron Kipp, who bought Soto's dive operation in George Town 20 years ago, told the *Cayman Compass*, "Without Bob Soto, there would have been no diving industry." Soto died March 17 at age 88.

This May Change How You Look at Beach Sunsets. A new study states that great white sharks exploit the sun's angle to hunt down their prey, perhaps concealing themselves in the reflected glare. This is the first time any animal has been shown to use the sun as part of its hunting strategy. Charlie Huveneers from Flinders University in Australia wanted to test if the sun's low position on the horizon plays a role in why they hunt at dawn and dusk. So he and his team sailed 18 miles offshore from South Australia, threw chunks of tuna into the water and watched how the sharks approached it when attacking. It turns out sharks tended to come in from the direction of the sun: in the morning, they were more likely to approach from the east, and in the evening from the west. When the sun was hidden by cloud, there was no association between the sun's position and the angle of approach, another indicator that sharks intentionally exploit the sun's direction when it's useful. It could be that prey are better lit from that angle, or perhaps their view of the shark is obscured by the glaring sun. Just remember where the sun is located when you go on your next early morning or dusk dive.

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