

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Dewi Nusantara, Komodo, Indonesia

luxurious living, remarkable diving

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Dear Fellow Diver

Andrea, the friendly English Dive/Cruise Director from Southhampton, in her low-key way, introduced us 11 divers to all the details of the beautiful Dewi (pronounced day-wee) Nusantara, as well as the planned itinerary and the dive procedures. But, there came a clinker. Since we were lucky to have two marine biologists on board, one the veteran Mark Erdmann, she said they would modify the advertised Komodo itinerary and take two days to explore a few unknown areas, primarily muck dives. "After all, you don't want to spend your whole trip just diving Komodo." What? I booked my July trip for very good money to dive Komodo, and now that I'm onboard they're changing the itinerary. I'm no muck diver. I held my tongue.

My partner and I were already a little anxious, thanks to an earlier hitch in getting picked up at our hotel for transport to the boat. With no driver 35 minutes after scheduled pickup time, I called the phone numbers Dewi had provided, but no answer. Was there a glitch in logistics? Would I become the guy who misses his dive boat and has to figure out how to hook up with it somewhere in the middle of the ocean? Then I remembered an email address that Mike Hoppe, our fine Reef and Rainforest travel consultant, had printed on our voucher. Boom ... instant response.



MV Dewi Nusantara



No worries, the driver was just stuck in traffic. After picking us up, he honked his way through the scooter-chaos of Bali traffic. At the harbor, we boarded a tender for the 191-foot topsail schooner Dewi Nusantara, boarding her from the outboard staircase. Welcome, welcome ... we were greeted warmly.

We left dock around dinner time, with plans to travel seven hours to our first exploratory dive site. "Seas might be wavy," Andrea advised, but the ride was smooth (as rides were throughout the trip) and I slept well in the perfectly air conditioned cabin, only to awake in the morning to another hitch. An engine had lost

an oil line during passage, so we had stopped cruising and would dive unplanned locations near Gili Trawangan to wait for the hose to be boated to us. Andrea explained that the sites had been dynamite-fished so that we would be muck diving amid rocks and rubble. Afterward, most divers (other than the two marine biologists) and I were disappointed in the dives, though a few night divers enjoyed their findings. Yet, throughout the day, each of the upbeat 23-member crew handled the situation with aplomb, and at dinner we heard the good news: they had fixed the engine, and it would be 16 hours at full speed to catch up to our itinerary.

The next morning, we arrived at Sumbawa Teluk Saleh/Tansung Bara for exploratory muck dives. My wife and I, along with our helpful, excellent critter finder dive guide, Andre -- a powerfully built Indonesian with a huge smile -- let the current slowly carry us over a hundred yards of a sparse coral reef swarming with fish. It felt unique and wild to be somewhere virtually unexplored. In 81-degree (27°C) water and 40-foot (12m) visibility, I encountered a mimic octopus, nudibranchs, and a bunch of other critters in the dark brown volcanic sand, called "black sand." Commensal shrimp, mushroom coral pipefish, various morays and black garden eels were among the discoveries. More than once, Erdmann, the highly regarded marine biologist, commented, "I think I found a new species! And after another dive, he exclaimed, "What you saw is really rare! I could dive here all week!" To collect specimens, Erdman would squirt a clove oil anesthetic into the holes, then bring the specimens back to the boat, pin them to the bottom of his shower shoe, then measure and catalog them.

Andre was our dive guide the whole trip (two divers to one guide is the rule), which allowed a great relationship to develop as Andre learned exactly what we wanted to see. We made two more muck dives -- 20-foot (6m) viz -- and no night dive, since we were still behind our schedule. The two tenders were cranked up by crane for storage on the aft of the ship, and off we went.

The huge covered dive deck had plenty of room to store and hang gear, soak cameras and suits, as well as two dining tables that each seated 10 guests. After each dive, when the tenders arrived back at the mother ship, the staff greeted us with cheers and high fives on the boarding staircase (I wondered -- was it because we made it back alive?) Yeah, it's corny, but I smiled every time. I'd rinse off at one of two warm freshwater deck showers (there are two heads off the dive deck), then, after being handed a fresh towel, I'd sit in a chair for a short back and neck massage . . . after every dive!

At dinner, Andrea mentioned that we'd had a "successful day of diving," and I suppose the marine biologists did, but several of my fellow divers and I were

concerned. I was eager to visit the sites that I'd read so much about and paid dearly to dive. Earlier, Andrea had said "Ask if you have any concerns so that we can address them. It's too late for us to fix things at the end." So, I asked if we could check the plan, and Andrea reassured us that beautiful coral reefs were coming, and, yes, some muck dives would be part of the trip.

Returning to my cabin, #3 on the starboard side (there are eight twin staterooms and one master suite), was always a pleasure. The curved dark wood hull was one of our walls, with a porthole for fresh air. We had plenty of cabinet space and storage. Small LED lights calmly lit the room, and when one flickered, a crew member replaced it within minutes. The well-designed wooden bathroom sported a glass bowl sink; the spacious shower, with a stone tile wall and floor, produced plenty of hot water. The comfortable double-wide bed provided room to climb out either side.

Mornings began with a light breakfast before the first dive (07:15-08:00), followed by eggs Benedict, eggs Florentine, omelets, bacon, pancakes, French toast, or an Indonesian breakfast -- a bowl of buckwheat noodles and veggies, topped off with a fried egg . . . and lattes or cappuccinos . . . Another dive, then a buffet lunch, perhaps fried shrimp or curried chicken, with a delicious salad and wok vegetables. Then an afternoon dive followed by snacks such as egg rolls or fried bananas with caramel and cinnamon. A predinner night dive was followed by hot chocolate upon arrival at the boat, and a gourmet individually plated dinner. Fresh cream of mushroom, asparagus, broccolli, lentil soups, delicious garlic toasted baguettes, a salad, then an Indonesian dish, and seared tuna, beef saltimbocca, roasted chicken, rack of lamb, snapper, a tough sirloin, vegetarian options. Delicious! To ensure one was satisfied, Jun, the maître d, was around from wake-up to bedtime, with a smile asking "Would you like something to drink. I get you something?"

Day Three delivered! At Sangeang Main Island, Tikno Reef started as a sloping expanse of awesome colorful coral gardens filled with millions of reef fish. Breathtaking! At Hot Rocks, volcanic bubbles streamed from the sand. Lighthouse Reef was more of a muck-dive-critter-finding thing -- warty frogfish, decorator



There was plenty of space on the sundeck

Fishes of the East Indies

In late 2013, Ichthyologists Mark Erdmann and Gerry Allen, famed for putting Raja Ampat on the map, released a set of three interlinked iPad reef fish identification apps that covered 2700 different species of fish in the East Indies. They have updated these, with better photos, and have included new species that have been discovered in the region. Now, Fishes of the East Indies is contained within a single app for Android, useful to divers, naturalists, and scientists where Internet access may not be available or reliable.

There are both pictures (including multiple images for those species with different male or female and juvenile color patterns), a short scientific description, a

guide to type locality and currently known range, color description and distribution map.

While the area of focus is the Coral Triangle, many of the species covered can be found throughout the tropical Indo-Pacific, so the apps are useful for much of the world's tropical reef diving.

The apps are available at the Apple App Store (\$17.99 for volumes 1 & 2 with Volume 3 free) for iPhone and now at Google Play for Android.

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.species.fishapp>

Dewi Nusantara, Komodo, Indonesia

Diving for Experienced	★★★★★
Diving for Beginners	(don't go!)
Snorkeling	(n/a)
Accommodation.....	★★★★★
Food.....	★★★★★
Service & Attitude.....	★★★★★
Money's Worth	★★★★★

★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent
Worldwide scale

crabs, plenty of nudis. Currents were all over the place: this way, that way, down, up . . . but no one was in danger, because every diver had good diving skills, and the guides kept a close watch. That said, this is no trip for beginners without precise buoyancy skills and current comfort. Since water temperature swung between 75 and 86 degrees (24-30°C), wearing the right thermal protection was tricky. In fact, I wasn't well prepared, leading to serious shivers on some colder dives. I asked Andrea if she had rubber I could add and she had me covered for the next dive. When I needed batteries for my dinosaur night dive lights, she came up with rechargeable AAs. After stabbing my finger with my dive knife while modifying my veteran vest, she had first-aid in moments. When I needed a tie line to fix my vest, Yan rousted some up right away. Yan, by the way, was the private dive guide for a friendly but shy Japanese woman who dived with Dewi often, to focus on

photographing tunicates; one of her published photo books was on the boat.

At Padar Island Secret Garden in Komodo National Park, the water was 75 degrees (24°C) with 20-foot (6m) viz. My bright flashlight beam found tiny creatures hidden in the shaded coral crevices, as well as bringing out the color. Of course, there was plenty to see, giant frogfish, mobula rays, glass fish and batfish among the discoveries.

At the park, we hiked around to see several amazing Komodo dragons, as well as plenty of monkeys. Taking a tender trip to one uninhabited island, we spotted three scrawny hungry dragons coming down to meet us. (Per the plan, we stayed on the boat!) We also hiked to the 'pink sand' beach, where billions of grains of broken coral give the sand a unique tone, and we hiked to a pinnacle lookout for sunset that was stunning, overlooking a cut between islands with two separate bays and sand shallows, dotted with interesting 'backpacker level' dive boats.

While no one ever got lost diving, the Dewi website stated that divers would not be allowed to dive unless they carried a Dive Alert air horn and a rescue strobe. I noticed this just a few days before departure (the pre-trip paperwork didn't mention it), so I rushed to order two sets online and have them FedExed, only to find out from Dewi during an airport layover that they were NOT required. During the first dive briefing, Andrea mentioned that they want all divers to have an audio signal, which could be a whistle and a large safety sausage. Good ideas, both, but the paperwork should better address these requirements. (The website still has erroneous information.)

South of the park diving, in mostly 75-degree (24°C) water with 20-foot (6m) viz, looked like a snowstorm, but

Chip Your Dive Bag

Clearing customs in Jakarta on your way to Raja Ampat only to find your dive gear has gone missing in transport is not something we'd wish on anyone — but it happens. Anyone who's cleared customs at Miami might have also seen a bag go missing. Every day, airlines misroute 82,000 bags around the world, and 13 percent will never be found, largely because the labels get torn off during handling.

Now, you can put an electronic chip in your luggage, rendering it identifiable to lost & found services throughout the world, which markedly increases the chance that your bag will get back to you. Two million travelers use it, and baggage-handling services throughout the world are picking up on it too. The price of an E-LOST chip is \$9.90 and is available direct from www.e-lostbag.com/us

the reefs were healthy, and there was massive biodiversity for critter hunting -- a 10X magnifying lens helped. But north, the water was 81-82 degrees (28°C), with much better viz, and fantastic coral gardens sported massive schools of fish. One dive had so many anthias (and other fishes in the blend) that I almost couldn't see through them for the entire dive! Some dives were overwhelming, and virtually everyone was a grand ole time, as we ogled cuttlefish, hawksbill turtles, and reef fish such as big bumphead parrots and colorful butterflies. In Manta Alley, about 20 mantas schooled in front of us the entire two dives, filter feeding high in the morning, and getting cleaned deeper in the day.



Meals were imaginative and varied

On almost all dives, the topography was a form of a sloping reef, with the varying pitch, and some had level coral gardens. A few dives were on walls, but never big canyons or swim-thrus. During every dive, we had our safety stop in a coral garden, except just one where we drifted in open water. Upon surfacing, the tender would come right up, I'd pass up my gear, fins included, and climb the solid side ladder. Andre was always right here, in case I needed a hand.

Our final two dives were classic 'muck' dives in the trash-sand of Bima Bay. While I was skeptical about muck diving when I started this trip -- I'm more of a big environment, fish aficionado -- these dives made me a convert as I floated through the calm water hunting for mysterious creatures.

On the disembarking day, tenders took us to the dock to meet our drivers. At the airport, porters took the group's luggage through security to the check-in. There was some mix-up, however, when I was confronted later in the waiting room by an airport official with a porter tagging along, demanding tips for carrying the entire group's bags, even though I wasn't in charge of the group. We had presumed Dewi had taken care of tips, but truth is they hadn't. Clear this up with Dewi before reaching the airport.

I returned home with a huge Go Pro library of different animals and critters and corals and fishes and dragons and monkeys and sunsets and islands and . . . so many memories that will take a long time to absorb. The biodiversity was stunning, and combined with the Dewi Nusantara luxury service experience, this trip was, without a doubt, one that I will treasure forever.

-- P.L.

Our undercover diver's biog: "After four years of guarding U.S. embassies in the Marine Corps, I got YMCA-certified in 1979 wearing the old yoke vests and a giant dive knife on my calf for manliness. George, our instructor, would catch us by surprise by turning off our valves underwater and making us swim with our masks blacked out by tinfoil. I've logged 747 recreational dives (DM certified) all over the world, and I've made enough stupid safety mistakes to ensure that George would wonder if I paid attention to his training."



Divers Compass: The 12-day, 11-night trip was \$5995/person . . . Of course, Nitrox 32 was the gas de riguer They sell muck sticks, which are valuable to poke for critters and useful to keep you from accidentally bumping the reef when the underwater wind whips you aroundThey offer a complimentary glass of wine with dinner. You can buy wine or hard liquor; free beer and soft drinks are available all day, as are coffee, tea and cookies. . . . As for tipping, five percent was considered low end, ten percent high. www.dewi-nusantara.com

Sick Divers, Macho Divemasters

travels in Egypt, Fiordland, Bonaire, the Bahamas...

Our anonymous travel reviewers work hard to provide our monthly feature travel reports, so we really appreciate responses from our readers that tell us we've been very accurate in our portrayal of a liveaboard or resort trip. So, thank you Brent Woods (Deep River, Ontario, Canada), who took a cruise on *MV Aqua Cat* in **The Bahamas** this September, and wrote to tell us: "This was my second liveaboard of 2016. Both trips were reviewed in *Undercurrent*. I mention this because it gave me the opportunity to compare my experience with that of the *Undercurrent* reviewers. In both cases my experience was similar." www.aquacatcruises.com

For another **Bahamas** liveaboard, Richard Jones (Upper St. Clair, PA) took a trip with **Lost Island Voyages** on the 60-foot (18m) ketch *SY Avalon*, and though he was less impressed with the vessel's necessarily cramped accommodations, he otherwise had a great time. "They treated us as adults, with good briefings. You dived with a divemaster if needed, but mostly on your own. The ship was as comfortable as any small liveaboard can be; the food was excellent and healthy. The crew was helpful and made you feel relaxed and part of the experience, and less like a customer. The diving was some of the best I have ever done. Most days we didn't see another dive boat, most nights we didn't see any lights, we really were in special places visited by only a few operators occasionally. My suggestion: spend a few extra dollars over the low price operators, and get lost with Lost Islands." www.lostislandvoyages.com/Avalon

Shore diving can be great if you're in the right place, and **Bonaire** is one of those places. You don't have to schlep your gear to the shallows if you don't want to, because you can dive right off the dock at the beachfront hotels, but most divers still prefer the dayboats. At **Captain Don's Habitat**, says Irina Zeylikman (Lexington, MA), who was there in August, the "dive crew practices diving freedom rule, dive your own profile, but come to the boat in about 60 min. Every dive was great, and amazingly enough, we encountered very few lionfish, but quite a few seahorses, frog fish, and nurse shark. The reef is lush and healthy."

She went on to add, "The last time we went to Bonaire was in 2003, and now, 13 years later, I realized what we were missing all these years, incredible diving, great dive operation, friendly

people, and new restaurants." So that's a result! www.habitatbonaire.com

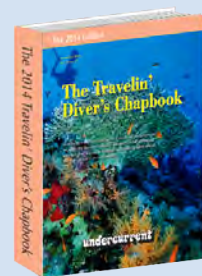
Spring is a good time to travel to **Cuba**, but it can result in a culture shock because the Cubans tend to be much more macho than we might feel comfortable with. Steven Clayman (Toronto, ON) discovered this to his dismay when he was diving with the **Marlin Dive Center** on the small island of **Cayo Largo**.

"On the third day, I decided I didn't feel comfortable diving with Marlin. I followed the dive guide's rules as best I could, having decided to slowly ascend from about 90 feet (27m) to 50 feet (15m) to conserve air as my tank emptied. I always had the group in sight and felt in control. When we all returned to the dive boat, the dive guide chewed me out for not following his rules. Although I signaled my intentions to him and told him I felt comfortable with my decision, this was [evidently] not acceptable.

The last dive I went on, I followed the dive guide's rules and signaled when I was down to 500 psi (33bar) while we were at about 90 feet (27m). He gave me the 'OK' sign. At 250 psi (17 bar) and still at depth, I went to him requesting his octopus. He refused to hand it to me, and instead, pointed ahead. It took a few seconds until I saw the mooring line. He signaled for me to go to it and guide

Travelin' Diver's Chapbook

We're gearing up for the 2017 edition of the *Travelin' Diver's Chapbook*, so we need your reports to make it as chock-full as we can. Send us your reviews of dive operators, liveaboards and resorts you've dived with so far this year by filling out our online form at www.undercurrent.org/members/UCnow/SubRRTopMA.php



You can also follow the link 'File a Report' on the right side of our homepage (www.undercurrent.org). Please send us your reports from any 2016 trip and thanks for helping us keep up-to-date with the great and the not-so great dive travel out there. Your fellow divers will appreciate your reports.

myself to the surface. I immediately did that, arriving at the rear of the dive boat. It was windy and I was being pushed toward some reefs. What astonished me was the ladder was up, there was no trailing line, and none of the crew was on look-out. I yelled, blew my whistle and kept swimming toward the transom. Eventually, someone came on deck, lowered the ladder and I came on board. My tank pressure [by then] was zero. I decided not to return and sent a report to the charter representative.” www.cayolargo.net/marina.html

It may be a long way to go, but the hundreds of Indian Ocean islands of **the Maldives** feature some of the most luxurious resorts in the world, and the same can be said of some liveboards that operate around the many atolls. Alas, Gilbert Montoya (Lafayette, CA) was less lucky with his choice.

He booked on an Egyptian-built Blue O Two vessel, *MV Blue Voyager*, and suggested, “The experience was less than two-star. . . . The boat itself was a wreck. Their excuse was it had traveled from Egypt to the Maldives in stormy conditions and different humidity. The decking was torn up in multiple areas, rendering the vessel dangerous to move around on and uncomfortable. Also, the boat they had was not the boat they advertised. They had the nerve to say it was ‘better.’ We did not receive the cabin type we had paid for. They did refund the difference, but we had a much less comfortable cabin than we’d planned to be in. The worst thing was the incompetent crew. The native crew members seemed 100 percent inexperienced and were worse than useless. They were directly responsible for damage to my wife’s brand-new Scuba Pro BCD, rendering it unusable after day one. They were unable to help people properly to and from the ‘mother boat’ to and from ‘dhoni’ (the smaller boat used for the actual dives). They were clueless how to assist people in and out of the dhoni, both before and after diving. . . . The instructors were indifferent to passenger complaints. . . . They had two ‘divemasters in training’ from their Egypt operation who were sleeping in the public lounge space, rendering it unusable for the paying guests. These individuals were extraordinarily rude. They were not diving in conformity with the instructor’s diving instructions and ended up ruining shark dives for paying customers by not following the dive profile outline.”

Montoya went to the Maldives at the beginning of the year, when the diving is high-voltage thanks to powerful currents bringing clear water and big animals in from the Indian Ocean. However, that sort of diving is not to everyone’s taste. He wrote:

Flying After Diving Researchers Need Your Help

Researchers at the Diving Diseases Research Centre Healthcare in the UK conduct on-going research into a broad range of health issues, and in 2016 have turned their attention to flying after diving. Hyperbaric chambers often see and treat divers returning from a diving vacation, and DDRC Healthcare is interested in finding out more about all divers who fly after a dive trip. If you are a diver who travels by airplane after a dive trip, whether you have suffered DCI (DCS) symptoms or not, they’d like to hear from you and welcome your contribution to their survey before the end of November. www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/YF9SPXJ

“The Southern Maldives are not a good site for beginners, as currents are strong and depths are deep!” (The same could be said of all the other atolls at that time of year.) www.blueotwo.com

Egypt tends not to be the first choice of destination for American travelers, but it cannot be denied that the **Egyptian Red Sea** has some of the best and most varied diving in the world. Randall S. Preissig (San Antonio, TX) exhorts *Undercurrent* readers, “Do not be afraid to go to Egypt, especially for diving. The dive areas are far removed from the tourist areas — and both are heavily protected and safe. There has never been an incident related to dive operations.” He went on the *Red Sea Aggressor* in September.

Craig A. Wood (Radnor, PA) also embarked on the *Red Sea Aggressor*, otherwise known as MY Suzanna One, at Port Ghalib, near Marsa Alam, in April of this year. He reported that “the boat was clean and well cared for, and the crew was absolutely fantastic and did everything they could to ensure a good trip. . . . The diving was excellent. Highlights of the southern route included beautiful hard coral gardens at Abu Dabab Bay, large schools of scalloped hammerheads at Daedalus reef, beautiful caverns and swim-thrus at Cave reef at St. Johns, and snorkeling with spinner dolphins at Sataya reef. There were other cool encounters with Napoleon wrasse, giant morays, blue-spotted stingrays, with thousands of anthias all over the reefs. Highlights of the northern route included a few thresher sharks and a couple of mantas at Little Brother Island, a thresher and the wrecks of the *Numidia* and *Aida* at Big Brother Island, anemone gardens with many anemone fish at Daedalus reef,

and a good dive in brisk current with sharks at the Elphinstone reef.” www.aggressor.com

Infectious illness can strike anywhere, but when it strikes one passenger in the confined environment of a boat, it’s often bad news for everyone else. Deborah Berglund (Bozeman, MT) discovered this when aboard the *MV Spirit of Solomons* during a trip in the **Solomon Islands** in May. All round, she appears to have experienced an unhappy time.

“This is an older boat and somewhat shabby, although everything was clean and functioned. The crew was great, the food good and the dive operation OK. The diving was not guided; often I was diving alone, which I did not like. The boat is too small for the number of divers. One person got sick, and most of the rest of us caught it, making it a rather miserable, crowded experience. My roommate got sick and made it impossible for me to sleep. I had no place to nap until I was offered a bunk while the people in the room were diving; the uncovered upper deck was too hot in the daytime heat. I skipped many dives due to fatigue and sickness, so may have missed the better diving. Space was a huge issue. I often had to stand to put my gear on, as there were unfriendly people taking up the sitting spaces. About half of the available space was taken up by camera gear.” www.bilikiki.com

On the subject of health, when you are far from home, you need to be circumspect about the risks you might be tempted to take while diving, too. Dr. Michael Davis (Christchurch, NZ) wrote about diving **New Zealand’s South Island Fiordland** in April, with the 60-foot (18m) *MV Pembroke*. He advised *Undercurrent* readers, “You are totally responsible for your own diving safety, bearing in mind that civilization is a long way away and there is a mountain range between you and any medical assistance.”

And, then he reports on diving where few Canadians or Americans have been. “I have been diving in Fiordland for 25 years, and for much of that time on the *MV Pembroke* (through two owners). For me, Fiordland is my favorite place to dive in all the world. Both the topside and underwater worlds are unique. Big black coral trees are everywhere, from shallow water to disappearing into the depths beyond diving range. Each tree is an ecosystem in its own right. This is a truly remote diving experience. *The Pembroke* is very seaworthy and cozy, but basic (with a bunk room for up to five and two tiny double-bed cabins, both accessed through the bunk room — therefore, privacy is at a minimum. The water is cold and suits experienced drysuit divers, but Dr. Davis’s enthusiasm for it is untarnished: “Water temperature is 52 - 62°F (11-17°C), visibility often 65 feet (20m), but this fails to

describe the unique environment you experience, especially if there is a reasonable fresh-water layer after heavy rains. This is a very special part of the Fiordland experience.” www.fiordlandcharters.co.nz

Donald A. Ricetti (McDonald, PA) was agreeably surprised at the welcome he got from **Wreck Life** based in **St. Thomas** in the **U.S. Virgin Islands**. He was there, out of season, in August. He was staying on St. John, where he’d made many dives previously, so made the ferry journey across and was told they would meet him at the public dock. He reported, “To my surprise, when they showed up, I was the only diver, and they asked where I wanted to go. Told them the locations I definitely did not want to see again, then said ‘far be it from me to pass up a wreck,’ to which they replied, OK, *General Rogers* it is. Great dive, clear water and the biggest green moray I have ever seen — shades of ‘The Deep’ movie size. Then a shallow dive to Grass Caye, where there were lots of fish and nice corals.” www.wrecklife.com

It’s not always luxury that people are after. Hunter Smith (Melbourne, Australia) enjoyed the rigors of an eco-resort in **Papua New Guinea**. He stayed at the **Lissenung Island Resort**, Kavieng, at the start of 2016 and was over the moon with it. “Lissenung is simply brilliant. Never mind no hot-water showers, this is a true eco-resort. The house reef is superb, with a school of jacks, clown fish of various types, snappers and all matter of other things within 160 feet (50m) of the dive shop and super-easy beach entry. The open water dives and wrecks are all there.” www.lissenungisland.com

Too tough for your taste? The flip side of that coin can be provided by Dive Butler International, and if you find mixing with ordinary divers simply too tiresome, DBI might be the answer, although we have yet to receive a reader’s report. French Canadian Alexis Vincent once ran the dive center at the exclusive Rangali Conrad resort in the Maldives and discovered his clients preferred the use of a private speedboat with their own crew with personal dive guide, complete with gourmet lunch, to the usual ten-dive package we lesser mortals normally opt for. Price was not a problem. From this he developed the idea of the dive butler, and Dive Butler International was born. DBI supplies services tailor-made to suit the demands of those who rent private tropical islands or own/charter super-yachts wherever they might be in the world. DBI has a retinue of suitably qualified dive guides who have fins and will travel. The cost? It’s a pittance in contrast to the other expenses you’ll encounter if you charter a super-yacht. Ask any billionaire! www.divebutlerinternational.com

Diver Safety – It’s Not Sexy!

but safety planning kills the angst

Seatbelts in cars, helmets for motorcyclists, smoke detectors in homes — none of these has been universally adopted by individuals except in those countries where they have been mandated by law. Why is that? They clearly save lives. Well, frankly, safety precautions are not sexy.

“It’s never going to happen to me.” That’s the ever-optimistic sentiment of most people. You never felt the need to have a fire extinguisher in your home until it is ablaze.

The *Titanic* set sail with insufficient lifeboats for the number of passengers it carried. Well, it was unsinkable, wasn’t it?

Divers might be slightly different, because whenever we break the surface after a serious dive, we have that momentary feeling of being alone in the ocean. In fact, we have abdicated our well being to the efficiency of those who are tasked with coming to find us. The foolhardy expect that task to be easy. They haven’t considered how tiny a diver’s head may look among the vastness of the ocean’s waves.

This scenario was encapsulated many years ago by six Japanese divers who got separated from their boat in Palau. There followed a massive sea search. One woman diver wrote on her slate, “We can see you searching but you can’t see us.” They found the slate attached to her body some days later.

Safety is such a boring subject, but the two separate events concerning lost divers reported

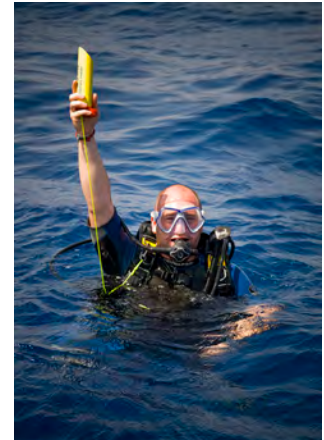
in *Undercurrent* in October might have made you change your mind.

One of the first rules of safety at sea is to stay with your vessel, but we divers habitually jump off into the unknown. What steps do we take to make sure our surface support can find us easily?

Rescue Devices? Not Always

Many divers carry a bright orange or red safety sausage. Inflated, they can rise about a meter out of the water. In daylight, a boat operator with a high viewpoint and good binoculars can spot one about half a nautical mile away. The driver of an inflatable will be less able. Taller safety sausages are available, but rarely purchased by divers.

Some divers carry an emergency flare in a water-tight container, but if it works (and you never know until you try), it’s a one hit wonder. Rescue dyes don’t offer a panacea either. Their effect is soon dissipated in anything but a flat, calm sea. As for whistles, the noise generated by a vessel’s engines, plus wind and waves, make them almost impossible



ENOS transmitter

G’day Mate, Do You Want A Lift?

A 68-year-old scuba diver is lucky to be alive after drifting off the Queensland (Australia) coast for more than 17 hours. He had been diving alone on the popular wreck of the *Yongala* during the 6th November and the emergency services were called only after his moored boat was found at 6.45pm with nobody aboard.

The missing diver was spotted at 11.00am the following morning 30 miles (50km) away. He had jumped into the water without his Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) because he’d taken out of his dive box to clean it several days earlier. The currents are known to be strong there and he was quickly taken away from his boat.

Rescuers were ecstatic that they found the man alive. When they reached him, the helicopter rescuer said, “G’day mate, do you want a lift?”

The diver had no surface marker device with him but, thanks to calm conditions, was spotted by his yellow tank.

A diver can learn an important lesson from this: Never leave a boat unattended while you dive, never dive alone at a remote dive site, and always take an effective surface-marker or working electronic safety device with you.

to hear. A search party in a small boat would need to cut the engine and listen.

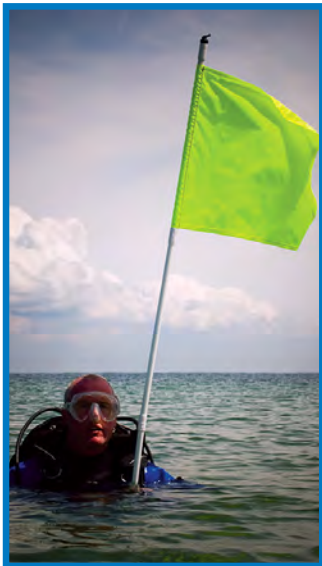
The Better Choice

A two-foot (60 cm) bright yellow flag on an extending pole can be seen from a far greater distance than a safety sausage. The pole comes in several sections of plastic tubing that slot together and are held in place by an elastic cord that runs

A fully charged dive light, reserved for emergencies and not used routinely during the dive, should be part of every diver's kit.

through the middle. Researchers at Heriot-Watt University in the UK, who test many devices, found that bright yellow was the most conspicuous color at sea. Alister Wallbank, leading the team of researchers, reported, "The folding flags were by far the most reliable and, at about \$25, cost-effective device we tested, particularly the Day-Glo yellow [flag]. It was consistently spotted at up to two nautical miles. Yellow was the most conspicuous colour, even with breaking wave crests, and could be located in deteriorating light when it was impossible to

locate pennants of any other color. Red and orange flags were located at up to one mile. Two of our observers who suffered from degrees of red/green colour blindness, had difficulty spotting these colors, particularly in intermediate light. Not surprisingly, flags were most easily located when the search heading was abeam to the wind direction so that the pennant presented the greatest visible surface area."



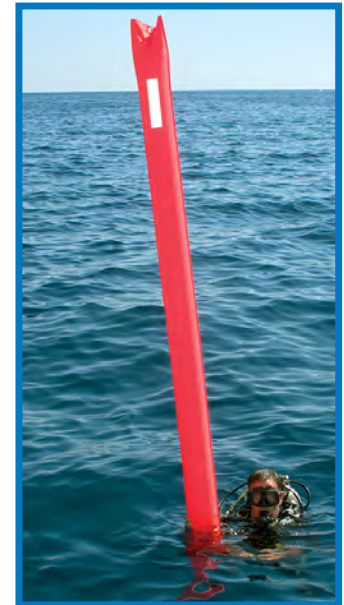
Extending Surface Flag

Though of no value at night, a flag is a low-tech solution for daytime. A diver can lash a folded flag to his tank and deploy it single-handed. Some dive stores sell these flags, but they can also be found online at www.bowstonediving.com

After the Sun Goes Down

When a dozen divers went missing at the Elphinstone Reef in the Red Sea, they were finally discovered at night because some had dive lights. The divers lost at Malpelo in September carried no lights, although they went into the water late in the afternoon. They might have been luckier had they done so (two perished).

So a fully charged dive light, carried and reserved for emergencies and not used routinely during the dive, should be part of every diver's kit — and during a pre-dive check, verifying that it functions properly should be as important as monitoring the air supply.



Oversized Marker Buoy

The same can be said for all electronic emergency equipment. Many divers now carry a Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) such as one of the McMurdo Fastfind products, in a watertight case. Some of these have been marketed as Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) but there is some concern that not all have sufficient power to send a signal to a satellite in the same way as an EPIRB carried on ships and planes does. Safety and Rescue Satellite-Aided Tracking (SARSAT) is an international satellite system coordinated by the USA, Russia, France and Canada as part of a two tier satellite system that can relay an emergency message to a mission control center via a ground receiving station. This then forwards information to the appropriate search and rescue center and local search and rescue facilities.

There is some concern that not all PLBs or small EPIRBs have sufficient power to send a signal to a satellite in the same way as a bigger EPIRB carried on ships and planes. You'll never know until you try!

The Electronic Lifeline

The Canadian Nautilus Lifeline is a portable device combining radio and GPS that dovetails with current international safety-at-sea protocols. It offers lost divers three rescue strategies: a marine

VHF radio so that a diver can talk directly to the dive boat calling in the GPS position displayed, a localized emergency call-out, and a worldwide SARSAT satellite-activated rescue mission.

If the diver fails to make contact with the dive boat, his second strategy is to put out a general distress call on Channel 16 in the hope that another vessel in the area will come to the rescue. While that program covers a lot of the world (though not yet much of the Pacific), it's unlikely there would be any rescue craft available in many remote locations. For example, the deaths in Malpelo (*Undercurrent* October 2016) reveal how tardy the Colombian authorities were in instigating a sea search for those missing divers.

Early versions of the Lifeline required registering and receiving a specific Maritime Mobile Service Identity number, which is issued to all vessels using portable marine VHF radio licenses. Many Lifeline users just invent one to satisfy the paperwork, but that could mislead would-be rescuers if the operator inadvertently selected a number that actually was assigned to some other vessel's radio that was most likely in a different part of the world.

A few liveaboards supply them to divers, but they are expensive, so many don't. When faced with refurbishing cabins or providing safety beacons, the former usually has more marketplace appeal. Safety isn't sexy.



The diver/boat VHF radio feature was an excellent idea, but there are some licensing problems associated with the use of marine VHF in many parts of the world. Nautilus

now has brought out a version, the Nautilus Lifeline Marine Rescue GPS, without the personal VHF radio feature and not needing MMSI registration.

It's smaller than the original. Activating it sends both a GPS position back to your boat's marine radio and a man-overboard distress message to all AIS-equipped vessels within a 34-mile radius. The Automatic Identification System (AIS) is an automatic tracking system used on ships. But you must be diving where there might be such so-equipped vessels, and many of us dive in areas where other vessels are few and far between. Also, the one-watt output would not provide the 34-mile range. Furthermore, in many instances, the original Lifeline failed because the user failed to recharge it. The new Nautilus Lifeline Marine Rescue GPS has user-replaceable batteries said to be good for five years, obviating the need to constantly recharge it. It costs around \$200. www.nautiluslifeline.com

Seareq in Germany manufactures an autonomous diver locator system called ENOS. Divers carry a portable submersible signaling devices that relays to a tracking unit on the dive boat. The dive boat operator must invest in the system, which also requires installing an unobstructed aerial on the vessel's cross-trees. Generally, the ENOS system has been effective, but few vessel owners have been willing to make the investment. Safety is not sexy.

All signaling devices, whether high-tech or low-tech, require that somebody knows you are missing. It still requires the dive boat to instigate a search. Operations that cut corners cut their spending on safety requirements first. You need to be able to trust your surface support crew. It has been alleged that, when it became necessary, the *MV Maria Patricia*, the Colombian dive boat that lost divers at Malpelo, carried insufficient fuel to look for them.

Underwater Statues and Sculpture Parks

visit an art gallery while diving

It probably all started at Portofino in Italy, where, in 1947, pioneer Italian diver Dario Gonzatti lost his life. Honoring his life, there now stands a bronze stature of Christ, eight feet tall in only 30 feet of water. It was created by Italian sculptor Guido Galletti and is a popular attraction for scuba divers and free divers alike.

Galletti's mold bore two more statues. One is at the surface in Grenada's harbor, in remembrance of the death of a crewmember when an explosion and fire hit Italian liner Bianca C. in St. George's harbor in 1961. Still on fire, it was towed into deeper water, where it sank and is now a popular dive site. The other is in the John Pennekamp Coral Reef

State Park, 25 feet deep in the water off Key Largo. www.floridakeys.com/keylargo/pennekamp.htm

In 1990, another 10-foot-high statue of Jesus was placed 30 feet deep, between the Mediterranean islands of Malta and Gozo, to commemorate the visit of Pope John Paul II to Malta. There's a much smaller statue of a dolphin placed at the entrance to an underwater cave in the Medas Islands, a popular diving spot in Spain.

What started as an initiative to deter dynamite fishing resulted in an underwater destination for a pilgrimage. In 2010, a 12-foot-tall representation of the Virgin Mary with baby Jesus was erected on the seabed at the Bien Unido Double Barrier Reef Marine Park in Bohol in the Philippines. www.bohol-philippines.com/underwater-grotto-shrine.html

There's a Guardian of the Reef merman statue just outside the Divetech dive shop in Grand Cayman that is twinned with one at Sunset House, which has its own mermaid statue of Amphitrite around 50 yards from the shore and 45 feet deep. www.guardianofthereef.com

The largest underwater statue must be the Ocean Atlas. This 60-ton figure, sculpted by British/Guyanese artist Jason deCaires Taylor, is said to symbolize the greater need for ocean conservation and ironically can be found close to an oil refinery in New Providence, in the Bahamas. It's rivaled in size only by the abandoned fake moai, a stoical 22-foot-tall monolith lying against the reef, that mirrors the monoliths on shore in Easter Island but was actually made for a less-than-successful Kevin Costner movie, *Rapa-Nui*, in 1994.

None of these can compare with the statue park conceived and sculpted by Taylor in Grenada. 'Vicissitudes' is the name of an installation placed in Molinere Bay in 2006. This collection of life-sized figures of schoolchildren arranged in a circle has since been joined by other similar installations. There's the 'Lost Correspondent' at a desk complete with a typewriter as well as other interesting figures, and not to be outdone in the religious category, the park now also has its own 'Christ of the Deep.'

The idea was first mooted after Hurricane Ivan and Hurricane Emily destroyed much of Grenada's coral reefs in 2004 and 2005. Already, the statues have attracted sponge growth and a healthy nudibranch population. Recently, a local artist has added new works to the sculpture park.

Even that pales into insignificance with Taylor's array of 500 life-sized figures that comprise an underwater installation, 'Silent Evolution,' at the



The Raft of Lampedusa - Lanzarote

Museo Subacuático de Arte in the waters off Cancun, Isla Mujeres and Punta Nizuc in Mexico. For example, 'Inertia' is an overweight naked man sitting on a sofa with a plate of fast food, watching television.

This work was conceived in 2009 and draws some 750,000 visitors annually, away from the area's natural reefs toward an otherwise featureless seabed.

Not to be outdone, on the other side of the Atlantic, Jason deCaires Taylor was commissioned and created another sculpture park off the coast of Lanzarote, in the Canary Islands. It represents desperate refugees from Africa and selfie-taking tourists. The Museo Atlántico includes Taylor's 'The Raft of Lampedusa,' a sculpted inflatable boat carrying 13 refugees and a modern take on Géricault's 1818 painting, 'The Raft of the Medusa.' The full installation will be completed this year, but the raft is expected to be joined by a faceless couple taking a selfie, people glued to their phones and others brandishing iPads or wielding cameras. The artist calls it 'the Instagram generation.' www.underwatersculpture.com

Taylor doesn't have a monopoly on underwater sculpture. Val, with her husband Frédéric Morel, is a French-born sculptor living in Thailand. She has recently installed three large sculptures near Koh Tao. Called 'Ocean Utopia,' it was completed in cooperation with an NGO specializing in the conservation of coral reefs. Already marine life is finding it an inviting underwater habitat. www.sculptureval.com

In Austria, an otherwise uninviting freshwater lake hosts the somewhat bizarre Grubsee Alpen Aquarium which features replica ancient artifacts submerged in its depths including Egyptian tombs,

old cannons and Buddhist statues alongside quirky pieces like a miniature Statue of Liberty, Christ the Redeemer, aliens and skeletons. During the winter it is inaccessible to divers thanks to the snow and ice, when a rustic ski hut is the only attraction.

Gambling with the stakes to be the most bizarre, back in the USA, a former NYC environmental 324-foot tanker ship has been sunk in 120 feet of water off Pompano Beach, FL. Unlike the many other wrecks purposefully sunk along this coast for the benefit of divers, *Lady Luck* features work by noted Greater Fort Lauderdale artist Dennis MacDonald, who was hired to create several fun and fanciful displays, including a faux casino for the ship deck, which features poker tables, slot machines, a cascade of gigantic dice, an octopus craps dealer, card sharks and a mermaid cocktail waitress. One of the largest contributions to Florida's artificial reef system, it is intended to be the centerpiece of what will become Shipwreck Park and is expected to draw 35,000 divers annually. www.southfloridadiving.com

With coral reefs seemingly in trouble worldwide, one day we may be grateful for sculpture parks as a habitat for marine life and as unique places for divers and photographers.

Life mimics art and art mimics life. In an aim to call attention to the marine environment partly



Vicissitudes - Molinere Bay, Grenada

as a call for better conservation, artist Doug Aitken built an ambitious installation on the floor of the Pacific near Avalon, Catalina Island, to coincide with his exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Scuba divers can swim through a series of underwater structures. 'Underwater Pavilions', composed of three geometric sculptures with partly mirrored exteriors moored at depths between five and 50-feet. It caused a sensation in the art world. Although this installation is said to be temporary (but with no end date yet decided), Aitken hopes for a permanent installation erected in Venice, Italy, during 2017.

Assigned a Bad Buddy?

it happens to all of us some time

It's not uncommon for complete strangers to be paired up as impromptu buddies on dive boats. Some of those strangers are incompetent, as *Undercurrent's* senior editor, John Bantin, notes about a diver in a group he was once leading: he twice had to bring back up from below 165 feet (50m) while breathing Nitrox 32. Most of us have been reluctantly paired with someone we wish we hadn't been paired with. We asked subscribers for their stories, and we got an earful. The consensus: do not accept just any old buddy, no matter what the dive operator says or insists on.

New Zealander Mike Davis, editor of the stellar *Diving & Hyperbaric Medicine Journal*, had a long list of stories after a 54-year diving career. He told

Undercurrent of a diver who brought a spear gun on a night dive and speared fish caught in other divers' light beams! Then there was the diver 15 years his junior who was too faint-hearted to swim to the shot-line for the famous Queensland wreck of the *Yongala*. He towed him over on the second attempt but the guy refused to leave the bottom of the shot-line, surfacing after 5 minutes, so neither got to see the wreck. He also remembers following a buddy down to 120 feet (36m), bringing her back up and removing 13 pounds (6kg) of lead from her weight belt before the next dive – and even then she was over-weighted!

Buddies going deeper than might be wise is a common complaint among those paired with strang-

ers. Charles Burkhart (Titusville, FL) told how he was paired with a buddy of similar age to him when diving in the Red Sea in 1999, only to find the guy went so deep that Charles passed 200 feet (61m) merely trying to get his attention. We don't think Charles or anyone else would do that in 2016.

Panic is not something you can usually anticipate in someone you don't know.

Canadian Raymond Haddad (Candiac, QC) was paired with a French diver in the Bahamas who only wanted to breathe air and dive beyond 130 feet (40m) because he thought that's where the sharks would be. The Frenchman wasn't even able to go as deep as the reef top on the following dive, such were his residual decompression limits.

There are buddies who may agree to pair with you but have very different intentions. Mark Etter (Lancaster, PA) was once forced against his better judgment to take a buddy whom he found took 10 minutes to clear her ears. Then she ignored him, joining instead the dive guide with two others who similarly had abandoned their assigned buddies.

The Problem With Personalities

Buddies who ignore you and go off to do their own thing will leave you with a dilemma, whether to spend the dive chasing after them or not. Seventy-five-year-old Didier Figueroa (Sandia Park, NM) reckons he's still very fit but went out with a dive boat from Ventura, CA and found himself paired with a muscle-bound young man who announced he would be searching for lobsters. That should have been a warning to the PADI Self Reliant Diver. He was immediately abandoned underwater by his erstwhile buddy, who took off at speed. In an attempt to keep up, Didier ended up exhausted at the surface, far from the boat and in need of a rescue. He went solo for his next dive and had a much better time.

For a drift dive in Cozumel, Rich Erickson and his daughter (Marietta, GA) were put together with a third diver who insisted on swimming hard in the same direction as the current. He soon left them in his wake, and when they surfaced, was seen to be a huge distance from the boat.

You can check a person's logbook and discuss the diving they might have done in the past but panic is not something you can usually anticipate in someone you don't know. Bob Cottle (Berwyn, IL) relates how, diving in the Spanish Mediterranean with an

assigned buddy, they entered a sea cavern and surfaced in the airspace within it, at which point his buddy froze in panic and refused to re-submerge in order to go back out. Stuck with this impasse, Bob searched around and luckily found another exit close to the surface. He managed to persuade the man to follow him out.

Panic is one thing; someone who is oblivious to what's going on around him is just as bad. Bill Domb (Riviera Beach, FL) remembers having a buddy with clearly impaired cognition allocated to him and later seeing him being dragged up from the depths by an alert divemaster after the man simply kept going when they reached their maximum assigned depth. Domb says, "In retrospect, he should not have been foisted off on a guest [like me], but should have been accompanied by a divemaster if allowed to go down at all."

Kelly J. Ramsay (Montreal, QC) had a buddy who appeared to suffer from perceptual narrowing during a search and recovery scenario, so concentrating on their compass they forgot the purpose of the exercise, swimming faster and faster in entirely the wrong direction, out into a shipping channel. Worse, another buddy tried to inflate his BCD in a misguided effort to aid an ascent from depth, resulting in panic as things got out of control.

Jeff Janak (Dallas, TX) thinks a solo diver certification absolves him of the need to be paired with a stranger and take on the liability, although this didn't help solo-certified David Bader (Norwood, NC). Because he is a technical diving instructor, he often finds himself getting paired purposely with divers with weaker skills. On one trip, he told *Undercurrent*, his problematic companion needed help with two emergency ascents and locked his computer out twice.

Dr. George Irwin (Bloomington, IL) has buddied with his wife for more than 3000 dives and has views on other divers' qualities by nationality. He thinks that European divers are very skilled and safe, while Asians and Americans are less so. Maybe that reflects perfunctory training?

It's not all bad. Meeting divers from many different parts of the world is one of the pleasures Emmette Murkett (New Bingham, AL) enjoys while routinely traveling solo. He's dived with Russians, a Slovenian, Dutch, Danes, Brits, Irish, Indonesians, and Australians. He told *Undercurrent* that he once dived with an octogenarian from Alabama with early onset of Alzheimer's. The lady had been diving for more than 40 years, could dive on autopilot, used

precious little air, and communications underwater were better than above.

We don't know what Emmette would have done if asked to sign a buddy agreement that took onboard responsibility for another diver as Mary Sirena (South Padre Island, TX) was once asked to do. She

He needed help with two emergency ascents and locked his computer out twice.

was on a liveboard, part of an Austrian fleet, in the Red Sea. She refused to comply but was still allowed to dive.

Do Women Attract the Dodgy Deal?

Women divers seem to get stuck with dodgy assigned buddies more than men — or is it that

most dodgy buddies are men? Karen Gordon (Fairbanks, AK) tells how she found herself with a buddy who thought he was Superman and put his arms straight out in front while he bicycle-paddled off through the water. The man was chronically oblivious of where he was in the water column or where anyone else around him was as well, because he constantly crashed into other divers or soared upwards. She says he had no buoyancy control skills and “was an accident waiting to happen.” What was supposed to be a fun day turned into a stressful job for her. She says she learned her lesson that day. The last thing she wants to do on vacation is babysit an unknown diver.

Mary Wicksten (Bryan, TX), a professor of biology at Texas A&M, has also endured the company of buddies who had no idea of buoyancy control, who yo-yo'd through the water column, and especially one who complained the water was ‘too bumpy.’

Florida Caves Claim Two More

Two experienced cave divers from Fort Lauderdale died over the weekend of October 16th while exploring a cave system at the Eagle's Nest dive area in Weeki Wachee, on the west coast of Florida. Together with Justin Blakely, Patrick Peacock and Chris Rittenmeyer entered the water at 2 p.m., but while Blakely remained close to the surface, Peacock and Rittenmeyer, the more experienced divers, went below to explore the caves. When Blakely arrived at a predetermined location at an agreed time, neither Peacock nor Rittenmeyer were there. The alarm was raised, and a rescue team launched an unsuccessful attempt to locate both men. They tried again Monday morning, and Peacock and Rittenmeyer were located in 260 feet (80m) of water in what they described as a complex area of the cave.

Becky Kagan Schott, an experienced cave diver who has dived Eagle's Nest around 20 times, said, “It's an alluring cave, and many divers aspire to dive there someday. It's like dropping down into a whole new world as you swim through giant passageways that have taken tens of thousands of years to form.”

120 feet (36m) below the surface, near to an area known as the ‘Debris Cone,’ is a permanently posted sign with an image of the Grim Reaper along with the stern warning to go no further. There have been ten deaths there since 1981. The area was off-limits to divers from 1999 to 2003, and the fatalities are thought to be the first since a father and son died there in 2013.

The latest deaths, of divers considered experts by

Blakely and others, have renewed a decades-old debate over whether Eagle's Nest, proven time and time again to be lethal, should be closed off to the public for good.

“It's like a Venus Fly Trap,” Sylvester Muller, vice-chairman of the National Speleological Society's Cave Diving section told the *Sun-Sentinel*. “You get in there and there is so much to see, you get distracted, and it gets deep quickly.”

At this time it's unclear what happened to Peacock and Rittenmeyer underwater, or why the two men were unable to resurface.

“They may have lost their line, they may have lost visibility, they may have been restrictive, there may have been gear issues,” Matt Vinzant, a local diver with more than 50 dives at Eagle's Nest, told Fox 13. “We don't know at this point, but more than likely it was a series of issues.”

Often, people ask why divers do this sort of deep diving in a cave system like this?

The only possible answer is the same that climbers give for attempting Mount Everest — because it's there.



Mary tells *Undercurrent* that she's had buddies who have charged off, leaving her alone, and those who think their own computers are too conservative before descending to more than 200 feet (61m) breathing air. She reflects that she has had to violate her own decompression plan to bring up a girl who went down to 120 feet (37m) on a second dive, and who also ran out of air – resorting to the emergency air tank hung under the boat. That girl then had the temerity to explain later to the dive guide that because she had no computer, she merely followed Mary, doing what she did!

Australian Gail McIntyre (Mountain Creek, Queensland) also told *Undercurrent* of the buddy who had no computer and promised she would keep close but didn't and ended up in a hyperbaric chamber as of a consequence.

Anne Kazel-Wilcox (NYC) reckoned she might have suffered elements of decompression sickness after wasting precious air searching for her buddy who had separated from her during a dive, resulting in a hurried ascent from the wreck of the *Yongala* in Australia's Queensland, cutting short her decompression requirement.

The young German man Valerie Pinder (Stratford, Ontario) found herself paired with during a trip to the Red Sea “strutted his stuff like Mick Jagger” on the aft deck of the boat and looked to be very confident in comparison to her mere 30-dive experience. In fact it was bluff. Only after he unknowingly went down to well beyond 90 feet (28m) and she was forced to follow him to bring

him back, followed by him “blowing off the 15-foot (5m) safety stop” did she realize the awful truth. He had no idea how deep he'd been nor had he ever done much diving.

“I surely resent my dives being stolen by a bad buddy experience,” says ZaZa (Toulouse, France). She tells how she once got paired once with a macho divemaster who claimed he was a former professional diver who once installed equipment underwater. Now he worked as an instructor and guide with the club she was diving with.

“We watched a lobster lose a claw as he wrenched it out from between the rocks to show it to me (the poor thing escaped) and witnessed his attempt to wrangle an eel from its crevice (the poor thing luckily had enough space to retreat from his sausage-like fingers). Not only was every dive wrapped up in 35 minutes at 85 feet (26m) with a 90 cu. ft. (12-litre) tank because he swam so fast, I spent most of these dives silently apologizing to all of the creatures we were barreling through!”

So be circumspect about whom you buddy up with. Don't be shy about refusing to be paired with someone you don't really know or trust. Discuss their diving experience, where they've recently dived, and try to get a look at their logbook — and don't be shy about letting them see yours. Buddy pairing cuts both ways! Maybe it's worth writing on that liability disclaimer that you do not take responsibility for the well being of any other diver in the water.

– Ben Davison

When Your Liveboard Doesn't Go Where It Promised *and makes excuses about it*

People booking diving vacations on liveboard boats often overlook the fact that conditions might be very different to those found at a resort securely set on terra firma. However, as big or seaworthy as a vessel is, it still operates at the mercy of the weather. The ocean is bigger than everything.

This can mean that itineraries get changed at short notice due to changing conditions. The safety of the vessel and its passengers are the priority, and when it comes to diving, the safety of those once in the water is equally crucial. For that reason, skippers must always maintain the right to adjust an itinerary as necessary.

Changes can lead to disappointment when people have expectations of visiting certain dive sites on advertised routes, and they don't get to see them. More disappointing are changed itineraries that were so changed to suit the requirements of the crew or operator rather than the paying passengers.

Some of us have been on liveboards that were under-booked and didn't venture far from home port to save the cost of fuel. Or what about a liveboard that spent a lot of time around one island because a crew member's wife was about to deliver their baby there. It's not fair but it happens, and passengers have every right to complain.

Adam Preston, A British national living in Thailand, booked a 2016 full charter of the *Fiji Aggressor* in 2014 for customers of his Koh Samui dive operation, with the intention to explore what is known as the “soft coral capital of the world.” The Aggressor website map and description included the Bligh Channel between the main islands of Vitu Levu and Vanua Levu. However, by 2015 the website route map had been changed. The Bligh Channel had been removed, and instead, the route was diverted to Kadavu Island but still included the north-east islands. The website description and video still called it the “The Soft Coral Capital of the World.” Even though Preston had paid for a full charter, he was never notified of the itinerary change.

In February 2016, Cyclone Winston ripped through Fiji, causing a lot of devastation. When Preston and his group boarded the *Fiji Aggressor*, they were taken on yet another route that spent all six days at Kadavu Island, south of Vitu Levu, the main island. He says that at no time was he warned of this alternate itinerary and reported they spent the six days “searching for any signs of marine life.”

The reason for this route change, he was told in Fiji, was that “the Soft Coral Capital of the World” had been destroyed by Cyclone Winston.” but he had not been pre-warned of this despite paying the second 50 percent of the charter fee in May.

After the liveaboard segment of their vacation, his party stayed at Wananavu Beach Resort. “Imagine our surprise when we saw the lovely pictures of healthy reefs and colorful corals other divers were bringing back from their scuba dive trips in the Bligh Waters,” he says. “This in the area we were told by *Fiji Aggressor* staff had been completely destroyed and nothing left to see.”

Undercurrent looked at the current video on the *Fiji Aggressor* website and noted that although it mentioned soft coral in the commentary, there was little in evidence in the visual material. Neither is the area most notable for vibrant soft coral, between Vanua Levu and the island of Taveuni, featured.

Undercurrent was unable to elicit a response from the Aggressor Fleet, so we contacted other live-aboard operators in that part of the world, notably those who operate the well-established *Nai’a* and the *Fiji Siren*.

Rob Barrel of *Nai’a* said that although the reefs had sustained some damage, “Often, relatively undamaged patches of reef could be found within 150 to 300 feet (50 to 100m) of severely damaged

patches. While prior to Cyclone Winston, you could throw a diver pretty much anywhere on the best reefs in Bligh Water and Namena and they would have a great dive, after the cyclone we had to work a bit harder to make sure our passengers saw the best aspects of each reef. We extended *Nai’a’s* route after the cyclone to include the Rainbow Reef near Taveuni.”

He directed us to a video shot in March immediately after the hurricane. www.naia.com.fj/post.php?healthy_reefs-197.

Mark Shandur for Siren Fleet said, “Although it’s true that there has been some destruction of the reefs from Hurricane Winston, there’s still plenty of good diving.”

Both suggested that some vessels embarking out of Suva are probably only restricting operations around Kadavu Island because of the prohibitive fuel costs for traveling farther afield. We still wait to hear from the Aggressor office, which markets the *Fiji Aggressor*.

In a separate case, Stephen Murvine (San Diego, CA) told us how he and his buddy booked a trip aboard the *Bahamas Carib Dancer* (Aggressor Fleet) and paid a \$200 premium to dive Tiger Beach off Grand Bahama. Tiger Beach is a stretch of shallow low-lying reefs fed by the Gulf Stream that is

The Sting in the Tail

A diver has been killed by a stingray in a Singapore aquarium.

Dr Tan Heok Hui, 45, an ichthyologist and operations officer at the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum in Singapore, says that stingrays in captivity may feel provoked and retaliate by stinging when they feel threatened, cornered or alarmed, or even moved from their tanks.

“Stingrays have backward-pointing barbs on the spine that have serrated edges. When a spine pierces human flesh, it breaks and releases toxins into the flesh and can cause severe muscle contractions. Whether a sting is fatal or not depends on where the victim is stung.”

Philip Chan, in his early 60s and head of a team of divers at Underwater World Singapore, was a victim of this in October when moving a stingray to a different tank. Chan died in hospital after being struck in the chest. The most famous victim of a stingray barb was Australian TV personality, Steve Irwin.

Stop Using Aqua Lung Powerline Inflators Immediately!

Last month *Undercurrent* gave warning that Aqua Lung was issuing a recall on Powerline inflators. It has now issued a recall of all 53,000 Powerline inflators sold with Aqua Lung and Apeks Black Ice BCDs since January 2015 until September of this year, when they identified the problem. That's an awful lot of inflators.

Aqua Lung says that the inflation button can remain depressed and cause the buoyancy compensators to continue inflating, resulting in an uncontrolled ascent. "This poses injury and drowning hazards to the diver." We say that an uncontrolled ascent might cause a DCS incident or worse, burst lung. Recalled Powerline infla-

tors have a date code beginning with "H" printed on the inflator body.

The company reports that as many as 60 inflators have been found defective, continuing to inflate after the button was no longer depressed. It advises users to stop using the recalled Powerline inflators immediately and contact Aqua Lung to receive a replacement of the inflator button by an authorized Aqua Lung dealer. www.aqualung.com/uk/recall-safety-notice

Aqua Lung and Apeks recently came under new ownership after being sold by the French parent company, Air Liquide.

famous for its preponderance of tiger sharks and a large lemon shark population. The *Shear Water* of Jim Abernathy's Scuba Adventures, *Dolphin Dream* and Stuart Cove's Dive the Bahamas regularly visit Tiger Reef.

"We went to a site they called 'Shark Paradise' on day one and saw a tiger shark on dive #3, so they called that 'Tiger Beach' on the dive debrief at the end of the trip. [Although there were plenty of lemon sharks], this was the only tiger shark seen during the seven-day trip. We never hit the Tiger

Beach we paid for, and we both [later] contacted the Aggressor [office]. They gave some half-hearted excuse and said the whole Grand Bahamas west end was considered Tiger Beach and the extra \$200 was because they came out of a port that charged more for this trip. My buddy has taken five Aggressor trips in the last year, and she only received this answer."

Again, *Undercurrent* waits to hear from the Aggressor office for their side of the story! Have you ever been disappointed in this way?

Skimming the Tip Pool

possible pitfalls of group gratuities

British property billionaire Godfrey Bradman liked to tip upfront, saying do a good job, and there's the same again at the end. More often than not, the people he tipped took the money first proffered and disappeared from view, so it didn't always work.

The various cultures regarding tipping have been dealt with in *Undercurrent* from time to time, but a subscriber, who remains anonymous for obvious reasons (we'll call her Helen), wrote to us, concerned about the possibility of the group leader or organizer skimming the pooled tips. They collect the money, but the amount and the way they distribute it is often not disclosed.

She tells us she's used to traveling in a group of up to 40 people, and this results in a pooled tip amounting to as much as \$8000. Is this too much?

She wrote, "There is recent suspicion of skimming from the tip pool. Although unverified, my

own inquiry has found discrepancies. For example, pre-trip we were reminded about the group tip and the need for this, as it helps support back-of-the-house staff at the resort, their Christmas fund, etc. While we were there, the resort was asked about tipping, and their response was, no need for additional tipping of the resort staff [since] a tip/service amount is included in the package rate. We had no idea. The dive shop is totally separate and should be tipped accordingly."

Different countries have different customs. Hospitality workers in territories that are governed by European (EU) laws (e.g., Bonaire and the Dutch Antilles) are paid at least a statutory minimum wage and expected to give good service regardless, whereas those who work "American-style" often rely on tips to make ends meet. That is why you might find a European passenger swooning in their cabin when it is suggested they pay an additional ten percent of the price as a crew tip.

Americans have become so accustomed to tipping that we're being asked everywhere, and when we travel we can't but help giving away money, but it's often too much. While it's usually encouraged by American travel agents, we seriously doubt that pooled tips always get to the right people.

Helen continued, "It's unclear how many other travelers with the group have suspicions about the pooled tip. I have not said anything, as the total pooled amount can't be verified, or whether it was properly distributed. However, for me, there is huge doubt."

One thing about tip pools, while some people are over-generous, others border on miserly, and a pooled tip disguises their tight-fistedness.

Another *Undercurrent* subscriber (we'll call him Jim) told how, "During one of our trips we were cautioned about going in with the group on tips. There was a question about the trip organizers skimming from the top, who apparently thought they should be included in the tips even though they received free room and dive packages for their efforts. After we heard that, we have always tipped directly to the crew or staff ourselves."

Some liveaboard captains do take the lion's share of the crew's tip when the aggregated tip is huge. While workers should be compensated well, how far up the ladder should tips go? We don't think captains and cruise directors should benefit from the tipping pool.

If you want to be sure that the right people get your money, ignore the tipping pool and take care of tip distribution yourself. However, bear in mind that many staff whose work is essential to the success of your vacation may be out of sight, and you may not be aware of who they are. And keep in mind the local cost of living. It's relatively easy to find out locally what constitutes an acceptable amount.

While we encourage divers to be fair, even generous, there's a dark side to over-tipping. Once, in Istanbul, I was so pleased with the efforts of a shoeshine boy in renovating my beaten-up shoes outside the Blue Mosque, I gave him a \$20 bill. His eyes widened with amazement before he grabbed it and ran for his life, followed closely by all the other shoeshine boys determined to take it from him. He lost the money and received a severe beating instead. So much for my less-than-clever generosity.

The best advice is to follow local custom. In some countries, the offer of a tip might be considered offensive, whereas in others it might form an essential part of a person's income. The local cost of living ought to determine the proper way of saying thank you for good service. Do your homework first. A good travel agent or tour operator will advise you about what sort of tips are expected before you book so you arrive prepared.

– John Bantin

Equipment Issues from our Readers

are there Cobalt computer problems?

Larry Molnar (Cleveland, OH) thought we were too dramatic when we wrote about the Zeagle recall in October, suggesting that if a BCD buoyancy cell split at the surface, the user might plunge to the depths. He suggests a properly weighted diver would stay comfortably at the surface.

This might be true at the end of a dive, but a properly weighted diver would carry enough weight to account for the loss of weight of the air used during the dive. This could be as much as eight pounds (3.5kg), depending on the tank. So if the BCD split at the surface at the beginning of a dive when the tank was full, down the diver would go.

In my days as a test diver, this happened to me twice with prototype BCDs, where the buoyancy cell

had not been welded properly. I can assure you, it resulted in some hard finning upward!

Michael Lay wrote that two members of the group he went with to Bonaire needed to take their regulators to a dive shop for attention after the checkout dive, even though they had been serviced at home before the trip. The technician said he saw lots of similar incidents, and told them it was better to leave a three-year gap between servicing.

Michael says, "Given the high cost of servicing gear, this would make sense. For the cost of three service visits, I can usually replace the item for the same amount of money. I would love to hear from other readers on this."

It's common for a regulator appearing to need adjustment immediately after a service and the first dive. Any liveboard dive guide will tell you how often they hear a gushing regulator on the aft deck, accompanied by the words, "I don't understand it. I've just had it serviced."

While there are regulators that only require servicing every three years (Atomic regulators come to mind), most need servicing more frequently. The problem arises in that the replacement valve (low-pressure) seat used within the mechanism usually needs to 'bed' against the metal or plastic orifice so that the regulator will almost certainly need readjusting after the first dive despite the best efforts of the servicing technician to set it up properly. There's a certain amount of engraving that takes place, too, and that takes place over time.

A good technician might take several hours to adjust a recently serviced regulator, returning to it time and time again. Since time is money, this is unlikely to happen. Regulators get serviced instead to 'manufacturer's standards.' So what do we learn from this?

It's best not to take a freshly serviced regulator on a dive trip without using it first, even if it means going to an inland site or even a sufficiently deep swimming pool. Use it and take it back for adjustment.

While praising Atomic regulators for their long service intervals, the same praise may not be due

for the company's computers. *Undercurrent* subscriber Kent Roorda (Grand Lake, CO) wrote:

"I just read the article about bad depth sensors on Atomic Cobalt computers. Unfortunately, the article comes as no surprise to me and many other Cobalt owners. Atomic/Huish has replaced my Cobalt five times; three of which were due to bad pressure sensors. My wife's Cobalt has been replaced three times due to bad sensors. They have also had numerous other problems. My relationship with the computer is a love/hate relationship. I love it when it works, and hate it every time it fails. Never — until I purchased an Atomic Cobalt computer — did I feel the need to carry a backup computer. But, in my opinion, a backup computer should be included with each new Cobalt.

"We just got back from a liveboard trip in Komodo, and on that trip, the two other people who had Cobalt computers experienced failures with their depth sensors. Honestly, it is amazing that, with such a high rate of failure, no recall has been made."

Apparently Atomic Aquatics is aware of the problem, but officially they are tight-lipped. Not a good practice, when divers' lives are at stake, so until this is resolved, divers in the market for a computer might be wise to avoid the Cobalt. And if you have one — well, for sure carry a backup, a good idea anyhow.

—John Bantin

When Great White Cage Dives Go Awry

it may not be as safe as you're told

Diving instructor Chan Ming, a Shanghai-based advertising executive, got more than he expected when he embarked on a five-day trip out to Mexico's Guadalupe Island with 20 others aboard *Solmar V* for a cage diving experience with great white sharks. It was October 4th. Other divers had just left the cage, and he was alone with his camera when a large beast, chasing a tuna bait on a line, hurtled toward the cage and crashed through the (too flimsy) bars to join him.

A video of the event, taken from the surface, went viral on social media and there was a memorable moment recorded as the huge shark thrashed about in panic and an attempt to escape when someone was heard to ask, "Is anyone still in the cage?" www.youtube.com/watch?v=93WiSq9TIoM

One of *Solmar V's* crewmembers, thinking quickly, opened the top door of the cage, allowing the great white to escape by breaching through it, after being stuck for about 20 seconds, resulting in very dramatic top-side images. Better images than produced by Chan Ming. Evidently, he managed to escape for a moment through the bars into the water before re-joining the cage.

The solitary diver climbed out of the cage after the shark had gone, both parties seemingly none the worse for the experience.

In a telephone interview with the *New York Times*, Chan said he did not have time to take photos of the encounter, and could not see what was happening as the shark was thrashing because the cage was

An American Immersion: The First Woman To Dive All 50 States

Jennifer Idol and I never met, but we both experienced the ultimate American scuba diving adventure. So when Ben Davison asked me to review her book, I was thrilled.

An American Immersion takes the reader to every state for a visual feast of underwater exploration. It chronicles an adventure that goes far beyond the typical resort diving most divers experience. Coral reefs are not featured in this book — and let's face it, after a while, reefs might all begin to look alike.

Jennifer is not only the first woman to dive every American state, but also, she's a talented underwater photographer who has the images to prove it. On this journey, she took more than 105,000 photos and displays their immense variety in her spectacular photo essay of underwater America.

Jennifer writes that inspiration came while flying over the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. She didn't capture the flaming wreckage, but decided instead to photograph our neglected American waters in a more positive manner. This led to her goal of becoming the first woman to dive all 50 American states. She completed her quest by driving 72,000 miles over five years. And she did it the hard way, by lugging heavy camera gear from state to non-contiguous state!

While Jennifer and I had the same objective to dive every American state, our inspirations differed. In the '90s, I discovered what I coined "safari diving" while traveling a thousand miles in South Africa. I packed a multitude of distinctive dives into a month-long expedition. This drive-and-dive concept inspired me to plan my American journey.

I also wanted to dispel the notion that scuba diving only exists on tropical reefs. My mission was to explore the most distinctive dives in every state, complete it in a year-long dive safari, and then write a book about it.

This approach would not work for Jennifer. As a photojournalist, she needed to take her time, plan her dives over vacations, and persevere until the end. And



perseverance is what it's all about. Her North Dakota dive, for instance, required more than 3,700 miles of driving from her Texas home — for just one dive!

My 2002 book, *An American Underwater Odyssey, 50 Dives in 50 States*, included snapshots taken along the way. Jennifer's book provides a rich, more visual experience. Her images of diving in steaming-hot craters, alongside bottomless oil rigs, and in ghostly shipwrecks place you behind the diver's mask. The endless caves and bizarre quarries provide an armchair diver the experience of practically being there. Many shots brought back my memories of mysterious spires in Yellowstone Lake, fossil diving in South Carolina and the gin-clear waters of inland Oregon. While Jennifer didn't dive the nuclear missile site I enjoyed in her home state of Texas, her ice diving shots in Ohio and Minnesota made me

shiver with envy.

While I'm said to be the first person to dive all 50 states, being first wasn't my focus. Jennifer was inspired by an environmental issue, but her quest to become the first woman to dive every state tends to obstruct that narrative. I would have hoped that she had emphasized her inspiration and provided greater attention to the environmental theme of our threatened domestic waters.

What she accomplished, however, is a remarkable achievement by any standard. In addition to driving 72,000 miles, Jennifer took 80 flights and spent \$158,000 to complete her quest. That's true dedication, whether it's to get in the record book or to publish a record book of her spectacular adventure. I highly recommend you buy her book and take her grand tour of underwater America. Your diving outlook might very well change. Click [here](#) to buy the book directly from Amazon.

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Reviewer Chuck Ballinger's book, *An American Underwater Odyssey, 50 Dives in 50 States*, is available from Amazon and can be purchased by clicking [here](#).

rattling so violently. He said he was not afraid to be trapped inside the cage with the shark.

"Honestly at that moment I don't have time to get afraid," he said. "Because the shark is coming, a very sharp moment, two seconds."

Not at all put off by the experience, he continued to dive the following days saying, "I felt so lucky. Why would I be scared?"

Ten days after the event, the operators of *Solmar* V issued a statement to explain what had happened,

saying that ‘shark breaches of that magnitude were a one-in-a-million occurrence.’

They say they have since reinforced their cages and extended the ‘no bait zone’ around all cages. All Guadalupe Island operators expect to meet soon to share ideas to minimize the dangers.

But, is this as rare as one in a million as Solmar claims? Well, there were two similar incidents in the weeks before!

Bluewater Dive Travel operations director, Katie Yonker, was involved in a terrifying and remarkably similar incident during September while diving from *Nautilus Explorer*. A 13-foot female shark known locally as Big Mama bit through a diver’s air hose and although one of the boat crew members managed to open a safety valve restoring air pressure to the hookah-style breathing system, the shark became stuck in the cage’s open balcony (upper level), wedging itself deeper as it struggled to break free. The divers remained trapped in the section of the cage beneath it during its ordeal.

“It’s hard to put into words the thoughts and feelings that went through my head,” she wrote on www.bluewaterdivetravel.com. “The first minute or so felt like a horrific earthquake underwater, and I kept thinking, ‘we just need to wait this out.’ But in the back of my head, I feared the cage would break apart, and this would be the end for me. I was calm, but felt very, very sad.”

Yonker said a female diver trapped in the top part of the cage with the shark was able to reach the

bottom section without being injured by the massive predator. The boat crew then set about freeing the shark.

“After a few failed attempts, they tied a rope around her tail, lowered the cage back into the water, and tried to pull [the shark] out backwards. Her gills were pressed against the cage bars, so a dive master went into the cage and pressed on her gills, which freed the shark and she swam away,” she wrote.

Baiting or chumming over or on a shark diving cage is strictly prohibited at Guadalupe, but some operators seem to ignore this rule. In fact, Katie Yonker described how “the submersible cages descend with one bag of fish chum, which entices the sharks with its scent.”

Ed Stetson, who was out on *Nautilus Belle Amie*, wrote to *Undercurrent*, “This year, the Parks Department is allowing ‘wrangling’ at Guadalupe. This is where bait is thrown out on the surface to attract the sharks, then pulled in before they eat it. Wrangling was prohibited for several years, but it was still being done. It appears that the Parks Department realized this, so decided to allow it, but regulate it.

To get a wrangling permit, the boat must have a pulpit where the wrangler and throw the bait, well away from the cages. This minimizes the chance of the sharks chasing the bait and hitting the cages. The idea is good, but it doesn’t always work.”

Flotsam & Jetsam

Waterproof iPhone7? Just to prove a point, a team from an Apple promotion company took a naked iPhone7 on a scuba dive and found that it could record 4k video at a depth of 25 feet. They made the unscientific water resistance test at Timothy Lake in Oregon, around 3000 feet above sea level. When immersed, the touch screen could not be operated, so they started recording before each test dive.

A Last Chance Destination? A report published by the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* says that 70 percent of tourists visiting Australia’s Great Barrier Reef are doing so because the decline in the reef’s health has been publicized as a last chance destination. The report highlights the paradox that people traveling great distances to view a destination at risk

from climate change are burning fossil fuels to do so, hastening the destruction.

So, Why Burn the Fuel to Do This? The 280 divers who turned up on Limassol on the island of Cyprus broke a Guinness record, previously held by Italians in Elba in 2015, for the longest underwater human chain. Held together by a rope fastened to the dock, they submerged to 15 feet for 10 minutes. Divers on the Indian Ocean island of Reunion held an earlier record with a chain dive during 2013.

Invasion of The Spider Crabs. In a mass aggregation, thousands upon thousands of giant spider crabs have invaded Britain’s Devon coastline. The formidable-looking spiny spider crab has a carapace of up to 8 inches (20cm) and legs of up to 20 inches (50cm) in length. Divers Dan Bolt and Terry Griffiths made amazing photographs, with Bolt saying, “Everywhere we looked were crabs, upon crabs,

upon crabs, three or four individuals deep in places, like something out of a horror film.”

www.underwaterpics.co.uk/2015/08/09/crabs-2

For the Love of Seahorses. Thailand, the world’s largest exporter of dried seahorses, will temporarily ban exports of the critters, which are traditionally used in Chinese medicine for such hocus pocus as erection-production (use Viagra, guys). Thailand exports about three-quarters of all seahorses in international trade. However, the ban does not protect seahorses from the effects of by-catch when fishermen use trawl nets to catch shrimp.

Hurricane Troubles. David Inman (Devon, PA) wrote to tell us that, in August, Hurricane Earl destroyed the dock used by the *Belize Aggressor* in Belize City. The boat is still moored at the ruined dock, which now consists only of bare pilings. Access to shore is by tender only. The voluminous supplies needed to restock for the next week-long voyage have to be transported to the boat by the small tenders, too. Rumor has it that it will take two years to construct a new dock. We tried to confirm it with the Aggressor folks, but they are unhappy with us, apparently for reporting problems with their vessels. www.aggressor.com

Panic Kills at Wakatobi. Pulling your regulator from your mouth when you panic is the last thing you want to do, but unfortunately it’s a common reaction. That tragic move killed 17-year-old Gregory Mills, a British tourist, during the last weekend of October, while diving at 30 feet (9m) with his father, Chris, and Wakatobi dive guide, Nicola Jaeger. They were at the Maya Bay site in South Sulawesi. He was rushed to a nearby medical center where he was pronounced dead.

Ocean Geographic Photo Op. Entries are now being accepted for this year’s Pictures of the Year Photo Competition. With 15 categories, contestants should submit up to 20 pictures before December

12th. The Young Photographer of the Year Award, for contestants aged between 8 and 18, will be judged by Alex Mustard. www.ogpicoty.com

Singing Fishes. If you thought it was noisier than you expected underwater, it could be the dawn chorus. Scientists at Curtin University in Perth, Australia, recorded vocal fish off Western Australia and identified seven distinct fish choruses happening at dawn and dusk. Most of this underwater music comes from soloist fish, repeating the same calls over and over. But when the calls of different fish overlap, they form a chorus — a dawn chorus! Says lead scientist Robert McCauley, “We still have only a crude idea of what is going on in the under-sea acoustic environment.” (Source: *New Scientist*)

Clever Cuttlefish. New research suggests that cuttlefish can not only count better than a one-year-old child, but also they can distinguish quality over quantity when it comes to food. University researchers in Taiwan studied 54 one-month-old cuttlefish hatched in captivity, and found that cephalopods can count potential prey such as shrimps, crabs and fishes, making judgment calls as to whether to strike or not. With cuttlefish able to distinguish between one and five, the researchers concluded that they were at least equivalent to infants and primates in terms of numbers sense. Given a choice between a single live shrimp and two dead shrimp, the cuttlefish opted for the better quality rather than the larger quantity.

Local Hero. When Bob Hood took the job as a rescue and recovery diver from the Bandon Dive Team in Oregon, he didn’t expect he would become a local hero. He’s helped save at least 10 lives since his first recovery of three fatalities after a small plane crashed at the Southwest Oregon Regional Airport back in 1994. He’s had some near misses in his time, too, and despite dealing with 19 drownings, he continues to head up the team.

undercurrent

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