

The Florida Keys: Part One

For Some, It's Terrific; for Others, It's So-So

Among the home-state chauvinists in Florida and California, there rages a debate as to which is The diving capital of the United States. Floridians argue that they have the best and the most divers and that the best of the Caribbean reefs are right offshore. Californians argue that they have the best and the most divers and that they have the best kelp bed diving all along the Coast.

Such arguments are of little consequence. "Who cares?" I must ask. No one, unless he's about to travel to one state or the other for a week of diving. Although the reduced cost of getting to U.S. dive spots may be of little consequence to the diving doctor and of great consequence to the diving student, a concern we all share is whether we have wasted our time vis-a-vis other choices. Although we may be willing to spend our last nickle in search of an underwater nirvana, we seldom have more than a week or two a year to charge around the world looking for great diving. Therefore, we must have the facts, ma'am, just the facts.

I won't be bothered to fuel the debate between states. I'm not writing about California since California is full wetsuit, cold water diving and nearly all touring divers travel in search of the warm water tropical sort. The Florida Chamber of Commerce says that Florida has it all - they call it the "U.S. Caribbean" - and I, along with a projected 50,000 or so out-of-state divers in 1976, ventured forth to find out.

To be sure, there is varied diving throughout Florida, but the Keys is the tourist mecca. The view along the highway from Key Largo southward is an awesome sight - there seem to be as many dive shops as gas stations! The diver filled with anticipation will feel like the proverbial "kid in the candy store." Anyone afraid to make choices when faced with too many alternatives could tie himself in knots as he drives along. Deciding just what shop to dive with could be paralyzing. So far as I could tell, at least 40 shops advertise trips to the reefs and who knows how many private guides cater only to those who learn of them by word-of-mouth.

Such an array sets up special circumstances for review. It would be impossible to dive with each shop unless I had 40 days and 40 nights, and it would serve no purpose for our readers who need only to know where to go for satisfactory results. This review would have to be approached differently.

INSIDE UNDERCURRENT

Undercurrent Survey on Backpack
Buoyancy Compensators p. 4

New Deaths Raise the Spectre of Legis-
lation: *Can the Industry Continue Self-
Regulation?* p. 6

Farallon Decomputer Recalled: *There's a
Lesson for the Industry* p. 6

Free Flow p. 8

Diving is found in the four major population centers of the Keys: Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon, and Key West. Ninety percent is found in the first three towns, so due to space limitations, I will focus on those. Some shops offer 3-4 day trips to Cay Sal Bank or the Dry Tortugas, about 60 miles offshore, but for the present I will review only the half day reef trips which are run regularly by all shops.

To evaluate these I visited nearly every dive shop in the Keys, itself an exhausting experience. I looked for expertise from behind the counter and generally good ambience - i.e., good vibes. That may not seem scientific, but if you've been around enough you can sniff out the right places. From my visits I selected three shops in each area to dive with, but on a couple of occasions those shops couldn't get enough divers for a dive so I dove elsewhere. I'll report on two from each area which I found to offer safe, competent trips to the reefs. I am not saying that these are the only good shops; I am saying that my experience with these was sufficient to recommend them to the diver without the information or experience in the Keys to already have selected his favorite shop.

The Overall Quality of Keys Diving: Underwater I would probably rate the full experience as "average" or "average +" if pushed by my Florida friends. Pennekamp Coral Reef, 21 miles long, has been protected for 16 years from marauding divers and here the diving is fine; nice tropicals are abundant. As soon as one leaves the reef, the effects of spearfishing and other undersea ripoffs are apparent. Stable sealife - coral, sponges, etc. - are in adequate quantity and variety in the Park, but outside the reefs are laden with sand and broken coral. Inside the Park the full reef seems roughly comparable to the U.S. Virgins (but not Bonaire); outside much less. On this trip visibility in the Park ranged between 25 and 75 feet; outside 15 to 50 feet. Interviews with locals and returning divers indicated that 50-75 is common in the Park; it may get better or worse. Visibility increases as winter moves into spring and then into summer, but drops with high winds, summer storms, plankton blooms and dredging activity. Throughout the Keys, there is pretty fair spearfishing.

Most diving is in 10 to 30 feet of water. Half an hour boat trip is required to get to the offshore reef, Beachfront snorkeling is seldom of any interest. In early February, water temperature was 70° at the surface. Even with a 1/4" wet suit top, I got chilled during each dive and wished for my farmer john bottoms. Summer temperatures are considerably higher.

Dive Shops: In every community several shops are well equipped and can meet every imaginable need. Many have a good photographic equipment stock and rent a range of camera gear. Most shops advertise two trips daily (usually 9 am and 1pm) and if they don't get enough customers they'll usually call others to ensure that you get a trip. Trips average \$13 in Key Largo to \$15 in Marathon. Tanks, packs and weight belts go for another \$10 or so. Many shops require a \$10 deposit on rental gear, so don't forget to pick it up after the dive (I forgot twice!). Trips take at least 4 hours and many skippers seem hell-bent on getting to the closest spot as fast as possible. On most trips, the Captain stays with the boat and does not dive. That's nothing to be concerned about in 30 feet of water. All the boats seemed well maintained and excellent for diving. Every shop I dove with asked if I were certified and all but one asked to see my card. Everywhere dive shop personnel seemed knowledgeable and efficient. In the Keys, there's visible evidence about how the combination of strong competition among shops and strong divers organizations in Florida contribute to a top quality, well-managed sport.

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Should you spend a week in the Keys? The Keys has two significant attributes: It's easily accessible by auto, attested to by the braggadocios I met on charters who tossed about claims of 26 hours from Boston and 22 from St. Louis. Both had speeding tickets to support their claims. Also, it offers a range of camp sites for tents or vehicles. The Keys is best suited for groups of divers who want to drive to their dive vacation, camp and cook out, dive frequently and enjoy boating and fishing. There is better diving outside the U.S. and if you enjoy big beaches, nice restaurants and nightlife and local culture there are far better vacation choices. The Keys is overpopulated and overcommercialized. It's no place "to get away from it all." Tourists jam the highways, campgrounds overflow and popular restaurants have long lines in high season and summer. Yet, if you have a carload you'll most likely be glad you came. And you'll still envy those divers who live here.

In Key Largo I selected two shops:

Key Largo Diving Headquarters and Camera Shop: Route 1, Box 393, Key Largo 53030 (305/451-1151). This appears to be one of the best equipped shops in the Keys, capable of handling any repair problems, or selling new equipment for diving or photography. Most noteworthy are the living accommodations available. Dormitory rooms are \$7.50/day or \$37.50/week and they subtract \$3 from charter trips for those renting rooms. Cottage efficiencies rent for \$20/day or \$100/week for 2. They're nothing special but have kitchen facilities and are adequate.

On the dive I selected to review, Captain Bill piloted five of us into Penne-camp. Our first dive was at Molasses Reef, where just about every dive boat goes once a day. It's a fine and complete reef, but after a few daily trips there you may wish to seek out a Captain headed elsewhere. Most impressive were the squadrons of barracuda which lazily swam about or, as if they were spawning salmon, hovered a foot or two off the bottom. By the way, they're harmless. Snapper, hogfish and grunts were plentiful and the large angel fish had learned not to fear divers. Since it is a preserve and the fish are not confronted by hostile divers, closeup photographic possibilities were superb.

On the way to the second dive we motored by many Portuguese man-of-wars--- they're easy to avoid when diving by simply checking above you before you surface -- and stopped to watch a large turtle swim by. We dove in a few small caves, but the bottom was less interesting and the visibility had dropped to 30 feet. Captain Bill gave good instruction before entering the water and helped each diver with his equipment.

Bill Crawford's Tiki Isle Dive Shop, P.O. Box 755, Key Largo, 33037 (305/451-1063) Crawford runs a nice little shop and his booklet on Underwater Photography Hints (\$1.50) provides the most simplified step-by-step instruction for the beginning photographer I've ever seen.

On our dive, guide Cecil took us to Molasses Reef, as I'd come to expect. For our second dive we left the Park to collect Conch and anchored in 10 feet of water where there were hundreds in a 50 yard radius. Cecil brought up three in his first free dive! Divers on the boat collected other live, but inedible shells. I don't like collecting sea animals for their shells any more than clubbing seals for their pelts, so I felt saddened as I rummaged through their goody bag to check their catch. This dive was highlighted by a seven foot hammerhead which took a couple of lazy turns around snorkeling Cecil, but once it spotted me, the fascinating creature picked up speed and swam away without looking back. With the visibility about 30 feet, you can bet that I looked behind me more than once! Cecil, by the way, turned out to be a helpful and competent guide, and good to rap with.

Next Issue: A guide to camping in the Keys; boat rentals and putting together your own dive trips to the reefs; hotels; shops at Islamorada and Marathon, and tips for your trip.

Survey on Backpack Buoyancy Compensators

In January's *Undercurrent* we published the results of our reader survey on buoyancy compensators. Roughly 12 per cent of the more than 500 respondents to our questionnaire reported on backpack-mounted buoyancy compensators. The average respondent had been diving 3.6 years and last year had made 46 dives.

Backpack devices are a relatively new addition to the market and we were a little surprised that as many as 12 per cent of the divers responding used them. However, we received sufficient data to comment only on two brands—the At-Pac, by Watergill, and Scubapro's Buoyancy Compensator Pack. The parameters of the study are the same as explained in the survey on BC's.

BC's vs. Back-mounted BC's:

The advantages and disadvantages

On the whole, the divers who reported owning a back-mounted BC seem to be pleased that they made the investment. The problems the divers experienced were no greater than the problems experienced with the standard BC, and in some respect the problems might be considered even less significant. Regardless, full flotation systems may not be for everybody. There is a range of advantages and disadvantages to the backpack BC, and these are the ones cited by the divers who use them:

Advantages:

1. Backpack devices are easier to put on and take off than the combination of individual items.
2. There is at least one less set of straps.
3. They are more comfortable than gear worn piece by piece.
4. From a crowded boat or dock, backpack devices can be tossed into the water (after inflation) and the diver can follow to dress in the water.
5. There is no constriction around the neck, as with some BC's.
6. When the backpack devices are fully inflated, the diver can float on his back well out of the water.
7. It can be used as a surf mat, with the diver taking the unit off and floating on top of it.
8. When a diver is moving out or in through heavy surf, it can be towed behind the diver, tank and all.
9. It keeps more of your gear in one place.
10. By having less bulk on your chest, it makes underwater photography easier.

Disadvantages:

1. Systems with weights are heavy to carry; a not-so-husky diver may find that toting the full unit around is extraordinarily difficult.
2. Although a little more bulky than individual gear, some units may be too bulky for air travel, particularly if one insists on taking the hard shell along.
3. Divers, because they can see in front of them, can protect their standard BC's from unnecessary knocks against rocks and coral. But, if the back-

mounted bag is not encased in its hard shell, it may be difficult to avoid damage from sharp protuberances above or behind the diver.

4. The purge may be more difficult to view and therefore it can be more difficult to correct malfunctions by visual inspection.

5. With the shell intact, dressing in a crowded or tiny dive boat can be difficult.

6. Divers accustomed to pockets on a BC may have to install pockets on their wet suit tops.

7. Divers who believe a CO₂ cartridge is essential will have to convert the bag themselves.

Two back-pack flotation devices:

What the users say:

The At-Pac by Watergill (26 respondents): The At-Pac was the first of the backpack devices on the market. A container for weights (BB-shot) is built right into the system. It can be purchased with or without the protective case. Thirty-one per cent of the users said they purchased the At-Pac because it is compact, 23 per cent said it reduced the number of straps, and 15 per cent said either that it is the best tool for photography, that it could be put on while in the water, or that it makes diving easier.

As reported in the August, 1975, issue of *Undercurrent*, the At-Pac developed serious problems in late 1974 and Watergill had to recall it. A weak plastic airway could lead to unintentional inflation, and in this survey 16 per cent of the divers had experienced that problem. Twenty-three per cent said that the oral inflator hose was too short and 23 per cent found that the purge valve stuck or leaked. Twelve per cent said the oral inflator hose had not vented.

Comments from the readers: The only problem with the At-Pac is that it rides up when fully inflated on the surface. A crotch strap solved the problem. K.C., Sparks, Nevada

The oral inflator hose is too short to raise above to deflate when swimming parallel to bottom. Must roll over on backs or get perpendicular to bottom. T.S., Hudson, Wisconsin

I ripped the bag on coral. Dr. C.H., Avon, NY

Plastic inflator cracked at approximately 30 feet. It inflated automatically. Thereafter I check inside before every dive. J.H., Wheaton, Maryland

A great system—terrific lift power. No lift bag needed. Easy to float on back or stomach. The original tank inflator problems resolved. S.S., Irvine, California

The quick release bands are not strong enough to take repeated use. In their place I have purchased Scubapro bands, drilled holes in them to fit the At-Pac holes, and will use them in the future. E.D.S., Baltimore, Maryland

The center of gravity is too low when lead shot is used and tends to roll you over or make you bottom

heavy. Also the plastic cover creates too much drag and tires you quickly. R.S.L., Walsh, Colorado

Undercurrent comments: We talked with six dive shops about the At-Pac recall and replacement and all but one felt that the problems have been fully corrected.

Scubapro Buoyancy Compensator Pack (23 respondents): Twenty-six per cent of the respondents indicated they had made their purchase at the recommendation of their instructor, a testament to the Scubapro/N.A.S.D.S. relationship. Fifteen per cent like the convenience when dressing up.

A high 50 per cent indicated that they had experienced no problems; Scubapro also had the highest rate of "no problems with the BC!" Most problems were inconveniences. Twenty-two per cent said it was uncomfortable when floating and 17 per cent said the straps cut them.

Comments from Scubapro users: I have had quite a bit of trouble with my inflator from the tank, which frequently leaks at the connection. Silicon spray seems to help. T.L., Birmingham, Michigan

BC vent valve too small, causing uncontrollable ascent from 60 feet to surface in about 15 seconds. Once ascent started, flotation bag expanded faster than vent could release air, causing continually accelerating ascent. J. and E.S., Ambler, Pennsylvania

Dumping is a problem. An emergency dump like on U.S. Divers vests would solve problem. A.D., Allen Park, Michigan.

Automatic inflator inflated uncontrollably because of a loose connection between mouthpiece and auto-inflator. Corrected by tightening. M.R., Houston, Texas

Scubapro BC pack has tendency to ride up while floating on surface with pack inflated. The waist strap often ends up under armpits with loss of some buoyancy because lift is situated so high; i.e., head is not held easily out of water unless diver makes effort to lie back on pack. Possibly the Scubapro Independent Weight System would give additional ballast to tank to prevent as much upward slippage of waist strap, but that just means buying new weights to replace perfectly good ones already owned. W.J.W., Raleigh, N.C.

Undercurrent comments: Respondents indicated that the problem with the automatic inflator we noted with the buoyancy compensator continues to pop up here. Generally speaking, however, the users liked their back inflation pack and appreciate the strength of the neoprene-backed nylon bag.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Users of backpack flotation devices do experience some problems uncommon to divers who own the standard BC: occasional instability underwater, difficulty floating, and difficulty venting. These problems are mainly overcome through initial training with the equipment at the time of purchase—a must for any diver buying a backpack device is to take a pool lesson and with subsequent experience. The surface problems,

for example, are frequently overcome simply with weight and strap adjustment.

The weight system for the two brands reported on differs significantly for each. The At-Pac has a built-in container which carries BB shot for weight. The Scubapro has no standard weight system, but has an optional system which permits weights to be fastened to one's tank. If that system isn't used, then the diver uses a standard weight belt. We believe that the standard weight belt is safer and that a diver is better off to exercise that option with either device. To jettison At-Pac weights or Scubapro tank-mounted weights, a diver must be roughly perpendicular to the bottom; without the pull of gravity, the weights remain. A diver caught in an upside-down position who needs to jettison weights could not do it. Further, if for any reason a diver had to remove his pack underwater—shark protection, entanglement, or whatever—he would automatically be removing his weights.

A diver might need the option to leave the weights on, but that option is not available if the weights are part of the backpack system. The opportunity for inadvertently losing your weights is probably about the same whether the diver is wearing a weight belt or using weights attached to his backpack system.

The At-Pac costs more than the Scubapro, if for no other reason than the fact that the weight system is *not* optional. On that basis alone, the Scubapro system is a better deal. If one is buying all new gear, the cost of a backpack device is not much greater than individual components. If a diver is converting, however, and his present gear is in good shape, the cost is high. Still it may not be a bad investment. Old equipment may be necessary for situations in which a backpack just isn't convenient, particularly for free diving or snorkeling.

The biggest drawback, we believe, is the lack of a dump valve. Many individuals in the dive industry dispute the need for a dump valve, arguing that inadequate training is the greater cause for the inability to deal with unintentional inflation. Perhaps. But, so what? If normal diver response causes a certain amount of error and that error can be designed out of the equipment, then it should be. In aviation, computer technology, and nuclear warfare, every possible step is taken to eliminate the potential of human error leading to self-destruction. Diving should be no different.

Making our reservation about automatic inflation clear, we recommend the Scubapro backpack over the At-Pac. It appears that the diver can get a better piece of equipment at less cost.

Finally, backpack flotation devices are most likely to be the wave of the future. We anticipate a push by many manufacturers, and also anticipate some significant redesign in the basics. The first indication is the *Nautilus*, to be introduced by Dacor in March. It features a *hard shell* "bag," a manual dump and uses *water* for weight, just as would a submarine. And we suspect there'll be further innovations by others. Whether they're worth the trouble will be the subject of the next *Undercurrent* questionnaire on backpacks.

New Deaths Raise the Spectre of Legislation:

Can the Industry Continue Self-Regulation?

Scuba diving deaths are back in the news and scuba diving is back under the eye of politicians and the press in two states.

Due to the first of two separate incidents, the newly formed National Scuba Training Council will be given its chance to prove its ability to police the industry to the satisfaction of public officials (see *Undercurrent*, November, 1975). Spurred by the embolism deaths of two divers from the Michigan Underwater Schools of Diving (Lincoln Park, Michigan), the Committee has begun investigation of that N.A.S.D.S.-affiliated shop. The two divers, both experienced, died while exploring an abandoned, water-filled mine in Missouri. Although there is doubt about whether this was a shop-sponsored trip (one of the two was a provisional instructor at the school), three other deaths have occurred on school-sponsored tours since 1974, according to a copyrighted story in the *Detroit News*. The complaints airing the case were filed by three former instructors from the school.

Although the facts are still unclear and the National Council has begun its investigation, the Michigan legislature has been drafting a bill to control the training and certification of divers.

The second battleground is Florida, where two divers drowned while cave diving in the Peacock Slough area in Suwannee County in Northern Florida. According to the *Live Oak Independent Post*, this incident makes seven diver deaths in the area in less than two years.

Florida cave diving ranks near the top as the most adventurous and dangerous diving anywhere. For years the Florida legislature has flirted with different plans for regulation and this incident again brings the dangers to the legislators' attention. Significantly, the area is private land and has been closed to divers for some time, but with no enforcement or substantial penalties

for trespassing. The editor of the *Independent Post*, convinced that voluntary action will not work, has called for diving regulation by requiring permits, and then only for those divers with advanced cave diving skills. Anyone else found diving there would be subject to a \$5000 fine.

Because of the mishaps, several issues are at stake: the quality of basic certification, the need for advanced certification for advanced diving, and the responsibility of trip sponsors are among them.

One issue we must each consider as we ponder the implications of government action is whether a diver has the inalienable right to kill himself. Certainly he has the right to engage in a dangerous sport. But long ago our society concluded that the individual does not have the right to commit suicide. The reasons are less moral than pragmatic; divers have families, friends and business relationships.

The ultimate fight will be how to draw the line between individual rights and the rights of society. Deaths from random causes in any sport must be accepted as our tragic debt to that sport; those deaths may be preventable, but by common sense, not by control. Death in clusters, whether connected to the same dive boat, dive shop or instructor, or whether it happens to those using the same brand of equipment or diving at the same location, must be classified separately. And so must death in pairs, where one failing buddy takes the other with him. That seems to be the ultimate injustice.

Government has little role, if any, in random accidents and random deaths. But it does have a responsibility when deaths appear in clusters and demonstrate patterns and predictability. The industry has the first option to determine the facts and to act. Should it fail, then someone else must assume the responsibility. In these cases there is no one else but government.

Farallon Decomputer Recalled:

—There's a Lesson for the Industry

Undoubtedly the most controversial piece of dive equipment is the decompression meter. The two companies which market a meter, Scubapro and Farallon, trumpet studies which support the validity of their product. However, we have interviewed a number of dive shops and independent researchers who don't

think much of contemporary decompression meters.

To be sure, decompression meters are risky devices because of the precision required; a substantial shock caused by the airlines tossing your bags around or by banging the meter against a coral head may be enough to render it worthless. Furthermore, the meters are

built to simulate the body, but because of design limitations, they cannot give a full or accurate reading of individual bodies.

The greatest risk may be due to human nature itself. As members of a technological society we are all too dependent upon being serviced by the technology we have created. Rather than walk to the corner grocery, we elect to drive. Rather than challenge the computer printout of our bank statement, we elect to accept it. Rather than refer to the Navy Decompression Tables, we refer to the meter. We accept technology. We expect it to work for us.

The problem is, in fact, less with the meters than with ourselves. Still, we expect excellence from the manufacturers. After all, that meter is there to tell us how not to get bent. We rely on it for its accuracy, although both manufacturers state that their meters are never to be used as a replacement for the Navy Dive tables. Even so, human nature often lets us forget. And that can be our fatal mistake.

In early January, Farallon issued a notice to recall its decompression meter, the Decomputer. In brief letters to every dealer and diver who had returned the warranty card, Farallon said:

"Lab tests on Decomputers returned from the field have revealed that the solvent used to bond the last part of the Decomputer together, after completion of the unit's multiple test dives, can have an adverse effect on the membrane. The result is the indicators [particularly the slow indicators] may rise at too slow a rate to safely approximate the Navy tables.

"If you have a Decomputer, please return it at your earliest convenience so we may test it thoroughly, then replace it, if necessary."

One of Farallon's public relations sheets states that "before packaging the Decomputer is inspected as a complete unit." Not quite true. We learned that the meter is clamped together before final inspection so that if there is a malfunction it can be easily opened and the problem corrected. As a matter of practice they apparently were not testing the meter after it had been glued.

To get more information about the recall, we talked with Ralph Shamlan, dynamic young president of Farallon Industries. Shamlan said they believed they had a great responsibility for the safety of the diver and worked hard to get the recall notice out. He said there is no inherent problem with the meter and that the company has no plans for redesign. The problem simply came in the assembly. If you have a Decomputer (or know someone who does) you may return it either to your dive shop or directly to Farallon Industries, 1333 Old County Road, Belmont, CA 94002.

Undercurrent Comments: In pursuing this story, we called the Consumer Product Safety Commission, a federal agency which requires that any manufacturer recalling a product report the recall within 24 hours.

We expected to corroborate the information Farallon presented to its shops with the information sent the government. We learned, however, that the recall had not been registered.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission has the primary responsibility to "protect the public against unreasonable risks of injury associated with consumer products; to develop uniform safety standards for consumer products and minimize conflicting state and local regulations; and to promote research and investigation into the causes and prevention of product-related deaths, illnesses and injuries." When a product is recalled, it monitors the company's recall process to ensure that it is being handled properly and provides whatever assistance it can to publicize the problem and get all unsafe products returned. Reasonable enough, we believe.

In our conversation with Shamlan on February 9, we asked whether he knew of the registration requirements (it had been more than four weeks since the recall had been issued) to which he served up a 30-second harangue about the evils of government agencies. We repeated our question, and, after another vitriolic outburst, he said that he had registered with the West Palm Beach, Fla., office and had several pieces of correspondence between the commission and his company. We tried to locate the West Palm Beach office, but apparently there is none. We called the commission office closest to Farallon to check again if Farallon had filed its report; we were told that the commission had not been informed of the recall. For willful violation, the law carries civil and criminal penalties, including fines of up to \$2000 a day.

There have been two recalls before in which the diving industry cooperated fully with the commission: the At-Pac recall (see *Undercurrent*, August, 1975) and a recall of 1300 tank liners by AMF Voit where ineffective installation created the possibility of occlusion of the cylinder valve. That was 1974. Up until now, the industry has demonstrated full cooperation.

If the Scuba industry is to avoid unnecessary government regulation, it has to demonstrate its good faith by observing laws already on the books. We suspect that Farallon did not understand fully its obligation under the law, but in our legal system that has never been an excuse. Its failure to file promptly provides no support to the claim that the industry can police itself without government looking over its shoulder. Farallon is a highly respected company among divers, dive shops and other members of the industry. Shamlan has been a significant figure in developing the industry's posture of self-regulation and in lobbying against excessive regulation. At press time, we learned that Farallon and the Consumer Product Safety Commission were now cooperating to solve any problems with the recall. This should be a good lesson for everyone.

Free Flow



After 25 years of issuing chemical shark repellent packs with all life rafts and life jackets, the Navy has at last concluded that the stuff is worthless. As consolation for its lack of credibility, Dr. C.S. Johnson of the Naval Undersea Center stated, according to the Associated Press, that "at least the dye kept the person in the water from seeing any approaching sharks." My, isn't our Navy merciful! . . . If you're still packing the dye around, you had better write the Hallmark Insurance Company in Madison, Wisconsin. They must have heard the news since they've recently announced a policy to provide compensation to attack victims of a wide range of Mother Nature's creatures, including sharks. It's less than \$50 a year.

Fair trade laws go down the drain in early March, meaning that more bargains may be available in some product lines. Among the major manufacturers, U.S. Divers has been the leader in providing solid equipment discounts, and now, with fair trade on the way out, others may be forced to follow. A few marginal shops in large metropolitan areas or major diving centers may suffer if the price competition gets heavy, but the total effect on the industry should be positive and divers might find a few more bargains in their favorite shop.

"How," writes Rodger Schlickeisen, "can you write a whole story on the Cousteau books, and spell his name wrong?" It's quite easy. Although anywhere from three to five people proof each issue, the last reader sometimes overreacts. Our reader, who studied Russian in college, not French, puzzled over the correct spelling, then referred to a previous issue of *Undercurrent* for the right spelling. The twist is that he had edited that spelling too, and was wrong then! He's not much of a diver, either. Now, were you one of the 99 per cent who didn't even notice the misspelling?

Louisiana diver Jack Heidloff shares a painful experience with us. He took his new Farafins to Belize and, although the instructions say if you're not wearing a wet suit, wear high boots, Jack couldn't find boots

high enough. Coral and sand lodged between the frame and his leg, rubbed him raw, and infection set in. Can't find boots high enough either? Try pants, but what else did Farallon have in mind? Needless to say, Jack's vacation was spoiled.

Many airlines have rules that no crew member is to dive less than 24 hours before a flight. It's a good idea not to dive and fly the same day since there could be trouble should a plane lose pressurization. At 18,000 feet there's half an atmosphere of pressure, which is reason enough never to fly in an unpressurized plane after a dive. . . . Should anyone need emergency medical consultation on the bends or need aid in locating the closest chamber, call 512/536-3278. That's Brooks Air Force Base in Texas and it handles calls 24 hours a day.

Still on the trail of "The Great American Diving Novel"—which we doubt we'll ever find—we at least have a candidate for honorable mention: *The Man Who Lived in Innerspace*, by Arnold Federbush. It's light science fiction, filled with facts and a bit of fantasy, and it's devoid of sex. That's why it hasn't sold well. Still, it strikes a diver's soul, for the main character devotes his life to developing a oneness with the Sea by living with it, then living in it, and finally becoming the Sea itself. In his travels below, he encounters a vast array of creatures and shares experiences that all divers have had or fantasize about. The plot is a bit more than acceptable, the writing style slightly forced but nicely descriptive, and the book builds well. We found it difficult to put down. Best of all, the reader is left with a range of unanswered philosophical questions which brand this effort as far more than a filler for your duffel bag: \$1.60 from Bantam Books, 414 E. Golf Rd., Des Plaines, IL 60016.

We've received more than one letter asking how to contact the Current Club (Current, North Eleuthera, Bahamas) and Captain Don (Aquaventures, Hotel Bonaire, Bonaire, Netherlands Antilles) so there you are . . . Armando Jenick, whom we thought so highly of in St. Thomas, has moved a few miles to the Bolongo Bay Beach and Tennis Club. The club has potential for a full range dive resort, and someday we'll take a look at it. . . .

Two Los Angeles divers found what appear to be ancient Asian anchors, dated somewhere between 500 and 1000 years ago. Since they found them in 30 feet of water a short swim from the L.A. shore, divers Bob Meistrell and Wayne Baldwin may someday be remembered as the two gents who converted Columbus Day to Wo Fat Choy Day, in honor of the man who discovered America—or is it "the woman who . . . ?"