

St. Maarten/St. Martin, Netherlands Antilles: *for lovers or for divers?*

During the next several months, you'll be media blitzed about St. Martin, as the French end of this little Caribbean island is called, or St. Maarten, the Dutch moniker for its side of the territory. The travel section of your Sunday newspaper will carry plenty of ads about St. Martin excursions and the editors will run more than one compromised travel article about the tropical paradise awaiting the lucky traveler. Certainly, the copy will be accompanied by lovely models in scuba gear. Television giveaway shows will offer prizes of a one week stay on St. Maarten, most likely at the Mullet Bay Beach Hotel, and talk show guests will bore you silly about the rendezvous there. Tall, tanned jocks, arm-in-arm with perfectly crafted ladies, will stroll past you on a summer's day in Anytown, U.S.A., and both will be wearing tight t-shirts tout-ing, among other points of interest, St. Maarten. At cocktail parties you will overhear jet setters jabbering about how they have discovered St. Maarten. Holiday magazine, Travel and Leisure, Playboy, and New York magazine will rave incessantly about a St. Maarten sojourn. And you'll be tempted. Oh, you'll be tempted.

St. Maarten. Jewel of the Caribbean. Imagine the gin-clear waters. Lobster taken for every dinner. Remote beaches lined with shells. Virgin diving. A true paradise, indeed, discovered only recently by the beautiful people, yet still undiscovered by the relentless scuba diver in search of the new world underwater. We will claim it for our dive club and our buddies just as Columbus claimed the new world for Spain. And we'll wait for the day that the diving world discovers our secret.

I trust however that you'll engage in your own research before boarding Air France. If you take the same rigorous research route I selected, you won't find a damn thing, because nothing significant has been written about St. Maarten diving. Oh, your travel agent may assure you that there's plenty of good diving because the International Hotel and Travel Index shows that some of the hotels advertise scuba diving. After all, St. Maarten is an emerald island in an aquamarine world, so the ingredients must be there.

Let me be candid. St. Maarten may be for lovers. It is not for divers.

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In fact, I'm not sure it's even for lovers, but why not allow a bit of the image to remain, however tarnished? For divers, it is not. In the first place, all diving is by boat and often quite a distance from shore. I have an unsettling feeling when the guide anchors two miles from shore in four foot rollers, especially when I've never dived the waters before and know nothing about the guide. Should we become separated underwater, I'd need more than a whistle to be spotted on the surface, and the next stop would be the coast of Africa. Yes, there are spots closer in, but these are the favorites. I would have no complaints if they were terrific, but I have complaints.

Just as much a drawback is the relative inaccessibility of the shops. From nearly all hotels, you'll need a car to commute or else pay the \$4-6 round trip cab fare. There are but two shops; neither sells the odds and ends you might need and neither can handle sophisticated repairs.

The reefs I visited have their plusses and minuses. There are lovely soft coral forests, similar to St. Thomas, for example. Cave and rock formations too strike a similarity. Fish are not as abundant; the spots were comparable to the Keys outside Pennkamp. The wrecks were of moderate interest. On the whole, I did not find enough to keep me interested for a week, and combined with the hassles of diving, I must rate the total experience as something less than average.

Underwater Research Center, Box 234, St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles (ph 2433)... Until September, when the only other island shop is supposed to be getting a suitable dive boat, this is the only legitimate operation. I learned of it through the shop's representative in downtown Philipsburg, the Dutch capital, who said that I must make reservations to ensure a place on the boat since their morning and afternoon trips were usually filled. As it turned out, that was only a way to extract a few guilders commission out of the dive fee (\$32.50 for 2 tanks, \$25 for one). At the shop owner Lucie Sheldon informed me that there would be no afternoon dive. I had to double check that I had arrived at the impressive sounding Underwater Research Center, because it looked more like a cluttered retail aquarium store. Lucie assured me that it was both a dive shop and retail freshwater fish outlet. She said a diver had dropped in earlier, but he, too, was sent away since there were no other divers. If I wanted to dive, I would have to go to his hotel and find him. I suggested she call, but there was no phone, not because it was impossible to get but . . . well, they just didn't have one.

That's a stinking way to run a business, but I would go anywhere for a buddy on this hot day, especially when I learned that the next day, Sunday, the shop would be closed. I finally found the diver, but only after I walked up to every young lady on his hotel beach and asked if she were Mrs. Livingston, wife of the diver. I found Mrs. Livingston, she got the message to her husband, and we dove. In the meantime, I had discovered a great way to meet the beach beauties.

Guide Hank Tonnemacher, a displaced Californian (are all guides?) was enthusiastic, helpful and sufficiently conscientious about the safety of his charges. Hank, however, swam over the reefs with the speed of a speared Barracuda; I hadn't moved that fast since riding the current at North Eleuthera! I did not bring my camera, which was the correct decision since 1/500 shutter speed would have been too slow to stop action. I also question the sanity of taking uncertified divers (one paying customer turned out to have had one swimming pool lesson and a single ocean dive under his belt) two miles out to sea.

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We made three dives in one frequently visited area. The first was on an 1801 wreck, little more than a pile of rubble, but with three photogenic cannons intact. I poked for a trinket or two here in yet-to-be discovered St. Maarten, but an occasional find of an encrusted Heineken's bottle gave me sufficient evidence of why I otherwise came up empty handed. Two other close-by dives were in "the Alleys", a moderately interesting maze of small caves and gulches cut through large rocks. There was a mixture of common reef fish, but in two caves were schools of what were probably glassy sweepers, an interesting hatchet-shaped fish. We spotted occasional pairs of french and gray angels, a lobster ripe with thousands of bright orange eggs (which we returned to its hideout) an enormous trumpet fish, its belly full with a morning meal, and a few 3-4 pound groupers. An average array, I might say.

The nicest feature of the dive was the plentiful soft coral, always weaving to-and-fro in the constant surge. Visibility averaged 50 feet, dropping as low as 30 and rising to 75 or so. Apparently, this is just about typical -- late summer is better. On one other dive near shore, visibility averaged between 20 and 50 feet. Although a couple of eagle rays ventured in, it was a low quality reef, but our purpose was to visit a recent wreck. Bits of assorted junk could be located; the good stuff is already on someone else's library shelf.

Maho Water Sports, Mullet Bay Beach Hotel, St. Maarten. A 23 foot cabined dive boat is to arrive in September, but until then this is nothing more than a hotel tourist operation, although they insisted on my C-card before I could dive (not so at Underwater Research). Whether it arrives remains to be seen. Owner Jeff Klein drove a van stuffed with nondiving tourists across the island where a local fisherman named Freddie motored the 12 of us in his 16 foot historical piece through white caps to a small island. The nonswimmers aboard damn near died of fright when a few cupsful of water dribbled in over the gunwhales.

Again an ok, if unspectacular dive. 30 feet of water, 25-50 feet of visibility, moderate variety of fish, nice soft coral, no fish large enough to eat, nothing to make a trip to St. Maarten for. There were no shells, with the single exception of a nice helmet which Klein scooped up for himself; since shells are rare, it would seem prudent for a dive shop owner to keep his hands to himself and instruct his tourist customers to do the same. Nearby is a patch of eel grass filled with conch, which is the only other area dived by Maho.

Conclusion: Given the rest of the world in which we live, there's no reason to select St. Maarten as a place to dive. I have heard of terrific diving at nearby Saba and St. Eustasius, but neither St. Maarten shop makes regular trips there. For the entrepreneur, exploring the area for better spots still could lead to a venture worth investment.

I'm not even sure St. Maarten is for lovers (this is not to say that divers are not lovers). If money is no object, the La Smaana Hotel is a sexy and romantic spa, a wonderful place for an affair. Island residents are taciturn, yet friendly. There are sandy beaches, plenty of nice restaurants, gambling, a few nice hotels. The island is not lush, but rather dry, somewhat scrubby, and sometimes desert like. I do not find it, the architecture or the grubbiness attractive. I have no reason to return. On the other hand, thousands of devotees speak lovingly of it. Who knows?

The widely advertised Mullet Bay Hotel I can do without -- it's too expensive, too commercial, too spread out, and too large for an island retreat. It's run by Marriott. The Great Bay is commercial, yet preferable. The Pasanggrahan is a nice little guest house right on the beach in downtown Phillipsburg. Across the street is the West Indian Tavern, featuring a delicious crab pie made from, would you believe, land crab. No, you're wrong. They live in tunnels dug in the island, scurry about sideways, and are about 6-8 inches across.

Diver's compass: Wet suit tops are needed just about year-round. . . The smaller cute rental firms beat the big three by 25%, but no cars are available at the airport; you'll save money by not renting a car until your second or third day, doing your touring over one or two days, and using a cab otherwise . . . I could not locate a hotel with even reasonable snorkeling . . . (C.C./6/9)

Aluminum Tanks:

A little discussed problem with a simple solution

So far the data on aluminum tanks support the claims of great resistance to corrosion (that great plague which affects steel tanks) and suggest the structural integrity of the cylinders. Many divers, however, presume that the aluminum tank is corrosion free—that it will give a lifetime of maintenance free diving.

Not so. *Undercurrent's* October, 1975, issue provided a lengthy discussion of the aluminum tank. Suffice it to say that such a tank does require maintenance—and some recent discoveries further emphasize the need for an annual visual inspection.

The problem is this: moisture can build up between the threads of the valve and the cylinder. Temperature changes caused by pumping in air or by moving the tank from cold water into a warm vehicle are the most likely cause. Apparently galvanic corrosion results which may freeze the valve into the tank, making it impossible to remove the valve without destroying the threads of the tank.

The problem is not widespread, but it exists, perhaps to a greater extent than originally thought. One dive shop we spoke with reported six cases in the past several years. The corrosion can only be detected when someone makes an effort to remove the valve from the tank. Either he finds that the valve won't budge, or he discovers it will only with a Herculean effort that mangles the aluminum threads in the process. If this happens, render one tank obsolete.

The easiest way to prevent corrosion at the valve/tank interface is by following the advice of everyone—have an annual visual inspection of your tank. That inspection should permit removal of any moisture buildup prior to a freeze.

U.S. Divers recommends a preventive process which

all dive shops should follow. If you're one who insists on performing your own inspection, you, too, should heed U.S. Divers' advice. Vice President for Engineering Leon Cerniway was kind enough to provide us with these tips:

The valve should be loosened from the cylinder until the cylinder O-ring is exposed; then Molykote #557 lubricant should be applied to the valve and cylinder threads. Allow the lubricant to flow around the valve threads, then rotate the valve clockwise to expedite the flow. Rotate counter-clockwise for removal. If any resistance is felt, repeat the Molykote procedure. Once the valve is removed, clean it with isopropyl alcohol and a stiff brush, apply Molykote #557, lubricate the O-rings and valve, and reinstall. That will take you a long way toward preventing valve lockup due to galvanic corrosion.

We spoke with John McAniff, Director of the University of Rhode Island Scuba Safety Project. McAniff, who has been conducting extensive tests on both steel and aluminum cylinders, agrees that an annual visual inspection is the best way to prevent a freeze. Even with a potential freeze problem, aluminum, he believes, is superior to steel. McAniff thinks that steel tanks ought eventually to be phased out.

The project director adds that if you live in warm climates where heat and humidity can produce internal moisture, you'd be wise to inspect your tank every six months.

Of course, water can enter tanks by a number of ways. The easiest is by sucking a tank nearly dry then pushing the purge button while underwater. If you pick up your tank, shake it back and forth, and if you hear water sloshing around, you're in for some trouble.

Two New Books for Divers:

The Shallow, by Peter Benchley

If there were any sort of association of professional diving writers, I'd vote to kick out Peter Benchley. I remember a winter's night a few seasons back when I was snuggled up in bed with my beautiful buddy and we read wide-eyed this marvelous and scary adventure of a monster shark that gobbled up anybody bouncing through the surf. It was a grand adventure story and we

speculated that should Peter Benchley someday decide to write about diving, we'd be the first in line at the book store.

Well, Peter Benchley has decided to write about diving and his new novel, *The Shallow*, makes the same contribution to literature as the ping pong ball made to the snorkel.

Actually, this new book is not called *The Shallow*, but *The Deep*. However, a more shallow story I've never read. The diving good guys—actually a Bermudan treasure seeker, perhaps modeled after a hard-core diver named Teddy Tucker, and two honeymooning noncertified divers—never drop below 30 feet in this peerless adventure, although the fears they report would more characteristically accompany the 200-foot dive. Indeed, Benchley uses a number of diving facts to create about as much suspense for anyone who knows diving as might be created when you come face-to-face with a man-eating sea cucumber, reach for your knife—and find it missing!! To wit:

SURVEY ON WET SUITS

How to make the right decision about which brand of wet suit to purchase has always been a mystery to us. Manufacturers make strong claims about their products—the kind of neoprene used, the stitching, the nylon lining, and other ingredients—yet it seems impossible for the diver to sort out these claims in order to make the right decision for himself.

Furthermore, there are a number of variables over which a manufacturer can have no control: how off-the-rack suits fit; an individual diver's proclivity for getting cold, the water temperatures in which a suit is used, and so forth. In the final analysis, the decision an individual makes comes down to four variables: the particular brand your dive shop is pushing, what your friends have told you, your own experience with a particular brand and with wet suits in general, and the not-very-relevant variable, the appearance of the suit.

Perhaps the best data about wet suit durability and protection from the cold will come from divers' own experiences. Because of the number and complexity of variables, we're not certain how specific our conclusions can be. Even so, we'll take a chance with a questionnaire and report on it as best we can. Because of the anticipated level of response, the results will be computerized, so please answer the questions only as directed.

Note that we hope to gather some information about dry suits, but we suspect that too few are in use for the results to be conclusive. Because of the growing interest in dry suits, we would like especially to encourage dry suit users to respond.

The results and our analysis will appear in a late fall issue of *Undercurrent*—in time for winter diving.

"Gail sneezed. As she folded her handkerchief she noticed a smear of blood. 'I've got still a bloody nose,' she said.

"What do you mean *still*?"

"There was blood in my mask when I came up today.

"They left the Orange Grove after breakfast . . ."

I can see Grandma gasp, and gasp again when this little flower later mentions blood in her mask. Since the cause was no doubt a broken capillary or two inside the nostrils, which healed in a day, certainly no cause for alarm, the conclusion of this scary incident (gasp!) is never forthcoming.

No doubt Benchley has tried to parlay the drawn-out suspenseful tidbits he so cleverly used in *Jaws* into instant success for *The Shallow*. But, he fails. The *Jaws* formula does not work for him this second time around no matter how hard he tries.

The Shallow's similarities to *Jaws* are crude. The covers of both books are nearly identical. The author concludes the first chapter of *The Shallow* as he concluded the first chapter of *Jaws*. In *Jaws*, a beachcomber finds a chunk of a woman's body; in *The Shallow* a beachcomber finds a drowned man half buried in the sand. "Water ran from his mouth and from his ears when his head rolled to the side. The navy man bent down and touched him, and the man emitted a rasping, gurgling sound. He moaned and his eyelids fluttered."

For *Jaws* the scene had a point; for *The Shallow* it is pointless.

The Shallow is a linear story with nothing of interest happening on the sidelines. We've all read the script before: *Novice discovers treasure on wreck. Novice tells good-guy legendary local diver. Bad guys threaten novice. Good guys look for treasure. Shark shows up. Bad guys come after good guys. They fight underwater. Hoses are cut. Everyone survives. Shark doesn't. The good guys win.*

There are a couple of twists, such as the fact that the treasure turns out to be morphine. For some readers the information on treasure hunting will be new and interesting. For more, you'll have to read between the lines.

Straight diving information is fairly accurate, but Benchley paints too much evil in the eyes of sharks and barracuda for the experienced diver to swallow. And, when lady Gail tells hubby David that there are no reserves on the tanks and he tells her not to worry because they'll only be diving in 25 feet of water, you expect their stupidity to set the stage for major action.

It doesn't. It only sets the stage for further stupidity. In fact, some of the questions 37-year-old David asks make him appear to have as much seaside sense as Bonzo the Dog Boy. About the only time he shows intelligence equivalent to his years is when he's trying to seduce his bride—actually, she's just as interested in seducing him—and then chickens out by explaining

that "an ejaculation occurring more than 33 feet below sea level could cause a backup in the system, resulting in the blowing out of the brains."

Now why didn't my dive instructor tell me about that one? Does the Rhode Island University Scuba Safety Project need volunteers to test this hypothesis? The line forms at the right.

So, my friends, save your \$7.95. Wait for the

movie. When Hollywood finishes with it, perhaps they'll have made sense out of it. They could, you know, because Al Giddings will be handling the filming. Regardless, they'll need Ron and Valerie Taylor to play the couple and Lloyd Bridges to play the hero. That's the only way they'll be able to pull it off. And, if they do, I'll be the first in line. I wouldn't miss it for a trip to the Caymans. —L.K.

Amphibian: The Adventures of a Professional Diver, by Jim Gott with Norman Leeds Smith

This is an "as told to" book, and I've always disliked "as told to" books with the same passion that I dislike instructors who are drill sergeants, divers who delight in stabbing everything in sight with their knives, and waitresses who call me "Honey." When you pick up an "as told to" book it means that the alleged author, the person who writes, "I did this" and "I did that," has the writing ability of a frog who has been trained to hold a pencil but will never learn to spell c-r-o-a-k. Someone, usually the person to whom the story is told (in this case, Norman Lewis Smith), decides that the frog has a story to tell and gets it off by vicariously sharing the experiences of the frog and then writing about them for profit. Once I realized that I had been handed an "as told to" to critique, I rubbed my hands together fiendishly, barely able to wait to sharpen my scalpel first to dissect this amphibian, then to put him on the shelf in formaldehyde forever.

Actually, I kind of liked the book. Gott, the frog, is no \$6 million man. Like most of us, he seems to be a 60-second man and that's exactly what makes his story worthy and credible. He writes of diving in zero visibility in cruddy rivers just to get wet, of getting his gear ripped off by a good friend, of getting freaked out in his first kelp dive, of nearly getting his head blown off by his own men as he emerged one dark night from a river in Vietnam, of becoming a commercial oil rig diver, but giving it all up to teach pretty New York ladies how to dive. He's an average dude, in love with diving, who has stumbled from job to job, with his only goal being to make a living underwater—barely a living—which he is doing and loving every wet moment of it.

To the non-diver the book may be filled with adventure, but most of us have had Gott's experiences and have even grown accustomed to them. Gott's philosophical bent strikes a balance between the ardent conservationists and the spearfisherpeople, between the macho, balls-and-all diver and the equipment and safety nut. He speaks for the sport diver, not the professional heavyweight. He speaks for us.

Gott took off to make the big money in commercial diving he had heard about. He describes the rigors of his training and then, as he wastes away his time in the barrooms of backwoods Louisiana waiting for a job—any job—he talks freely about his boredom, his fears, his loneliness. It doesn't take him long to leave the oil rigs of Louisiana for the dive shops of New York. If you're fantasizing about the life and big money of commercial divers, reading Gott's book might save you from wasting a year of your life.

This is not an exciting, adventurous book. It's simple, straightforward and enjoyable light reading. It's an excellent introduction to the sport for beginners. It would make a useful supplement in scuba courses because it provides a lot of basic information and answers questions that instructors often overlook. And, it's bound to encourage new students to continue diving. For the experienced diver, it provides a night of light reading. It costs \$8.95, a tariff too high for the book's quality, but a sum equivalent to a few beers, a hamburger and a ticket to *Jaws*. *Amphibian* was published just this spring by Playboy Press (919 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago) and can be ordered through any local bookseller. —L.K.

Underwater Photography:

A valuable Nikonos repair service from Peter Navarro

Over the years we've noted that many divers who use local camera repair facilities for the Nikonos are

frequently dissatisfied with the speed of repair, the ability of the repair facility to locate and correct special

Nikonos problems, including corrosion, and the high prices charged.

At the same time, we have spoken with more than half a dozen divers and a handful of dive shop personnel who have been delighted with the mail-order Nikonos repair service that Peter Navarro of Campbell, CA gives. They all seem to agree that Navarro offers careful, reliable and honest service at a reasonable price and our experience corroborates that. Navarro learned his trade at San Jose Camera, where he worked without pay after an automobile accident left him 75 per cent disabled. He had been with the California Highway Patrol. Today, his home is his workshop.

If you have a repair problem, carefully bundle up your camera and send it to Navarro along with a clear statement of what the symptoms are. Unless you authorize him to proceed beforehand, within a week he'll send you an estimate for the work you have requested, plus an estimate for any additional work he thinks the camera needs. Give him the go-ahead and he'll get the camera back to you, C.O.D., air parcel post, within two to three weeks. If you decide not to have the camera repaired, there's an estimate charge of \$6.50 plus postage.

Navarro recommends an annual preventive maintenance program for which he charges from \$37 to \$45, plus parts. He inspects, replaces or relubes the O-rings; completely cleans and lubricates the camera; checks the shutter speed, flash synch, lens function and alignment; then provides a wet pressure chamber test from 33 to 150 feet. Any minor maintenance that is required is included in the fee.

Navarro guarantees parts and labor for 90 days, but he won't guarantee against flooding because, as he and we both know, it's too easy for a diver to leave out that little plug or get a grain of sand in the seal. When the Nikonos leaves the shop, however, it's sealed.

Navarro is not ready to repair the Nikonos III because, he says, he has had difficulty getting mechanical information from the U.S. distributor.

Although Navarro has only one price for all customers, many dive shops use his repair service, moderately marking up his price to cover their own costs.

You may send your Nikonos—preferably insured or registered—to Peter Navarro, Post Office Box 577, Campbell, CA 95008. You may contact us if you have any problems, but we don't expect to hear from you. Of the nearly 1000 Nikonos cameras that Navarro says he has repaired, he reports that only one was returned for a second checkover by a dissatisfied customer.

In our conversation with Navarro, he passed on some pointers to share with our readers. Navarro doesn't use Nikonos O-ring grease in his work because, he says, it has a low silicon content that makes it highly susceptible to warm weather. He had to clean and repair one camera left sitting on a dive boat in the Caribbean sun because the heat melted the O-ring grease and the sticky stuff then ran down inside, sticking the shutter curtain. That meant 30 rolls of blank film! Instead, Navarro uses Dow-Corning 4X silicon lube. He paid \$8 for 8 ounces three years ago; since then he's used only half a tube. Whatever silicon lube you use, treat the rings with oh-so-light a coat.

Navarro also said that if you are treating a flooded camera with alcohol, keep the alcohol away from the optics; it attacks the color correction coating on the lens.

Finally, Navarro warns of a problem with the use of a thumb release mechanism. Because the mechanism increases the torque applied on the shutter release, divers who do not use caution in the amount of pressure they apply will find that after indefinite use the fork in the main wind shaft is spread apart, causing the shutter not to release. Turning the small stop screw will provide a temporary solution, but the cause of the problem will remain and eventually the shutter cannot be released. Navarro's repair bill for such a problem will run between \$15 and \$30, so he recommends that you click away gently.

A valuable magazine from Fred M. Roberts

It's uncommon for one magazine or newsletter in any field to speak kindly of another in a closely related field, but we promised to be different. We'll speak freely about anything. There's one little publication around that anyone involved in underwater photography or anyone interested in getting started ought to be reading. The publisher is Fred M. Roberts, the Nikonophile who published the definitive book on Nikonos photography (see *Undercurrent*, October, 1975), so one must indeed expect first class quality. That's what we have found, and that's why we recommend *The Underwater Photographer* for your diving library.

Roberts is an accomplished photographer, but with

his teaching and writing he appears to be devoting as much time to educating others about the fun and fine points of underwater photography as he himself devotes to practicing his trade. Because few of us will ever have the opportunity to take a course from Roberts or any other master—or even carry their battery packs—the next best thing is boning up with *The Underwater Photographer*.

This tidy little publication is not caught up in presenting beautiful shots by the professionals, although two years ago it presented in miniature two dozen award winners which provided an excellent range of ideas and further evidence of why most of us don't fare well even in local dive club competition.

Instead, Roberts focuses on the technical sides of underwater photography and writes for the person who is indeed serious about pushing his equipment to the edges of excellence. Titles from recent issues should give you the picture: "Heat Treatment of Acrylic Plastic" (for do-it-yourself housing construction); "Making and Using Filters for Underwater Photography;" "Multi-Camera Systems;" "The Ekta Family of Film;" "Flash Connector Modifications;" and "Progress in Underwater Photographic and Television Imaging and Lighting Optics."

If you're a serious amateur, don't let these titles put you off. From the very first issue, Roberts has been serializing a manuscript by Norm Robinson on 8mm and Super 8mm underwater movie making: writing a script, editing and splicing, camera controls, available light, artificial light and selecting a camera are examples of topics covered. The series fills a big void for those who wish to begin movie shooting but can't find adequate information. Also being serialized is a basic book entitled *Photography Underwater*, by Bob Kendall.

Any publication is prone to error, overstatement, or omission of facts, regardless of the expertise of the writers and care in editing, so Roberts uses a healthy letters-to-the-editor section for whatever self-correction may be required. Through the "Letters" section, Roberts also answers a variety of questions about equipment operation and repair. You may find these

answers nowhere else.

One possible shortcoming of the publication is a slight bias toward articles and information on the Nikonos system. However, given the great dependency both amateurs and professionals place on the Nikonos, this imbalance may well be justified.

The Underwater Photographer normally has 24 pages (the July issue will have 32), about half of them devoted to serious articles. Four issues a year cost but \$3 (\$4 outside the U.S.), and at that rate, together with a very limited dive shop distribution and subscription list, we suspect that this is clearly a labor of love. In a phone conversation we had with Roberts he said: "Well, I think we're paying our bills, so that's my contribution to diving." Mr. Roberts—it's a fine contribution.

If you're serious about underwater photography, you'll be wise to try that \$3 annual subscription; if Roberts' tips save you even a single roll of film next year, they'll pay for the subscription. Send your check to Fred Roberts, Publisher, *The Underwater Photographer*, Drawer 608, Dana Point, CA 92629.

Note to Dive Shops: Try stocking *The Underwater Photographer* as a service to your customers and to interest new divers in getting started in photography. Don't display it behind the counter where nobody can see it, but stick it right next to the photographic equipment, so those looking at the equipment can't miss the latest issue.

A valuable commentary from Jim Church

All of the legitimate experts on underwater photography in this country could be fitted comfortably into a top-of-the-line Zodiac inflatable boat, and two of them would be Jim and Cathy Church. They'll soon be ending a hiatus in underwater photography for beginners when their new publication, *Underwater Strobe Photography*, comes to dive shop book shelves. They will cover the basics of housed and submersible strobes, close-up photography, single and multiple strobe techniques, and trouble shooting. In the meantime, we'll all continue with our trial-and-error methods.

Jim Church wrote us about our article on purchasing an underwater strobe for beginners (March 1976). We'd like to quote his additions and corrections.

"The beam of a housed strobe (flat port) refracts to about three-fourths of the beam angle in air. A Vivatar strobe (192 or 292), when mounted vertically on an Ikelite bracket, produces a beam angle that is higher than it is wide, whereas the 35 mm film format is wider than it is high. Therefore, for even lighting, you must (1) use a plastic diffuser at the cost of one f-stop,

or (2) bend the bracket so the strobe lies on its side. Generally, we favor the wide beam strobes because they give a margin for error if you don't aim correctly.

"The statement: 'And the Subsea runs the risk of flooding which the Oceanic does not,' is misleading. The Oceanic products 2001 and 2003 are opened for charging and the strobes are vented to the atmosphere when the charging plug is removed. We know for sure that several OP strobes have been flooded because the photographer (a) forgot to replace the plug, (b) didn't tighten the plug or (c) didn't clean and lubricate the O-ring of the plug.

"Concerning the plastic connectors: We've seen many photographers take expensive diving trips and have their connector systems short out the first day. A beginner needs reliability. And in our experience, EO is tops in reliability.

"I know, if there ever is a market for nit, you'll hire me to pick it!"

Jim Church, as usual, you've got a sharp focus on the subject matter. Our regards.

Correspondents located strategically in the major diving areas of the world, as well as on all coasts and major inland waters of the continental United States.

The editors welcome comments, suggestions and manuscripts from the readers of Undercurrent.