

Baja California, Mexico: Part One

The Long and Winding Road

In the past year, Undercurrent has reviewed a dozen different diving locations, some excellent and others poor, but all with one thing in common: they cater to divers. Baja California does not, nor is it soon likely to. Baja is the primitive, nearly prehistoric Mexican peninsula which extends nearly 800 miles southward from the California border. On the west coast is the cold Pacific, while on the east coast is the Sea of Cortez, a curious tropical body of water, in some places overflowing with marine life and in other places nearly barren. Although President-elect Jose Lopez Portillo has promised to do all he can for tourists and has funded a commission to promote diving in Baja, the results may be a long time coming. In mid-August an important meeting was held in La Paz between American and Mexican representatives, but for their own reasons the Mexican government cancelled.

On my three-week trip down the only road extending the length of Baja, I was unable to discover a single dive boat with a legitimate guide to accompany the diver in the water, and only a few operating compressors. Yet, there can be extraordinary diving. Perhaps there will be no organized facilities for scuba divers until foreign interests--most likely Americans or Canadians--are allowed to own property and operate resorts, dive shops and charters. Assuming this miracle occurs, we can expect Baja eventually to look like the Florida Keys, its timeless, unchanged quality gone forever.

So, what must you do to explore the clear waters, the untouched reefs, the hidden marine grottoes, the unexplored wrecks, the desert islands and deserted beaches? The basic requirement is that you must be a damn dedicated diver.

If you are that dedicated a diver with your own camper, boat and compressor, with plenty of time and enough money, willing to drive up to two thousand miles in Mexican heat dodging trailer trucks on a narrow two-lane blacktop road, and you have a burning desire to explore Baja, then you may be one to make the arduous journey. There is good, even spectacular diving to be found, but the Sea of Cortez is an enormous body of water, and the diver's range is limited and so is the access. More important, the quality of

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diving is unpredictable. You might spend two weeks there any time of year with bad visibility, high winds and strong currents, and go home cursing and vowing never to return, only to later hear other divers raving about the great conditions just after you left. It is that changeable. And can be that frustrating.

For those of you with your own boat to make the long journey or among the fortunate few with reservations on the sold-out Superboat's once-only trip to the Sea of Cortez, we wish you good luck and good diving. The rest of us must either fly or drive down. The pros and cons of flying will be discussed in Part Two, but the general rule is: at those towns where there is an airport, you might find a compressor but the diving is limited; you need a car and/or a boat to get to the best of Baja diving.

Driving there to dive: The Transpeninsular Highway is a modern Mexican miracle, if only because it's finished. Very narrow with no shoulders, many curves, switchbacks and dips, but mostly long, long straightaways, it can be dangerous (avoid night driving) with livestock, dogs, people, falling rocks, suicidal passers and huge trucks coming out of nowhere. But, it gets you there. The speed limit is 62 mph, but 50 is safer. You must have a tourist card for your journey--get it from a Mexican consulate or tourist office or a travel agent--and a fishing license if you intend to spear your dinner (it's illegal for scuba divers to spear, but I always get my dinner free diving to 40 feet). You must have a Mexican insurance policy on your boat and vehicle. It's unreasonably expensive. We paid the going rate of \$150 to insure our camper for 30 days. Gas is terrible and expensive. Regular ran 68¢/gallon, and Extra almost \$1, when available. During the peak tourist months--the winter and long school vacations-- don't be surprised if the Winnebago in line ahead of you sucks up all the gas. Have a large reserve tank to keep you from getting stranded at a gas station.

Sleeping: Quality hotels along the way average \$20 double; moderate hotels around \$10. You would be wise to camp out, as most travelers do. Trailer parks average \$4/night and public beaches cost \$1-\$3/vehicle. Trailer parks usually have flush toilets and showers, but no shade. The public beaches, with few exceptions, have shade but little else. AAA members can obtain a good guide to Baja trailer parks and hotels by writing AAA of Southern California, 2601 S. Figueroa St., Los Angeles, 90007. A good general information book with maps called The Baja Book may be obtained for \$8.43 from Baja Trail Publications, PO Box 15444, Santa Ana, Ca. 92705.

The most important element of your trip is to have an absolutely reliable vehicle. Any mechanical breakdown will leave you stranded literally in the middle of nowhere, and your vacation ruined by the days or weeks required for parts and repair. Take fan belts, tools, spare tires, and replacements for anything likely to go wrong. Think of your trip as an expedition into a wild area, because that's what it is. Take enough food and water to be reasonably self-sufficient. Thirst is a number-one enemy, so keep an ice chest filled with fine Mexican cerveza.

The logistics of diving. Like most divers, my buddy and I do not own a boat or a compressor, but we piled into his camper truck--after very careful maintenance to be ready for the trip--and headed southward. We had made several trips to Baja before and knew of the difficulty facing divers. There are unlimited opportunities for free diving, which we took daily. Tank diving is another story. On this trip we were only able to make three tank dives in three weeks, and that includes the fill we brought with us from San Diego. Unless you are willing to

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drive two or three hours to a compressor each day, don't expect to do much diving in Baja without a portable air supply. But, do expect some fascinating, virgin free diving and unique experiences, which we'll report on in the next issue. I'll tell you where to go, and where not to waste your time. (OK,7/23)

Running Out of Air:

Will this new device ever reach the dive shops?

Running out of air is a common cause of diver death. In nearly every case, the reason is diver misjudgment, although there is an occasional situation in which a diver gets trapped or entangled and simply cannot surface in time. The Navy faced a problem with the crewmen of certain ships being knocked overboard and trapped below the surface. It is pursuing the development of an emergency breathing device (EBD) which may have useful applications to sport diving (see photo).

The EBD contains 150 liters of air compressed at 8000 psi, providing a three-minute emergency air supply at 40 feet. The device is constructed of stainless steel and weighs less than five pounds. It is nine by six by three inches and can fit into the vest pocket of Navy crewmen—and into a large BC pocket.

The device is activated by a mild tug on a red tab. When a user inhales through the demand regulator, the system provides the air required by his breathing rate and alveolar volume. When he exhales, the flow from the reservoir is shut off and the exhaled air escapes via the bubble deflector.

The prototype is being developed by Lear-Siegler under Navy contract. Whether such a useful device ever makes it to the scuba diving market depends on whether there's sufficient demand to permit the EBD to be produced at a reasonable price. We hope so. Instructors could pack them around for training dives.



Lear-Siegler's Emergency Breathing Device

The device could be planted in areas where students are commonly trained or where dive clubs dive frequently. They could be planted along well traveled cave diving routes. They could be stored on dive boats—ready to be dropped overboard for instant use. Obviously, the EBD could make a useful contribution to diver safety.

Thanks to diver Bill Paraskewik of Lansdale, PA, for tipping off *Undercurrent* to this product development.

New Local Government Efforts to Control Diving:

They're preventable and here's how.

On both coasts of this country, local government officials are renewing efforts to regulate diving. We must report that these officials are responding to problems caused by divers themselves—problems which are indeed preventable. It seems fashionable today for paranoid divers to claim that every local governmental body is out to “get” them. But anyone with a lick of sense will recognize that most of our problems are caused—or at least contributed to—by a handful of impolitic divers. The answer is to head off these problems by responsible behavior, not to cry wolf or claim foul play.

Monterey

The most serious threat to the diving community is

now on the legislative docket in the California coastal town of Monterey. We doubt that there is any other place in the United States or the entire world where more divers pack into a smaller area for year 'round beach diving. For example, a small shore area, about half the size of a football field, is packed every weekend with anywhere from two to 20 certification classes. Scores of certified divers venture out to deeper water to poke around the breakwater and the kelp beds. A quarter of a mile down the road is the Champs Elysées of Monterey—a few compact blocks of shops, restaurants, bars and general browsing quarters. This is Cannery Row, the charming area fabled years ago by John Steinbeck in his classic novel of the same name.

Divers swarm about the few accesses to the beach,

use up the parking places, dress and undress at curbside (demonstrating to more than one church convention the apparent difference between a snow white butt and a suntanned back). They spend no money in the local shops, but rather eat the lunches they bring and drink the beer they bought back home, and with their general gruff, macho, tightwad behavior, they chase the free-spending tourists back to God-knows-where.

At least, that's the situation as the city fathers, the local merchants, and a few gadflies looking for political entertainment see it. In reality the problem has been blown way out of proportion. Because an occasional diver, surely identifiable in a wet suit, behaves idiotically, the problem has moved from the streets to City Hall.

The first confrontation ended in a standoff after some 150 well mannered, well briefed and well organized dive shop owners, instructors and serious divers stood up at a city council meeting to talk business. Under the leadership of the indefatigable Ralph Shamlian, who doubles as President of Tekna and number one political strategist and activist for the diving community throughout the country, the group convinced the city council to postpone an ordinance that would require all divers to have city-issued permits.

The council settled for a resolution, generally acceptable to divers, that specifies parking and dressing areas. But the battle is far from over. In early September the council will again consider legislation which may include requiring city permits for any person diving in Monterey. That possibility will be fought by divers vigorously. One reason: if the city ultimately

controls the number of permits issued, the city could reduce the number of divers to zero.

Most observers from the diving community believe that the goal of the city is to return Cannery Row to splurging tourists by forcing divers out of town. If this strategy is successful, local political jurisdictions in other parts of the country may follow. That's why the Monterey issue affects all of us.

New Jersey and Florida

On the East Coast, the new efforts to control diving have a different base. During early July, two divers—one in the Florida Keys and one in a New Jersey inlet—were killed when struck by a boat. Neither was using a diver's flag. In Florida, state law requires the use of a flag and after the death, the Florida Marine Patrol announced a stepped-up enforcement program. In New Jersey, complex regulations were developed to prohibit diving in parts of most inlets along the Jersey Coast.

Undercurrent has no complaint with legislation requiring divers to display flags or prohibiting diving in areas where heavy boat traffic poses an unusual hazard. Yet, a line must be drawn, and it's up to the diving community to see that we, ourselves, get a fair deal.

The burden for keeping our sport free from unnecessary encroachment lies with the equipment manufacturers, dive shops, dive clubs and instructional agencies. Sadly, it's often the person who is not affiliated with any of these four who causes the conflict. In Monterey, dive organizations are performing admirably in solving the problem. But how do we communicate with the individual diver who pays no heed to organized groups? It's just about impossible.

To prevent legislation that will adversely affect your access to diving, in your own community, we suggest the following. It's easier to behave well today than to organize and fight tomorrow.

- If diving in a specific area is prohibited, either obtain permission or don't dive there.
- Always fly the flag on the surface when you're below. If you hear a motor whining, don't surface until you're certain you are in no danger.
- Make certain that marina owners, boat clubs and others in a position to spread the word recognize the diver's flag and understand its meaning. Take a flag to them and ask them to display it to educate their customers and members.
- Try to patronize local merchants when diving in an area. When you purchase gas, pick up a six-pack or spend the night in a motel, let the proprietors know why you're visiting—you're a diver. And that's why they're getting business.
- Be a bit modest when suiting up or stripping down. There's no need to show it all. If there is, we can recommend a good therapist.
- Observe and follow the local dress culture. If the local restaurant doesn't cater to cutoffs, change your clothes or eat elsewhere. Few shops appreciate people walking through in wetsuits or wet bathing suits. Don't

A ROLE FOR DIVE CLUBS

Many well organized dive clubs perform public service activities and generate useful publicity. In July the Bluegrass YMCA Diver's Club (Kentucky) and the Del Norte Dolphins (Crescent City, California) spear-headed cleanup contests of local waters, awarding prizes to divers or clubs who come up with the most junk, the most unusual junk, or the most valuable junk. They received excellent local publicity.

Since cleaning up the bottom may leave a monument visible only to divers themselves, also consider higher profile public relations activity. Raising money for a local charity, volunteering hours to a local group or a local cause, giving blood, or any other useful community activity which generates positive publicity for scuba divers ought to be undertaken by all groups.

Undercurrent Travel Data Bank

Exclusive Reader Survey

Response Requested

CONFIDENTIAL

We need your assistance to build our Travel Data Bank for the exclusive use of Undercurrent subscribers. Information from thousands of divers will be invaluable in helping *you* plan your next vacation. Please complete the form for your last trips. We'll send additional forms if you request. Attach additional comments on a separate page.

NOTE: Let Undercurrent help you plan and handle the details of your next trip. Complete the section on the last page and we'll be back in touch to help you ensure that you get the best possible results for your diving dollar.

Extra evaluation forms are included should you wish to rate more than one location or in case you and your spouse or buddy disagree on the merits of a location and would like to submit more than one evaluation.

Location Being Evaluated _____
 Date of your trip _____ Hotel _____ Dive Shop _____
 Would you return? _____

criteria:

evaluation: check the item closest to your impression:

fish size	<input type="checkbox"/> large ones plentiful	<input type="checkbox"/> a few big ones	<input type="checkbox"/> too small to eat
tropical fish	<input type="checkbox"/> abundant	<input type="checkbox"/> not bad	<input type="checkbox"/> sparse
kinds of tropicals	<input type="checkbox"/> impressive variety	<input type="checkbox"/> fairly interesting	<input type="checkbox"/> common ones only
coral	<input type="checkbox"/> plenty and colorful	<input type="checkbox"/> o.k.	<input type="checkbox"/> kind of a bore
sponges, gorgonia	<input type="checkbox"/> very nice	<input type="checkbox"/> pretty average	<input type="checkbox"/> not much
caves, ledges	<input type="checkbox"/> good variety	<input type="checkbox"/> some of interest	<input type="checkbox"/> none worth diving
wrecks	<input type="checkbox"/> exciting	<input type="checkbox"/> worth a tank or two	<input type="checkbox"/> none
sharks	<input type="checkbox"/> a couple for fun	<input type="checkbox"/> none	<input type="checkbox"/> too many
spearfishing	<input type="checkbox"/> all you want	<input type="checkbox"/> a few possibilities	<input type="checkbox"/> none or prohibited
shelling	<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> o.k.	<input type="checkbox"/> none or prohibited
snorkeling	<input type="checkbox"/> some of the best	<input type="checkbox"/> not bad	<input type="checkbox"/> nothing to see
photography	<input type="checkbox"/> top possibilities	<input type="checkbox"/> average	<input type="checkbox"/> nearly a bust
water temperature	<input type="checkbox"/> no wet suit needed	<input type="checkbox"/> wet suit top needed	<input type="checkbox"/> full suit useful
visibility	<input type="checkbox"/> 90 ft. or more	<input type="checkbox"/> 50-90 ft.	<input type="checkbox"/> less than 50 ft.
rated for advanced	<input type="checkbox"/> terrific	<input type="checkbox"/> o.k.	<input type="checkbox"/> go elsewhere
rated for beginners	<input type="checkbox"/> terrific	<input type="checkbox"/> o.k.	<input type="checkbox"/> go elsewhere
guides for good divers	<input type="checkbox"/> top-rated	<input type="checkbox"/> acceptable	<input type="checkbox"/> lousy
guides for new divers	<input type="checkbox"/> top-rated	<input type="checkbox"/> acceptable	<input type="checkbox"/> lousy
diving frequency	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 or more tanks/day	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 tanks per day	<input type="checkbox"/> one per day
night diving	<input type="checkbox"/> frequent	<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 times/week	<input type="checkbox"/> none
boat diving	<input type="checkbox"/> two tanks under \$20	<input type="checkbox"/> \$20-\$30 for two	<input type="checkbox"/> over \$30 for two
beach diving	<input type="checkbox"/> as good as the boats	<input type="checkbox"/> fair possibilities	<input type="checkbox"/> no way
dive shop manager	<input type="checkbox"/> a great person	<input type="checkbox"/> just does the job	<input type="checkbox"/> a real bastard
air quality	<input type="checkbox"/> no problems	<input type="checkbox"/> I wondered	<input type="checkbox"/> I worried
air fills	<input type="checkbox"/> 2475 psi	<input type="checkbox"/> 2250 psi	<input type="checkbox"/> short-changed often
new equipment	<input type="checkbox"/> full range available	<input type="checkbox"/> limited range	<input type="checkbox"/> come fully prepared
rental gear	<input type="checkbox"/> everything you need	<input type="checkbox"/> tanks, wt. belts . . .	<input type="checkbox"/> bring everything
repair capability	<input type="checkbox"/> can handle anything	<input type="checkbox"/> some repair capacity	<input type="checkbox"/> pray nothing breaks
hotel food	<input type="checkbox"/> gourmet	<input type="checkbox"/> surely acceptable	<input type="checkbox"/> ugh
nearby restaurants	<input type="checkbox"/> must try	<input type="checkbox"/> adequate	<input type="checkbox"/> better off fasting
luxury accommodations	<input type="checkbox"/> indeed luxury	<input type="checkbox"/> o.k.	<input type="checkbox"/> far below par
moderate accommodations	<input type="checkbox"/> surprisingly good	<input type="checkbox"/> o.k.	<input type="checkbox"/> terrible
car needed	<input type="checkbox"/> of no use	<input type="checkbox"/> only for touring	<input type="checkbox"/> a daily must
nightlife	<input type="checkbox"/> swinging	<input type="checkbox"/> enough	<input type="checkbox"/> dead
action for singles	<input type="checkbox"/> a paradise	<input type="checkbox"/> if you're a mover	<input type="checkbox"/> bring your own
other divers around	<input type="checkbox"/> all over the place	<input type="checkbox"/> a few	<input type="checkbox"/> hard to find a buddy
locals	<input type="checkbox"/> helpful, friendly	<input type="checkbox"/> no complaints	<input type="checkbox"/> hostile
weather	<input type="checkbox"/> great everyday	<input type="checkbox"/> o.k.	<input type="checkbox"/> many bad days
package deal	<input type="checkbox"/> the best way to go	<input type="checkbox"/> seemed o.k.	<input type="checkbox"/> better off without it

Location Being Evaluated _____
 Date of your trip _____ Hotel _____ Dive Shop _____
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criteria:

evaluation: check the item closest to your impression:

- | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| fish size | <input type="checkbox"/> large ones plentiful | <input type="checkbox"/> a few big ones | <input type="checkbox"/> too small to eat |
| tropical fish | <input type="checkbox"/> abundant | <input type="checkbox"/> not bad | <input type="checkbox"/> sparse |
| kinds of tropicals | <input type="checkbox"/> impressive variety | <input type="checkbox"/> fairly interesting | <input type="checkbox"/> common ones only |
| coral | <input type="checkbox"/> plenty and colorful | <input type="checkbox"/> o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> kind of a bore |
| sponges, gorgonia . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> very nice | <input type="checkbox"/> pretty average | <input type="checkbox"/> not much |
| caves, ledges . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> good variety | <input type="checkbox"/> some of interest | <input type="checkbox"/> none worth diving |
| wrecks | <input type="checkbox"/> exciting | <input type="checkbox"/> worth a tank or two | <input type="checkbox"/> none |
| sharks | <input type="checkbox"/> a couple for fun | <input type="checkbox"/> none | <input type="checkbox"/> too many |
| spearfishing | <input type="checkbox"/> all you want | <input type="checkbox"/> a few possibilities | <input type="checkbox"/> none or prohibited |
| shelling | <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> none or prohibited |
| snorkeling | <input type="checkbox"/> some of the best | <input type="checkbox"/> not bad | <input type="checkbox"/> nothing to see |
| photography | <input type="checkbox"/> top possibilities | <input type="checkbox"/> average | <input type="checkbox"/> nearly a bust |
| water temperature | <input type="checkbox"/> no wet suit needed | <input type="checkbox"/> wet suit top needed | <input type="checkbox"/> full suit useful |
| visibility | <input type="checkbox"/> 90 ft. or more | <input type="checkbox"/> 50-90 ft. | <input type="checkbox"/> less than 50 ft. |
| rated for advanced | <input type="checkbox"/> terrific | <input type="checkbox"/> o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> go elsewhere |
| rated for beginners | <input type="checkbox"/> terrific | <input type="checkbox"/> o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> go elsewhere |

- | | | | |
|------------------------|---|---|--|
| guides for good divers | <input type="checkbox"/> top-rated | <input type="checkbox"/> acceptable | <input type="checkbox"/> lousy |
| guides for new divers | <input type="checkbox"/> top-rated | <input type="checkbox"/> acceptable | <input type="checkbox"/> lousy |
| diving frequency | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 or more tanks/day | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 tanks per day | <input type="checkbox"/> one per day |
| night diving | <input type="checkbox"/> frequent | <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 times/week | <input type="checkbox"/> none |
| boat diving | <input type="checkbox"/> two tanks under \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$20-\$30 for two | <input type="checkbox"/> over \$30 for two |
| beach diving | <input type="checkbox"/> as good as the boats | <input type="checkbox"/> fair possibilities | <input type="checkbox"/> no way |
| dive shop manager | <input type="checkbox"/> a great person | <input type="checkbox"/> just does the job | <input type="checkbox"/> a real bastard |
| air quality | <input type="checkbox"/> no problems | <input type="checkbox"/> I wondered | <input type="checkbox"/> I worried |
| air fills | <input type="checkbox"/> 2475 psi | <input type="checkbox"/> 2250 psi | <input type="checkbox"/> short-changed often |
| new equipment | <input type="checkbox"/> full range available | <input type="checkbox"/> limited range | <input type="checkbox"/> come fully prepared |
| rental gear | <input type="checkbox"/> everything you need | <input type="checkbox"/> tanks, wt. belts . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> bring everything |
| repair capability | <input type="checkbox"/> can handle anything | <input type="checkbox"/> some repair capacity | <input type="checkbox"/> pray nothing breaks |

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|-------------------------|---|--|--|
| hotel food | <input type="checkbox"/> gourmet | <input type="checkbox"/> surely acceptable | <input type="checkbox"/> ough |
| nearby restaurants | <input type="checkbox"/> must try | <input type="checkbox"/> adequate | <input type="checkbox"/> better off fasting |
| luxury accommodations | <input type="checkbox"/> indeed luxury | <input type="checkbox"/> o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> far below par |
| moderate accommodations | <input type="checkbox"/> surprisingly good | <input type="checkbox"/> o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> terrible |
| car needed | <input type="checkbox"/> of no use | <input type="checkbox"/> only for touring | <input type="checkbox"/> a daily must |
| nightlife | <input type="checkbox"/> swinging | <input type="checkbox"/> enough | <input type="checkbox"/> dead |
| action for singles | <input type="checkbox"/> a paradise | <input type="checkbox"/> if you're a mover | <input type="checkbox"/> bring your own |
| other divers around | <input type="checkbox"/> all over the place | <input type="checkbox"/> a few | <input type="checkbox"/> hard to find a buddy |
| locals | <input type="checkbox"/> helpful, friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> no complaints | <input type="checkbox"/> hostile |
| weather | <input type="checkbox"/> great everyday | <input type="checkbox"/> o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> many bad days |
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Location Being Evaluated _____

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| locals | <input type="checkbox"/> helpful, friendly | <input type="checkbox"/> no complaints | <input type="checkbox"/> hostile |
| weather | <input type="checkbox"/> great everyday | <input type="checkbox"/> o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> many bad days |
| package deal | <input type="checkbox"/> the best way to go | <input type="checkbox"/> seemed o.k. | <input type="checkbox"/> better off without it |

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (please identify each location):

Location _____

Location _____

Location _____

Location _____

HOW THE TRAVEL DATA BANK WORKS FOR YOU

The Undercurrent Travel Data Bank and the Undercurrent Travel Club are new services designed for the exclusive benefit of our readers. They're free of charge so take advantage of them.

Information on diving resorts and locations is compiled and summarized from questionnaires like this one and from on-site visits by Undercurrent editors and correspondents. When you're ready for your next trip we'll go to work for you—without charge.

—If you already have a specific location in mind but need additional information concerning such things as diving services, shopping, accommodations or transportation, let us know and we'll share our information and observations with you. We'll even make the arrangements for transportation and accommodations!

—If you're ready for a dive trip but really haven't settled on a specific location we'll be happy to make recommendations on areas we think you'd enjoy. Simply give us the basic facts such as the proposed dates of the trip, number of people in your party (tell us if there are non-divers accompanying you so we can make suggestions for shopping, touring, etc.), an estimate of your budget and any specific requirements you have.

After we've received your request we'll get back to you with a detailed recommendation. Once you've decided when and where you want to go, simply notify us and we'll make all the arrangements.

PLEASE RETURN THIS TRAVEL DATA BANK SURVEY ALONG WITH ANY REQUEST YOU HAVE FOR TRAVEL INFORMATION TO UNDERCURRENT, P.O. BOX 1658, SAUSALITO, CA. 94965

Name _____

Address _____ Telephone Number _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

- I want to take advantage of the Undercurrent Travel Data Bank and my Undercurrent Travel Club. How about taking care of my next dive trip. At no cost, but with your expertise.

I'm interested in leaving on _____ and returning on _____
and there will be _____ of us. My destination is _____
(Use additional sheet to outline any special plans or requirements you have.)

- I'm ready for a dive trip, but would like some suggestions on where to go. Undercurrent, give me a hand. Have someone telephone me to discuss plans.
- I don't want your help. I'd rather waste my time doing it myself.
- Please send additional questionnaires so I can evaluate other spots.

inconvenience them to convenience you.

- Tell the locals how much you like the area, that you often come down, not always to dive, but to show the in-laws around, spend a relaxing weekend and spend money.

- If your spouse doesn't dive, when you're down below, have your spouse explain to the shops why you're visiting—you're a diver.

- Provide formal recognition to any individual, business or government agency assisting divers. If a local merchant pulls a person out of the surf, publicize it and patronize him. If the Police Department clears an area for parking, write a thank-you note and send a copy to the local newspaper.

- Every dive shop owner should be a member of the local chamber of commerce, a member of the local better business bureau, and should participate as

much as possible in community affairs. Positive contributions will discourage fellow merchants from complaining.

- Leave the areas in which you dive just as nature intended. Take your trash with you and pick up others' trash.

- Most important, when you see other divers violating good public relations rules, inform them. Explain that what they're doing may lead to unnecessary political hassles. Nearly all will get the message. For those who don't, chum the waters before their next dive.

These points are obvious and having to publish them testifies to our ability to bring wrath on ourselves. We've got a lot of years of diving left, and our behavior can ensure that our favorite dive spots will continue to remain accessible.

A Bottom Timer or a Diver's Watch?

For most divers, the Bottom Timer will suffice.

One of the more substantial innovations this year in diving equipment is the Bottom Timer. Although a few have been on the market for nearly three years, the new East Coast concern of Princeton Tectonics picked up the rights from inventor Herb Schwartz and began manufacturing and distributing the Timer last February. The concept behind the Bottom Timer is so simple that anyone who finds out about it is likely to say: "Now, why didn't I think of that?" You should have, because it's bound to be a successful product.

The Bottom Timer is an inexpensive Westclox pocket watch housed in a Lexan plastic housing. The watch can only be activated by exerting pressure on a penny-sized diaphragm on the back of the case. The Timer is activated when a diver descends below a certain depth—according to the manufacturer, six to nine feet—and its action is stopped when the diver crosses through that zone on the way to the surface. The watch can be activated by finger pressure on the diaphragm, but the pressure must be maintained to keep the timer operating.

We matched three Bottom Timers against a calibrated timepiece guaranteed to be accurate to within *one second per year*. It was readily apparent that the Westclox timepiece was an inaccurate device; each of the three *deviated more than three seconds per hour* from correct time. This level of inaccuracy would be intolerable for a common watch, but we do not foresee circumstances in diving in which the error would be of consequence.

We ran a variety of tests of up to 150 feet of pressure in two different wet chambers. We ascertained that the pressure had no significant effect on the accuracy of the time. Of course, there should be no effect. According to Princeton Tectonic Vice-President John

Penrose, each Bottom Timer is tested to 300 feet before it is shipped to the retailer.

We braved the murky waters of San Francisco Bay to determine at what depth the timers activate. Each activated in less than five feet of water, thereby exceeding the manufacturer's standards.

The advantages of the Bottom Timer over a conventional watch are as follows:

- A diver cannot forget to time his dive because the Bottom Timer starts and stops automatically.

- The recording of the elapsed dive time should prove more accurate than using a watch. Divers relying on a watch often begin timing the dive before they enter the water; if they snorkel a while before descending, unnecessary time may be added.

- Elapsed time cannot be forgotten because the hand remains stopped at the elapsed time until it is reset manually.

- The Bottom Timer's face is large and easy to read.

- Compared to a watch, its retail price—\$49.95—is inexpensive.

There are also disadvantages:

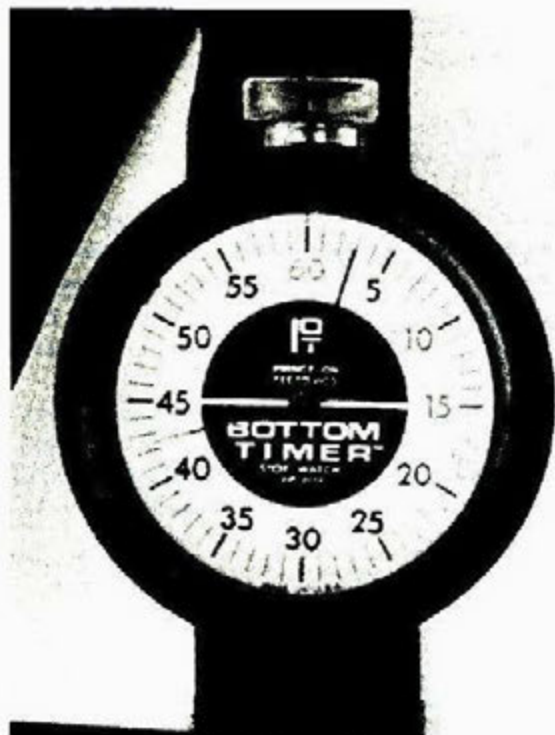
- Since the Bottom Timer does not compute the time between dives, the diver needs a watch handy to compute no-decompression limits for repetitive dives.

- The unit is 2 1/8 inches thick, making it more cumbersome than a conventional watch.

- Because its only method of activation is by a

RESULTS OF BOTTOM TIMER TRIALS

	BT 1	BT 2	BT 3
Depth at which Timer activates	16 in	40 in	56 in
Bottom Timer compared to real time	3.3 sec slower/hr	7.2 sec slower/hr	3.1 sec slower/hr



The Bottom Timer

pressure-sensitive plate, it can be used only for diving.

All things considered, we believe that the Bottom Timer's advantages clearly outweigh its disadvantages. Of particular appeal is its depth-starting mechanism, which simply does not permit the diver to forget to time his dive. As to the inability to measure time between dives, we note that on most dive trips somebody has a watch and is willing to give time checks. Also, a

cheap travel alarm clock can be easily kept in one's dive bag for surface times. Furthermore, the inconvenience of having one more instrument strapped to your body can be overcome by mounting the gauge on your console or strapping it to another piece of equipment. We've had it mounted on a Farallon console, by cutting a slot in the edge for the stem and fastening it with a bit of strong cement. It fits nicely. We extended the stem with a bit of plastic and epoxy so that the Timer on the console can be set while wearing gloves.

As we've come to learn, any new dive product hitting the market has its problems. Due to difficulties with a single batch of rubber, some of the cases split when left in the sun. This has no effect on the Timer, but Princeton Tektonics will replace the case if you send it there (Box CN 16, Princeton, NJ 08540).

Many "gorilla" divers wind the stem too tight and break the watch. So far the manufacturer has replaced broken Timers, but no more. Just as with any watch, don't overwind it.

If you pull the stem out to set the hands and don't push it back in before your dive, the Timer may run a short time and then stop.

If you strap the Timer too tightly either to a piece of equipment or your own body, the pressure-sensitive device may activate the watch. Check it carefully.

In essence, we consider the Bottom Timer a useful piece of equipment. Whether it is sturdy and dependable will require the test of time. For the present, we believe that a Bottom Timer—used in conjunction with a surface clock to determine the time between dives—is a combination suitable for just about all divers. Your local dive shop can order one for you if it's not in stock.

Saving Time, Money and Hassles:

An important new service for Undercurrent readers.

A few years back, I took a dive vacation to Montego Bay, Jamaica. Being able to afford only a week's tropical vacation a year, I carefully collected all of the information I could about a variety of potential destinations, and finally selected Montego Bay. From what my travel agent told me, and from what I could tell by the articles and the advertisements I had read, diving would be terrific.

Well, it wasn't, and I left disappointed. I had spent my thousand and had not gotten what I hoped for. I would have to wait another year for the ultimate dive.

That experience, and similar ones among my associates, led to the creation of *Undercurrent*. Divers clearly need straight, factual information about those far-away places and we—four of us—decided to provide it. Whether enough divers shared our view was uncertain, but we decided to take the risk and launch *Undercurrent*.

So far we've been delighted with the response to the publication in general and particularly delighted

when our readers write to tell us that our travel reviews have saved them time and money while aiding them in selecting the best destination for their diving vacations. Yet, we're continually overwhelmed by requests for information about areas we haven't reviewed, for tips on whom to dive with, where to stay, where to eat, whether to take tanks, and a million other questions important to traveling divers. Furthermore, we get several letters a month saying something to this effect: "We're a family of four, all divers, and would like good boat and beach diving, safe guides, solitude and accommodations where we can do our own cooking. Where should we go?"

What's become apparent is that without *Undercurrent*, divers are at a loss to get complete information about diving travel. And what's become even more apparent is that divers need a full travel service catering to their needs, one they can count on for accuracy, assistance and diving know-how. And the service must be one in which they can be certain they are not paying

Note: This new service is offered exclusively to readers of Undercurrent Time

for unnecessary items or hidden service charges.

We puzzled for some time about how to provide this service without compromising the independence and integrity of *Undercurrent* editorial policy. We've found the solution. As a reader of *Undercurrent*, welcome to the Undercurrent Travel Club, a cost-free service available only to Undercurrent subscribers.

As an exclusive service for readers, *Undercurrent* will assist you in your travel planning and will take care of all details of your forthcoming dive vacation at no cost whatever. We will provide information about areas to which you are interested in traveling, make and confirm your reservations, take care of your airline tickets and make sure that you're getting the best prices available. We will provide information on whether you might need a car, what the weather might be like and what gear you should take. We will do everything we can do to eliminate those unwelcome surprises.

Undercurrent staff can provide the diving advice, but to supply the travel expertise we needed a first-rate agency experienced in dealing with areas where divers travel—not Europe and not Central Asia, but the Caribbean, the South Pacific, the Aegean, the warm water ports. Surprisingly, on the streets of Sausalito we located Sunventure Travel, headed by long-time diving and sailing enthusiast Tom Corn. Sunventure specializes in travel to all tropical areas, and we can't imagine a better team.

Here's what the Undercurrent Travel Club will do for you. All you have to do is ask:

- We'll give expert and loving attention to the details of your trip. Your airline tickets will arrive at your home by registered mail (at our expense) in plenty of time for departure, along with hotel confirmations and dive confirmations where applicable.

- You'll get current information on passport, visa and immunization requirements. We will handle applications for tourist cards, visas and any other requirements for foreign travel. We will bill you only for actual costs, which are minimal.

- We will give you specific information about costs you incur in your travel and never charge you fees or commission. We will find you the lowest cost airfares and hotel accommodations, or the best of luxury rooms and first-class airfares. It's your choice.

- You will receive information about seasonal problems affecting diving conditions—weather, reduced

diving schedules because of few divers, rough water and others.

- We'll facilitate communication between single divers looking for travel buddies. We can't guarantee compatibility, but we might find you company.

- We'll be your own ombudsman should a serious problem arise during your trip which you can't solve. Call us collect and we'll go to work.

- The club will help keep the dive resorts honest. When you're traveling under the *Undercurrent* banner, dive resorts will know that your experience will be reported directly to *Undercurrent*. When you arrive home, a questionnaire will be waiting for you so you can report on your trip. Facts from your report will be available to other divers wanting information and to *Undercurrent* travel reviewers.

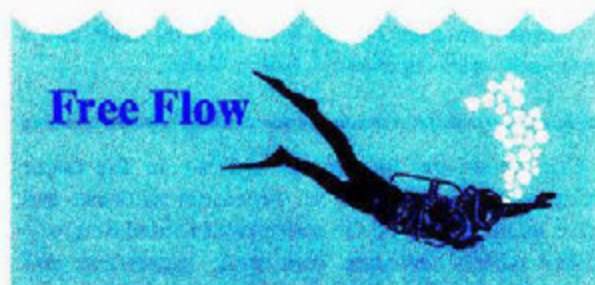
There is absolutely no cost to *Undercurrent* subscribers for this service, because compensation comes from the airlines and hotels. Both pay commissions to bona fide travel agents. Whether you are traveling as an individual or as a group, you pay the same price if you make your own arrangements as you would if you let a travel agent do it for you. Therefore, you don't save money by organizing your own trip. You only gain the headaches. We can put together the most complex trips, including several stopovers, or we can represent you on any package tour you wish to take.

Why is *Undercurrent* establishing a travel club? First, it will provide us with a great deal of information we need about scuba travel, the quality of resorts and the nature of the diving. For a travel editor, getting current information is critical to sound reporting. Second, we hope the travel service will expand our readership. Third, and most important, we can aid our fellow divers.

To help us begin collecting information for your future use, please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to *Undercurrent*. We'll report on the results in a future issue and use the information from each area to aid your diving travel.

In addition, if you are planning a trip in the next several months, indicate your plans on the reverse of the questionnaire and we'll be back in touch with you to begin organizing your trip. There is no obligation in returning the questionnaire.

So, I wish you good diving. Who knows, perhaps we'll be on the same boat together someday, somewhere. (C.C.)



OSHA UPDATE: Just as we go to press, Jim Hall of PADI informs us that the Louisiana Federal Appeals Court unanimously ruled against the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and the Temporary Emergency Standards for Diving (*Undercurrent*, July, 1976). Although there will most likely be standards developed for commercial divers at some later date, so far it looks like the scuba industry will be excluded. It looks like we've won this battle, but there will be

others. OSHA may try to regulate California only.

There's a potential hazard connected with the Farallon Diver Propulsion Vehicle which users ought to understand. Various pieces of equipment, ranging from BC hoses, to extra long straps, to regulators, can be (and have been) sucked into the propeller intake. Farallon reports that the problem is remedied by addition of a \$120 screen to cover the intake, a small price to pay considering not only the risk, but the \$100 required to replace the propeller should it be beaten up by the diver and his body. The problem occurs only with the V and VI, so, if you're using one for the first time, either make sure that the screen is in place or forego the experience. A couple of folks at the Dive Shop, in Pecos, Texas, turned us on to the problem, which certainly gives that shop high marks in willingness to publicize problems concerning diving safety.

The *Fort Pierce (Florida) Chronicle* reports that a scuba diver who developed aseptic bone necrosis—bone rot is a good enough description for most of us—was 90 per cent responsible for his plight and the hospital in which he sought treatment was 10 per cent responsible. The diver argued that the hospital should have sent him to a recompression chamber, but the attorneys for the defendant hospital countered in court that the diver knew the treatment for the bends and could have taken action himself. Damages were fixed at \$125,000 and the diver was awarded 10 per cent of that amount—\$12,500. He had asked for \$737,500.

The strangest scuba death we've encountered occurred recently in Oregon, and the victim didn't even leave his basement. Apparently he was cleaning his gear with a mixture of vinegar and soda and a chemical reaction created carbon dioxide fumes which asphyxiated him. Who says diving is a safe sport!

We've reported that shark attacks in Hawaiian waters are rare, and they are, but only half a scuba diver was located off Kauai in mid-July. He had apparently been swimming ashore from a disabled boat, further evidence that there's greater jeopardy on the surface than below.

For those male instructors who teach mainly to meet pretty ladies in their classes, there's hope. A moonlighting Florida instructor recently engaged in that age-old contract of marriage—underwater. The two took a dive and so did the minister, and after O-rings were exchanged, they buddy breathed for a second or two, employing the other person's lungs as a tank (until the CO₂ buildup slowed them). We speculated that they might spend the first night of their honeymoon on a night dive beneath the dock, but it turned out that neither was a skip breather.

Long-time diver John Malatich has developed a simple but strong little snorkel holder which, by

keeping the snorkel perpendicular to your head, leads to having less water inadvertently enter the tube when snorkeling. It also makes evacuation of the water easier—"with a little puff," he says. He sent us several for a trial. It is excellent for free diving and snorkeling, but the inflexible albeit tough construction does not permit the snorkel to be moved adequately out of your way when scuba diving. Free divers can pick it up at their dive shop or can send \$1 to John the Diver Malatich, Sylvan Park, Burlington, NJ 08016.

It is not uncommon for a diver to experience a wild combination of dizziness and euphoria when rising. The cause is connected with the failure to equalize rapidly. Should that happen intensely and unexpectedly, the diver could panic, attempt to surface too quickly and risk serious injury. If the underwater world begins to spin, stop rising immediately, grasp a stationary object, remain steady, and slowly descend four to five feet. Then relax. If the sensation hasn't left within 10 to 15 seconds, signal your buddy for aid and begin to surface—slowly.

Have you got a home in snow country? *Undercurrent* reader and diving instructor David R. Myers has a home on Grand Cayman and he'd like to exchange dwellings for a couple of weeks this forthcoming winter. Write him at Box 842, Grand Cayman, British West Indies.

"Why don't you list the names of *Undercurrent* authors?" ask a handful of subscribers each month. There's a good reason and it's for your benefit. A half dozen principal writers help us with resort reviews. Should someone with the name of Raphael Zbignev or Ophelia Glugg appear in print in *Undercurrent* and then show up to review a dive resort, we'd no longer be anonymous—and, we'd no longer be treated like every other diver. This very thing has happened. Our husband and wife advertising team announced their relationship while on vacation, and the shop with which they had been diving was transformed from a mellow place to one filled with paranoia and anxiety. The owner treated the two as if they were royalty. So, mum's the word. Where non-travelers can be identified, however, they will be. And, speaking of anonymity, our travel reviewer, C.C., is displeased with his own description of the Kona Coast. He believes the fish life there is terrific and wants to re-emphasize his good dives.

The typo gremlin got us. Change the word "shows" to "slows" on page 6, line 6 in the July issue, and a whole new meaning emerges. Sorry, Ralph.

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.