

Ambergris Caye, Belize

Runnin' Against The Wind

Unlike the author of last month's travel article, who toured the reefs of Belize aboard the *Isla Mia*, I'm much more of a landlubber. I don't relish the idea of spending a week aboard boat, confined to small quarters and limited deck space with a group of people foisted on me by a travel agent. Not that I'm antisocial, but I am a bit choosy about my house and bar mates; so, unless I fill the boat with my own buddies, I'm reluctant to lock myself up with a loquacious shoe salesman from Cle Elum or a first-time diver from Duluth who lectures on his prowess. I suppose my fears are somewhat unreasonable because seldom have I met a diver, who, after the first few minutes, I haven't warmed up to. The love of diving is indeed a solid bond. Nevertheless, I still avoid week-long boat cruises, instead selecting hotels as my base for diving. And after reviewing our readers' varied comments on Belize land operations, and becoming aware of the superb diving reported in the last issue, it became time for a trip southward, to Central America, to Ambergris Caye, in Belize.

Knowing the track record of banana belt airlines I carried my luggage from my connecting flight at the Miami Airport directly to Tan Airlines, rather than let the exchange take place in the baggage room. I then checked the tickets to ensure the bags were checked on the right flight. Of course when I arrived in Belize City my luggage was nowhere in sight. So I filed the customary complaint, found the taxi driver arranged by the Coral Beach Hotel (my destination) who transported me to the municipal airport for the short flight to Ambergris Caye with a four-hour tour of decrepit Belize City to keep us occupied until the flight.

Ambergris Caye (pronounced "key"), a 25-mile long, half-mile wide island, is a white sand, coconut palm-lined tropical paradise, located in the center of a giant lagoon. A mile out to sea is the great barrier reef, which extends to Mexico. Between the reef and the caye are calm and shallow waters, with a few decent sites when the reef can't be reached due to trade winds. On the

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mainland side of the island the water is also shallow, but the diving is limited to free diving for horse conch, emperor and king helmets in the early morning. There is but one town on this isle, tiny San Pedro, with 900 residents who support themselves either from the sea or from tourists. Two sand streets run 3/4 of a mile along the beach, passing ten small hotels, five shops, a fish and chips stand, Fido's Bar and Restaurant, and Daddy's Dance Hall (closed Sunday through Friday). A New Yorker will not find the *Times*, nor any newspaper for that matter, although he may get reports from a local who picks up U.S. news on his marine radio. Five telephones may be found on Ambergris Caye, but only one can be used at a time since they all connect to the same line.

My first destination was the Coral Beach Hotel and Dive Club, three stories of tropical splendor, located at the south end of Front Street, about sixty feet from the beach, fronted by houses and other structures. I walked to the hotel from the airport (had my baggage arrived it would have been picked up by a truck later), and was greeted by the manager, tall and lanky Allan Foreman, a local, who tried to comfort me about my baggage, then showed my buddy and me to our room. The ceiling, from which a bare light bulb dangled, was so low I could put my hands flat upon it. The twin bed mattresses rested on wooden slats. The floor was covered with linoleum, the bathroom doorway and cupboard with curtains. A desk with a wall mirror and a small end table completed the appointments. Nevertheless, the room was clean, the shower hot, the toilet functional, though not always on the first flush. And I could recharge my strobes on the 110-volt room outlets. But before, dear reader, you cross this off your list, let me explain that it is a budget hotel, with budget-priced diving, for people who can't afford the very best. At \$40/day double for room and three plentiful meals, one would be hard pressed to beat the prices. Breakfasts included eggs, potatoes, toast, ersatz orange juice, and pancakes or papaya. Lunch always featured fresh fish, two salads, red beans and rice, bread, coffee or iced tea. Dinners were nearly always turtle, lobster or snapper, usually fixed Creole style, with rice, again two salads, bread, coffee and dessert, which frequently were baked plantains. Twice, marinated conch salad accompanied supper. Everything was served up family style, with always enough for seconds. Milk and milk products were never served because, I was told, of the inability to keep them refrigerated.

So the question, at this mildly priced operation, was what kind of diving would I get. Getting started with my lost gear, however, was no easy task. I purchased a set of gym trunks and rented regulators and snorkeling vests from the small dive shop by the water for my first dive. But, I learned that the hotel boat had already been booked by six Louisiana divers who had arrived at the hotel the same day as I, so my buddy and I were sent to the Ambergris Lodge dive shop for our first venture.

During my week's stay, I could discern little difference between the dive operations. Most of the dive boats are 20-foot wooden skiffs. Entry is easy; a simple back roll requires no more than a two-foot drop. Exit may be difficult; the skiffs provide standard swimming ladders which some divers have trouble negotiating. Some guides accompany divers, while others don't. If you are inexperienced or have not been diving for awhile, locate a guide who will dive with you. Dive rates at all hotels are established by a boat rental rate for the day, about \$70, plus gas, regardless of the number of people aboard. Tanks are rented separately, \$5 for the first, \$3 for the second.

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To get outside the barrier reef, the boats must travel through one of the ten, 50-75 foot wide, cuts in the reef. When the wind blows, the cuts become rough and impassable. During my week stay in May, I got outside the reef only once. March, April and May, the guides claim, offer the best opportunities to get outside. Inside the reef only four sites are visited.

On my first dive, inside the reef of course, I joined four other divers, two of whom had never even taken a resort course. The Coral Beach dive boat had arrived ahead of us, and the Louisiana divers, armed with their spear guns, were already in the water in pursuit of the savage Spanish grunt. My buddy and I strapped on our rental gear, but found that neither of our vests would hold air, so we shrugged our shoulders and dropped over without them. It was a perfect little free diving and snorkeling spot with plenty of grunts, parrot fish, wrasse and fairy basslets, certainly okay as a starting point, but no place to return in the afternoon, which would be the destination since the wind remained strong. I opted for sampling local hops, Belikin and Charger, at the waterfront bars.

After Fido's and Milo's, I stopped at the bar at the Paradise Hotel where I was surprised to find Ramon Nunez tending bar. Undercurrent readers have for years written that Ramon was the best of Belize guides but now, after a falling out with the owners of the Agua Lodge, he was left mixing maitais. I told Ramon I had heard of his prowess, without revealing my identity, and he was quick to produce letters from his satisfied customers, which he read aloud. He was building a new lodge down the beach, he explained, and someday would be in business for himself, but the next day a cursory glance of the construction progress led me to believe I will be well into my senility before the lodge is ready. I stumbled back to the hotel for dinner, perking up quickly when I learned my gear had arrived. Tomorrow the dives would begin. The wind changed, the waters were calm, and the reef accessible.

We didn't make it outside the next day: the wind shifted and it was too rough, so we dove Holchan cut, a 30-foot dive located in a channel leading outside the reef. Along the sides of the cut, the coral rises to about four feet below the surface, forming a channel interesting to both snorkelers and tankers. On the upper portions of the cut there are some nice soft corals, with schools of several dozen French grunts and pairs of angelfish flowing to and fro with the surge. During our second dive the current picked up and the guide and I hung like flags to the coral walls of the cut before we gave up and rode the current into shallower water. That afternoon we visited "the barge," a sunken 25-foot vessel in shallow water, surrounded by plentiful fishlife including barracuda, blue and purple tangs, wrasses and hogfish. This is an excellent dive for fish photography; a pair of grey angels swam inside the pontoons of the barge and posed for my lens, but care must be used to avoid light reflecting from floating material--visibility was 40 feet at best.

The next day I prepared again for a trip outside. This was an all day affair with diving and a picnic on the beach. My buddy and I packed four tanks into the boat, shared with a non-diving couple, and off we went. Again we did not make it, although somehow our friends from Louisiana did. We only free dived for conchs, but the Louisiana marauders caught a loggerhead turtle which they brought to the beach to slaughter for lunch. After many rum punches, and no mention of the unused tanks, we returned to our palace in San Pedro, where we were served the rest of our conch in ceviche at dinner. We were charged \$25 for this affair, a classic tourist ripoff.

My stay was to include two other hostels, Ramon's Agua Lodge and the Paradise. So the next day we arrived at Ramon's (sans Ramon), which is located on the beachfront in a delightful beachfront setting. The 12 individual cabins, with thatched

roofs, house two double beds and the normal amenities of a tropical resort without frills. The tab, at \$70/day double, including three meals, proved reasonable, but certainly not the bargain of the Coral Beach. Breakfasts were standard American including instant coffee, while lunches consisted of fresh fish, salad, vegetables, rice and bread. Shrimp, barracuda or lobster at dinner, perhaps preceded by conch fritters, might be annointed with a delicious sauce, and accompanied by salads and vegetables. The meals were fine, not gourmet, but accompanied with a \$6 bottle of wine, they indeed met my needs at the price.

For my first dive with the Agua Lodge boatman, George, the winds again kept us inside the reef. We dove Coral Gardens. Masses of staghorn and elkhorn coral held my attention and I enjoyed swimming about with the wrasses, grunts, parrots, and grey and French angels, but I was getting anxious. I told George that I had been to every shallow site and unless I could get outside the reef I would prefer to relax and swim and read. I had had my fill of shallow water excursions. George said he would do his best to accommodate.

The following afternoon he announced that he could make it outside, so we quickly loaded his boat and headed for the reef. It began at 40 feet and dropped to 90 to a sloping sand bottom. Beautiful canyons with plate coral sliced through the walls; I was reminded of the lovely area on Bonaire--Karpata. Beneath the coral plates I spotted as many as 20 lobster peering out. Schools of 50 or so extra large (10-12 inches) blue chromis were stunning. Many of the fish here seemed larger and in greater number than most other places I had been. I got the sense of being in a time warp, where the fish had grown bigger and more abundant than the fish books say. Because swells on the surface were 8-12 feet, each diver came up the anchor rope, so as not to have to swim on the surface or have to search for the boat. On the return we spotted dolphins and the fins of sharks, but we had seen no pelagics underwater.

In summary, I can only say that unpredictability of the trade winds make the diving from Ambergris Caye quite chancy. Though I was there in May, a good month (although the tail end of the month), only once could I reach the outer reef. For an experienced diver, I really doubt that the chances are worth it. It was a nice vacation, with plenty of pleasant shallow diving, but for a diver in search of thrills, it was indeed a bit frustrating. Letters from our readers indicate that those who make the outer reef sing praise, while those who dive the inner waters sing not at all.

So what does a landlubber like me do to dive the best of Belize? There is a way, you know, and I'll reveal my secret in the next issue.

P.S.: I had made reservations in the Paradise Hotel, but when I arrived the reservations hadn't and there were no rooms. I believe the Paradise or the Ambergris Lodge would be equally good choices, but I was unable to stay in either.

Divers' Compass: The people of the island are friendly and helpful; one never feels a concern for safety; English is the native language. . . water temperature ran about 80° so no wet suit top was needed. . . because raw sewage is dumped into the ocean from Belize City, it is advisable to get a gammaglobulin shot before leaving your home. . . on weekends scores of British soldiers from the mainland show up for R and R: single women be advised. . . trade winds keep the heat bearable and mosquitos away, but when they stop, in August and September, I was told, be prepared. . . 2000 manatees make their home in the shallow backwaters and lagoons on the west side of the caye, but no one operates excursions; we were told by the locals that manatees were very good to eat.



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to 100% depending on the angle of the sun; sand reflects about 25%; and white surfaces like snow, etc., reflect 70%-90%.

★ UV rays can penetrate 2'-3' of water.

★ Each 1,000' of altitude increases the UV light intensity by about 4%.

★ Neither sunscreens nor suntan lotions promote tanning, although some artificially color the skin. Some sunscreens allow very little tanning.

The author of this article, Ted Finley, is a physician and NAUI instructor. This is a revised version of an article which originally appeared in the NAUI News. *Undercurrent* assumes all responsibility for editorial changes.

Why Divers Die. . .

Most of the information regarding diving fatalities is very incomplete in details regarding the fatality and the events leading up to it. Part of the problem is that the dead cannot talk. However, lack of available testing equipment, dispersion of witnesses, and inexperienced investigation also plays a large part in losing valuable information. Even when an accident is reported in detail it often is not enough to provide total analysis of what actually happened. The following is such an instance.

On June 25, 1979, two 16-year-old boys, Sammy Johnson and Zeke Masters, died while taking an advanced diver training course at Georgian Bay, Ontario. Both had received their basic open water certification a year earlier; since then Johnson had logged 10 hours and 40 minutes of dive time and Masters only 5 hours and 20 minutes. The class was being taught by Peter Thomas to a group of 6 divers from the Fort Wayne, IN area. The "facts" as given by the instructor on June 26, 1979 were as follows. On the 24th both students had a session in the decompression chamber at the Tobermory Medical Clinic. Johnson's ears would not clear at 70'; so he was returned to surface pressure with no apparent problems. Following the chamber dive, the group had lunch and then dove on the "Sweepstakes" wreck in 25' of water. Everyone was in bed by 9:00 p.m. that night.

The following morning the group had breakfast and set off at about 7:00 a.m. in an inflatable for a deep dive on the "Forest City" wreck whose bow was in 60' and the stern at 150'. At this time there were four students and the instructor. The students were divided into two buddy teams and Johnson and Masters were team #2.

The plan, according to Thomas, was to descend to 60', find the wreck and check to make sure that everything was alright, then proceed to 150', again check that everyone was alright and then ascend to 10' for 5 minutes, then surface. Team #1 was to lead off, followed by Team #2 (Johnson and Masters) with Thomas bringing up the rear.

The boat was anchored in waist-deep water where gear was donned and the buddies checked each other's gear. Air pressure was checked and the dive plan

reviewed. Then they began descent. Thomas carried an underwater movie camera. At 60' both teams were asked if they were OK; both responded with the OK sign. They then proceeded with the dive to 150'. After again checking for the OK sign, Thomas indicated that both teams should ascend. Thomas then turned on his camera lights and made "about 10 seconds of film" to record the dive. He then looked around for his teams. Team #1 was seen ascending up the north side of the wreck, but team #2 was not in sight. Thomas then started to hunt for Johnson and Masters.

The following account has been taken from Mr. Thomas's statement prepared on the 26th of June. "I made a 360-degree check across the deck on the south side. I saw a yellow tank and swam to it. Johnson was upside down with his head resting on the deck. Masters was next to him. He (Masters) looked excited but was under control. I indicated he should go up. At this point I cannot be sure of the sequence of events. There were no bubbles coming from Johnson. His regulator was not in his mouth. I took hold of him and started to ascend, but he was too negative. I then dropped or attempted to drop his weight belt; again I tried to ascend. No luck. I lost one fin. Johnson was still negative. I put air in my suit. I started pulling myself up the deck of the wreck with Johnson in tow. I made some progress, how much I don't know. Some time after that something grabbed, hit or in some way made contact with me. I turned to see Masters without a regulator in his mouth. I dropped Johnson, retrieved my octopus and put it in Masters's mouth. I purged it for him. His hands came up and took hold of the second stage. At this time he got hold of me and dropped the regulator. There it was free-flowing. I think he recovered the regulator the second time. All this time I was attempting to ascend. At some time I dropped my weight belt. I think I may have dropped his also. He was in a state of panic by now. I thought if he could see my tank it would help. I managed to get it (the tank) undone when my regulator was pulled from my mouth. I grabbed it and got it back in. I think I had my tank in front of me at this time, and had a hold of Masters's pack strap. I hit my inflator button. My regulator was again pulled from my mouth. I had the sensation I was rising. I

grabbed it (the regulator), put it in my mouth...some air but mostly water. I lost it and the tank again. Both were descending or stationary. I lost my hold on Masters. Apparently the inflator hose disconnected. The next thing I remember is trying to roll over on the surface. My dry suit was blown up. I purged air from it, turned over on my stomach and looked around. But no one was there. I started for shore, about 125' away. I had no fins, no mask, no tank and no regulator. As I approached the shore, team #1 surfaced. I sent them for help while I watched." Sammy Johnson's body was recovered around 5:00 p.m. in about 98' of water. Zeke Masters's body was recovered the next day. Depth unknown.

According to Thomas, the conditions were perfect that day with sunshine, "air temperature of about 60 degrees, lake was calm, no wind, water temperature of 45 degrees, no current and visibility of 30' - 40'." The equipment used by both divers was recovered. Masters's tank was half full but was not on the body. The air in the tank was tested and found to contain "an extreme amount of moisture which would be very difficult to breathe at the depth of the dive." Sammy Johnson's tank was still on the body but empty. He also had lost his mask. Further analysis of the equipment indicated that the vests used by the two boys did not "have the valves tightened on the air cartridge (CO₂ units) and could not be inflated. Also, the first stage of the regulator was upside down, creating a bend in the hose as it came over the shoulder."

The autopsy report indicated that both boys died from massive air embolisms.

During the inquest which was held four months later, there was testimony from a witness from the Defense and Civil Institute of Environmental Medicine that after examining the diver's equipment, one of Masters's second stage regulators was an old "tilt valve" regulator design. It was not possible to tell which second stage Masters was using, but it was pointed out that if Masters was using the regulator with the tilt valve and the hose kinked, it could have cut off his air and "could have caused the accident."

The students were taking a PADI advanced diver course at the time of the accident. *Undercurrent* talked with Mr. Bob Wohlsens, project director of PADI, about the course. He told us that an advanced course consisted of five supervised dives. Two navigation dives; one without a compass but learning to use underwater terrain and light for navigation, and the other using a compass. One night dive, one search and rescue dive and one deep dive. The deep dive is specified to be at least 60' but not more than 130' with a recommendation of 100'. It is suggested that the deep dive be the last one in the series of 5 dives. Mr. Wohlsens told us that Thomas had had his instructor rating revoked following the accident, but Wohlsens could not discuss any particulars of the accident because of possible insurance and legal considerations.

What becomes evident from this account is that several serious errors occurred. There was not ade-

quate supervision on the part of the instructor, the depth of the dive was greater than the maximum specified by the certification agency, and the condition of the equipment was poor. The vests could not be inflated (although in this case it is doubtful if that would have helped since none of the deceased reached the surface) and the regulators were improperly attached to the tanks. Use of the older style regulator should have been questioned by a knowledgeable instructor.

Many unanswered questions remain. How does one die of massive air embolism unless pulled or swimming up while holding one's breath? Johnson was unconscious, with no bubbles showing as he was being pulled to the surface. He was found at 98'; from 150' to 98' there would be enough pressure change to cause the embolism. But what of Masters? We know from the account (if correct) that he took a couple of breaths from Thomas's regulator, but what then? Did he try a free ascent? Did Thomas keep a hold of him long enough to drag him into an embolism? And why was Johnson's buoyancy too negative? There is no mention in Thomas's account of the amount of lead carried by either diver.

Another set of questions concerns the instructor's responsibility. Why didn't the instructor check the equipment? Why was he carrying a camera? Should the instructor have aborted Johnson's participation in the deep dive because of the ear clearing problem? Should young and inexperienced divers be permitted to train at great depth in cold water?

Heated Suits For Sport Divers

Divematics, a British firm, is now marketing a system which heats the suits of commercial divers. According to *Diver* magazine's Mike Todd, as reported by the Underwater Medical Society, a smaller system for sport divers should be available in a few years.

The heating device, about 21 by 6 inches, is carried on the diver's back. It burns propane, mixed with air from the diver's tank, and will operate as long as seven hours. Heated water is pumped into a Hot Water Closed Loop Suit, worn under either a dry or wet suit that has been modified to accommodate hot water hoses—thin plastic pipes which zig zag across the front and back of the torso, down the arms and legs, and up the neck and across the head.

The spin-off will be a smaller unit for sport divers (about 10 by 3 inches), weightless when submerged. Heated water will be delivered to the neck of a modified wet suit and then water will dribble down the back, arms and legs of the diver. Although heating may use up to 10% of the diver's air, air consumption may even be reduced because of the increased relaxation and comfort when kept warm. The projected price is roughly \$250.

In the end, students place their trust in the instructor simply because he is *the instructor*. Two 16-year-old kids, with 15 hours of diving experience between them, made the wrong choice. Every year a large number of students die in training. There's got to be a better way.

At the inquest, the five-man jury came up with 12 recommendations, none of which are earthshaking.

- There should be one instructor per diving team on a first deep dive.
- During a dive all students should remain in sight of the instructor.
- The buddy system should pair an experienced diver with an inexperienced one.
- A mandatory equipment checklist, in decal form, should be fixed to all air tanks and filled out prior to each dive.
- All divers should be warned about the tilt valve regulator (in this case the Nemrod Ibiza).
- Regulator design should be changed to eliminate these hazards.

- Divers should have a minimum of 10 hours of underwater experience before attempting a deep dive.
- A diving master should be present for all instructional dives.
- Diving lessons should be standardized.
- Instructor's certification should be issued by one body.
- Log books should be mandatory, and instructors should be required to sign log books after a dive is completed.
- Divers under 40 years of age should have a biannual medical, and divers over 40 should have an annual medical.

The above data was gathered from notes made by the instructor involved, Mr. Peter Thomas; from notes made by Mrs. Anna Johnson, mother of one of the deceased, at the time of the inquest, and from an article in the *Sun Times* of Oct. 13, 1979 published in Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada.

Buying Your Own Island

About a mile off the Panama Coast, in the warm and placid Caribbean, 365 tiny islands are scattered about, many within a simple swim of each other. The San Blas Islands are the private reserve of the Cuna Indians, who live on just a few islands and farm coconuts on several others. These tiny islands, some thick with palms and others with only a scattered palm or two, are indeed paradise to anyone who sets sight on them. It's hard to imagine a more romantic setting.

"Owning an island may not be as expensive as you might expect. The price of islands in the tropics can be as low as \$20,000, although those suitable for resorts run much higher."

In the mid 1960s, Tom Moody, a wayfarer from Pittsburgh, set his eyes on the San Blas Islands and knew his dream had life. For years he had searched for a paradise for himself, his wife JoAnn and his daughter Marijo. When he found the San Blas, nothing would thwart his goal. The Indians owned the islands and though they would never sell to Moody he was able, after shrewd negotiations, to cut a deal: a 50-year lease on the sweetest 3-acre parcel of land in any ocean. Today, it's Moody's Pidertupo Village, where the Moody family operates a magnificent little seven-cottage resort, with plenty of fine diving for anyone blessed enough to be able to find how to get there. And Tom Moody is living out the fantasy of nearly all of us.

It's no secret that most ardent scuba divers dream of someday staking out a tropical beach, erecting a home and perhaps even a small dive operation to take care of the bills, then settling in for a life of leisure, leisure as

—It's Easier Than You Think

much below water as above. Imagine yourself as proprietor of your own island, *an entire island*. Where the sun beats down each day. Where gentle waters lap at the shore. Where the ocean provides your dinner. And where *never again* do you have to handle an urgent telephone call from your boss.

Owning an island may not be as expensive as you might expect. The price of islands in the tropics can be as low as \$20,000, although those suitable for resorts run much higher. Several firms deal in island properties, so that an interested buyer doesn't have to comb the world in pursuit of his fantasy. Professional real estate brokers handle potential legal and title difficulties, so that the buyer can assure he owns the property, free and clear.

Before discussing how you might end up with your own island, let us list just a few which have come up for sale during the past few months:

North Bimini, Bahamas, \$3,000,000. A 725-acre island with houses, apartments, and other dwellings. South Bimini, three miles away, has an airstrip.

Moss Cays, Bahamas, \$40,000. Three islands totaling 3 acres in the Georgetown Harbor, at Grand Exuma Islands.

Little Hans Tollech Island, Virgin Islands, \$525,000. Three miles north of St. Thomas, the highest elevation is 217 feet, with plenty of palm trees and outstanding white sand beach.

Temironico, Bora Bora, Tahiti, \$68,757. A 12.6-acre flat atoll, with a coral reef on one side, a lagoon on the other, and panoramic views of Bora Bora.

Heritage Island, Florida, \$75,300. 50 acres of palmetto, on the west coast of Florida.

Guiana, Antigua, \$1,200,000. 338 acres of luxurious vegetation, pineapple plantations, sandy beaches and abundant water.

Pelican Island, Antigua, \$400,000. 36 acres with a 5-bedroom beach house, water and power. A boatride from the airport.

Unnamed Island, Australia, \$100,000. 362 acres between the mainland and the Great Barrier Reef, this island has an elevation over 600 feet, with mango and coconuts and plenty of coves and beaches.

To anyone who has invested in properties, some of these prices seem downright reasonable. But islands are different than mainland real estate. Access may be only by boat. There may be no ground water, only trapped rainwater. Electricity must be produced by a generator. Food, with the exception of fish and coconuts, will have to be imported. And so will gasoline. For the tenderfoot, "living ain't easy," at least not for awhile.

Even so, small islands are selling fast. Donald Ward of Granada Hills, California, operates Private Islands Unlimited, an American firm which represents a large international real estate firm, Boehm and Vladi. Ward told *Undercurrent* that the islands are selling not only to people who want their own paradise, but to real estate speculators. He cited the example of a 20-acre island on the Pacific side of Panama which has changed hands five times in the past ten years. The initial price was \$26,500; the latest sale was \$125,000.

But if a scuba diver isn't hooked on warm water and 100+ feet visibility, then islands right here in the United States and Canada are good choices. Just a few examples:

Birch Island, Nova Scotia, \$150,000. 167 unimproved acres, wooded, with natural caves and protected harbors.

Copps Island, Connecticut, \$245,000. 7.5 acres with four-bedroom house, electricity and water, one hour by car from New York City and a short private boat trip.

Duck Lodges Island, Maine, \$10,500. 1.5 acres of woods and beaches; ½ mile from shore.

Dayman Island, British Columbia, \$278,000. 24.7 acres, a stately house, modern facilities and beaches and bays. Lies in a bay near Vancouver Island.

Financing

In many cases, the seller is looking for all cash, but some may finance up to 50% or more at prevailing interest rates. Lending institutions are normally reluctant to involve themselves unless the buyer is well-qualified and a regular customer. Exchanges for other real property may facilitate a sale.

The Risks

Buying a piece of paradise is not without its risks. Woe be it for the investor who gets a case of cabin fever and can't stick it out. Developing a new life on 20 acres or even two hundred acres surrounded by water may be

impossible for all but the most unique individual. It is one thing to sip rums at Moody's Pidertupo Village, have meals served, and be escorted to the reef. It's quite another to keep the boat running, the food unspoiled, the generator working, and the beach from eroding. Only the heartiest survive.

One should also consider the economic and political risks of an island. Should an international oil crisis develop it may be impossible to get fuel. Should a volatile country undergo revolution, land might be expropriated. And, should an owner find he needs money or decides he must move elsewhere, he may find it difficult to dispose of the property under different economic or political conditions.

How To Shop Around

A number of firms specialize in exotic properties. We'll mention three:

Rare Earth Real Estate, Post Office Box 946, Sausalito, CA 94965. Karel van Haesten, President of Rare Earth, combs the world in search of properties. Not only does he locate islands, but he has unearthed a number of other exotic properties, including a 185-acre retreat in Napa County, California, which sleeps 100 (\$925,000), a 79-acre town in Northern Oregon (\$1.5 million), an inactive volcano in the Canary Islands (\$75,000), a castle on 200 acres in Mexico, and \$5,000,000 worth of gold claims in California. He recently completed the sale of an Atlas F-type underground missile base in New Mexico to a buyer whom he never met and who refused to reveal the intended use. He has an Atlas E Base, with 48,000 sq. ft. of usable underground space, listed at \$95,000. Rare Earth charges a 10% commission to the buyer. One may write directly to specify interests or, if only curious, subscribe to a periodic newsletter for \$36/year.

Private Islands Unlimited, 17538 Tulsa Street, Granada Hills, CA 91344. Private Islands' Donald Ward represents the large Hamburg, Germany firm, Boehm and Vladi. Although they seem to specialize in islands worldwide, they too have other listings, including islands in rivers and lakes, lighthouses, and developments on islands. Serious buyers may write for current listings. Buyers are charged 6 to 8½% of the sales price.

Holiday Homes International, Post Office Box 26042, San Diego, CA 92126. This is a glossy magazine, sold at \$12 for four issues/year, which lists expensive homes available in the U.S. and abroad. Recent issue advertised elegant waterfront homes on Little Cayman, St. Croix and Barbados.

Conclusion: We must be frank and admit there's not a staff member at *Undercurrent* who expects to buy an island, but each of us can dream. We suspect that you, too, only share our dreams. If anyone of our readers purchases an island because of this article, however, we do expect an invitation for a dive. We'll invite the subscribers.

Dear Undercurrent:

My CO₂ Cartridges Were Confiscated At The Airport

Dear Undercurrent:

On our recent departure for Cozumel, Eastern Air Lines' "Security Forces" at La Guardia Airport confiscated all of our club members' BC inflator cartridges found in their carry-on luggage. "Too dangerous" and "common sense makes no difference" was their response. Security management echoed their reply, even though airlines' on-board safety vests carry the same devices.

I doubt that FAA/CAB regulations prohibit 2½-gram CO₂ cartridges on board the aircraft. Can you sort this one out?

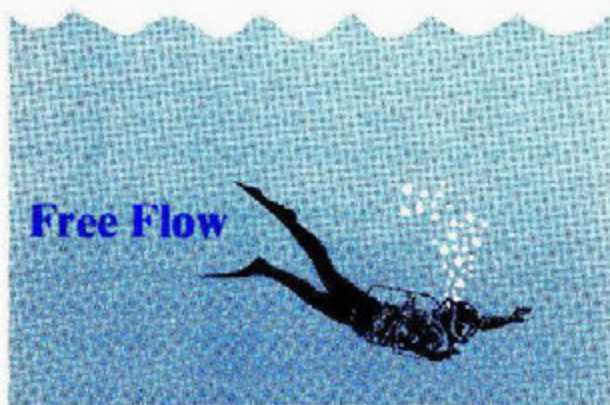
Sincerely,

Zig Zighan
Scuba Sports Rite Club
New York, NY

Sure. And you are right, Zig. Government regulations do not prohibit carrying small CO₂ cartridges on board airlines, according to Ray Salazar of the FAA Hazardous Material Section at the San Francisco International Airport. Salazar, however, pointed out that security personnel are hired by individual airlines and sometimes they can be overzealous. So by the time their mistakes could be corrected, passengers would miss their flight. To avoid delays, carry the cartridges in checked baggage.

Study Of Bubble Formation In Fetuses Challenged

Some time ago, we reported on results of a study at Texas A&M University, where researchers using pregnant sheep found that fetuses showed severe bubble formation (i.e., the bends) in simulated dives to 100 feet for 25 minutes. Those results, however, are now being challenged by physiologists, Michael Stock and John Rankin, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They surgically instrumented sheep fetuses so that the blood flow could be monitored, but unlike the Texas researchers, they included *uninstrumented* sheep in their study. The Wisconsin researchers found that all of the surgically prepared fetuses developed severe bubbling following simulated dives, while the uninstrumented fetuses showed *no signs* of bubble formation. Rankin says that "although we haven't proved that diving during pregnancy is safe, we have shown that the results in the Texas study are an artifact of experimental procedures."



Ever wonder how you can tell if your CO₂ cartridges are workable? Follow the advice given Navy divers in *Fathom* magazine. After checking to determine if the seal is intact, weigh the cartridge on an appropriate

scale. If the weight varies by more than three grams from the weight stamped on the cylinder, the cartridge should be discarded.

Even the celebrities are targets for attack. Valerie Taylor, famed underwater photographer who handled many of the shark filming chores for *Jaws*, was attacked by a blue shark while testing photo equipment off California's San Clemente Island. She suffered a four-inch long, 3/4-inch deep gash in her left leg, which was quickly repaired after she was air lifted to a San Diego Coast Guard air station.

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*. Editorial offices: PO Box 1658, Sausalito, CA 94965.