

Cozumel, Quintana Roo, Mexico

—Definitely Not For First Time Divers

As I sipped a Bohemia at the Cancun Airport, I contemplated my arrival at Cozumel without joy. On Isla de Mujeres I had spent my week as if it were 1956, for that was the pace of the people. Cozumel would be a different story. With the devaluation of the peso, tourists galore fill the hotels and dive boats, bumping into each other above and below water...at least that's what our readers have been reporting. Hotels were overbooked so rooms often were not available; I expected I might be sleeping in the street. The wonders of Cozumel twenty years ago, even five years ago, had now given way to the worst of both Mexican and American worlds. Or had they? I was coming to find out.

My landing proved joyless, indeed. After a pleasant 15-minute flight on a British-made Tri-islander, sudden shocking vibrations upon landing gave me sudden chills. I looked out the window to see a blown tire, but the pilot brought us safely to a halt in the middle of the runway. There we disembarked and were shuttled into the airport by van, then loaded into another van for a short trip to my abode for the forthcoming week, the La Cieba.

I had booked the La Cieba hotel because many of our readers recommend it. It is located about 3 miles from San Miguel, the major metropolis on Cozumel. I had pre-paid the first night and, surprisingly, registered with no problem. My ninth-floor room brought immediate culture shock, pleasant though it was--white walls, twin beds, a big bathroom with shower and tub and plenty of closet space, and air conditioning, all combined for a \$50/night tab. From the balcony I overlooked the International pier, where five cruise ships docked during my 7 days.

La Cieba is not a Frank Lloyd Wright creation. The newer portion, in which I stayed, had phones in the rooms that could only reach the front desk. The

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other side had the ice machines. To get ice, I had to take the elevator to the ground floor, walk across the entire reception area, go outside and up at least one flight of stairs to find the ice. And naturally you reverse the process to get the ice back to the makin's. Thank God for the elevator, I thought, but the electricity was off for several hours on a couple of days so there was no elevator, no air conditioning and no ice. La Cieba's dining area is nicely laid out with windows facing the ocean and tables set out in neat rows. The dinner menu offers a la carte meals, or fixed-price dinners at \$6.20 per person. The fixed-price dinner is neither Mexican nor interestingly prepared fresh fish. Usually a beef and a fish dish are featured, prepared so that even a confirmed meat and potatoes person would not be turned off. The a la carte side of the menu offered more adventurous selections. Throughout Cozumel I drank the water. I had ice in my drinks. I did nothing different from what I do at home. I had virtually no problems. Maybe I was lucky. Many around me did have problems.

The first morning, bright and early, I had breakfast and then scouted town to set up our diving. My purpose was to dive with a number of operations. Aqua Safari was my first stop. Everything was booked up, the lady told me, so the best they could do was to take me in four days. I agreed and paid in advance. A reader had written touting a private guide named "Blondie," so I asked if she knew how to contact him. Seems the lady was his wife! She gave me a phone number to call between 8 and 8:30 in the morning--but not today, Sunday. "Why not?" I asked. "Because we don't work on Sunday," she told me. "Could you book me with Blondie?" "No, you'll have to call." "OK, now who else do you suggest I dive with since Aqua Safari was full?" "Blondie," she said. "I planned to do that," I told her, "but who else do you recommend?" "Blondie," she said. I walked out. She came to the door and called out: "Be sure and call by 8:00 am Thursday to confirm that you will be diving with us." "Why?" I asked, "you have my money." "Just to be sure that you're still alive," she called back.

The Boats: As it turned out, I was able to dive with Blondie, as well as with Aqua Safari, Scuba Cozumel, Dive Cozumel, Caribbean Divers, and Club Yates. Frankly, I found little difference between any of the operations, due perhaps to the presence of the ubiquitous boatman's union, which controls dive boat commerce. The boatman's union supplies any number of old, slow, converted fishing boats to the dive operators for transporting divers to the reefs. Trips to Palancar, the most famous of the reefs, take about two hours in each direction from the pier in San Miguel. Waiting around for the union to fiddle around can add even more time. One day, while I waited for a boat to head to Columbia Reef, the union changed crafts three times before it finally settled on who would get the trip. At that point it became too late in the day for the longer journey to Columbia, so the entire trip was redirected to Palancar.

The union boats leave from the pier at 9:00 am or later, and many stop along the way to pick up divers from the hotels. Many dive operations have their own boats, some of which are faster than the scows of the boatman's union, but none seem to hightail it, so one can expect to enter the water no sooner than 11:00 am and spend the full day. Because there are hordes of divers, operators with boats have to hire boats from the boatman's union to supplement their one or two boats. So even though you may have been drawn in by ads of great dive boats, there's a good chance you'll end up with the union anyhow. Perhaps the most luxurious boat in Cozumel is the Fantasia, a double-decked, enormous craft which holds scores of divers. Unlike other operations charging \$31-35 for a two-tank dive with lunch (It's more expensive now than five years ago!) Fantasia charges \$45. I did not take this boat. Admittedly I should have, but when I learned

that a TV room and an electronic game room were aboard, I could go no further.

The Guides: Just as the boatman's union brings a sameness to all dive operations, so does the low quality of the Mexican guides. Most speak little English, and few pay any attention. I dived with more than a score, and only one, Jorge from Scuba Cozumel and the Hotel Galapagos, distinguished himself. Blondie proved to be a Dagwood. He picked us up an hour late, had three boats of divers (and only two guides), sent us down alone charged the most money and didn't serve lunch--like every other operator. The worst guide was Pepe, from the Club Yates, who swam the reef with the speed of a speared Barracuda, made two deep dives that pushed the hell out of the tables and led his people to the most rapid air consumption on record. For inexperienced divers, Cozumel can be a real nightmare. More than once our guides disappeared underwater, never to be seen until they surfaced. I had no worth while briefings, no checkouts. In fact, of the six operations I dived with, only Scuba Cozumel asked for my C-card. Others asked how experienced I considered myself. Blondie asked me for nothing other than cash.

COZUMEL QUINTANA ROO, MEXICO

Experienced Divers:	★★★★
Inexperienced Divers	★
Beach snorkeling	★★★
La Cleba	★★★
Barracuda	★★★★
Restaurant Food	★★★★½
Moneysworth	★★★★½

★ poor, ★★ fair, ★★★ average, ★★★★ good, ★★★★★ excellent

The Current: Because Cozumel sits smack in the middle of the Gulf Stream, there is current no matter where you drop in. Many of the dives are drift dives--fun for the experienced, perhaps disconcerting for the inexperienced. The current seems strongest in the first 30' or so, then diminishes, so I would swim to the bottom, rather than descend feet first. In just about every group, divers had trouble clearing their ears, so group organizing was difficult because they drifted away while they worked to clear. Twice I lost my group because the current carried them past me. We continued to dive, then at the end surfaced to find our boat, which had been drifting above. Because of the number of boats, I learned how important it is to remember the name of one's boat. When my buddy and I surfaced after being separated the first time, ten boats were picking up divers--and each looked identical to the other. We called the name of our boat to one captain, and within five minutes our boat arrived. Since each of those ten boats carried at least ten divers, a hundred or more divers were in the water at once (and plenty of other boats were still depositing divers up-current). I likened it to an airport terminal at Christmas.

The Reefs: In six days of diving I went to Palancar five times, Santa Rosa four times, Paradise twice and Yocab once. Palancar has three noted dive spots in its six-mile-long structure: the Gardens, Horseshoe and the Caves. Since few dive guides speak much English, the only spot I was able to identify was the Caves. The other four dives on Palancar could have been anywhere along the reef.

But it is beautiful. The beauty of Palancar lies not with its fish life--which is very sparse--but with the singular beauty of its healthy coral formations. There is no coral algae, no sediment. Only a pristine reef. I felt like I was in a museum looking at an artist's conception of what a reef should look like. Wire corals, plate corals, little clumps of flower coral all enhanced the overall picture. On the wall stately tube sponges held arrow and spider crabs and the occasional brittle star. Where normally one would expect one or two small anemones, Palancar had twenty or more large anemones, some with tiny banded coral shrimp moving around the tentacles. On the wall itself were myriads of orange crinoids, and when I looked under some of the plate corals there were always small damsel

fish. Below our determined depth of 80 feet--the limit ordered universally by the guides--I would see an occasional Queen angel. On one of the dives to Palancar I saw a Greenback Turtle swim over the wall and off into the distance.

Santa Rosa Reef again has a beauty of its own. A true wall starts at 50 feet and goes down and down and down. On the top of the reef live several fair-sized groupers (30-40 pounds?), obviously well-fed by divers and the dive guides. One time I had to push out of my way a 30-pounder who wanted something to eat and wouldn't move. When I pushed him, he pushed back. When he finally realized that I didn't carry food, he left me for another diver. Once over the side of the reef, I was again struck by the beauty of the reef--but this time there were more fish. Six barracudas followed me for 10 minutes while I poked around in the crevices of the reef looking at the normal reef critters: angels, damsels, wrasse, soldiers, big eyes, squirrels, one moray, many arrow crabs. On the soft corals I found several Flamingo tongues. On one dive I saw a school of about 20 snappers, and on another dive I observed a white spotted File fish.

Yocab Reef is loaded with life, but the current is a bitch. I once grabbed hold of a large coral formation to stop and look at a tiny spotted moray; the current spun me around to unfurl me like a flag in a stiff breeze. The only way to stop and look at anything here was to drop into a hole between coral formations to get out of the current. All of the usual reef fishes were here: Midnight parrot fishes, stop-light parrots, damsels eager to nip the unwary diver who came near, small spotted morays, squirrels, the ubiquitous blue chromis, a few which looked like tangs, but I went by too fast to be sure. Yocab was an exciting dive, but the current there brought "junk" in the water and the visibility never exceeded 40 feet. We lost our group on this dive too, but it didn't make much difference since there were always at least 10 divers from other boats in sight at any one time.

Paradise Reef is excellent for photographers. Here the current is slow, though it is only 30 feet deep. I found four morays on one drift, and one even came out to swim with me for a short distance. Hidden in small pockets at the base of some coral formations were Toad Fish, which have heads like catfish but elongated bodies like eels, with bright yellow or orange coloration on the top and bottom of the fins, running along the top and bottom of their bodies.

Since Paradise is the closest reef to the international pier, it is often the reef selected for the second, shallow dive at the end of the day. I tried several times to get to Maricaibo and Columbia reefs, but was always told that the lack of "early-in-the-morning" boats made it impossible. I suspect it was for another reason: there were too many amateur and untrained divers to tackle the current at these deeper, 90-100 foot reefs. In fact, on just about every trip I was accompanied by one or more recent resort-course graduates. On three trips the divers were students from Texas or Florida on openwater checkouts prior to certification. Night dives are offered by most shops, usually at Paradise Reef. A sign in the shop window states the time and place. The price ranges from \$25-30 for a single tank.

But one cannot spend his full time in the waters off Cozumel, so I set about exploring hotels and restaurants for our readers. Knowing that \$50/night was too high a tab for La Cieba, I decided to move to the Barracuda. When I checked out of La Cieba, the desk clerk totaled my bill, then handed me the chits I had signed for drinks. I noticed I had been charged for someone else's \$2.40. I pointed that out. The desk clerk became indignant, railing at me for not discovering that before he had closed the account. I shrugged, caved in, and walked away. Once home I checked the account and found that the hotel had charged me \$14.78/night, not the \$50 agreed upon rate. Not bad, hey Cisco?

The Barracuda Hotel, on the water, ran \$18 a night, single, with two 3/4 size beds, air conditioning, a ceiling fan and a small refrigerator. It was neat and clean. A better buy, for example, may be the Hotel El Marquesa, with rooms from \$11.75 to \$12.50 a night double. Undercurrent reader Jerry Winkler of Corpus Christi, Texas suggests that the cheapest place in town is the Vista Del Mar next door to Aqua Safari at \$6 a night. With more than two dozen hotels in town or to the south, there's a wide range of selection and price (from \$6 to \$60). If one selects a budget hotel without a beach, then there is no problem in using the beaches of other hotels. The only restriction is on the use of the fresh-water swimming pool, but I doubt it's rigorously enforced; there are just too many people running around to keep checking on who is a guest and who isn't.

I recommend against any hotel packages which include meals, since eating dinner in downtown San Miguel is half the experience of Cozumel. The restaurants begin to fill after 9:00 pm, so the tired diver will have plenty of early choices before the hordes arrive to promenade and drink and eat. Pepe is the king of the restauranteurs, sponsoring Pepe's (the best), Pepe's English Grill (the fanciest), Pepe's Bar-B-Que (the noisiest) and Las Palmeras (the most mediocre). Steaks, fish, conch and venison (from the Yucatan) are on every menu, and served commonly with french fries and a vegetable. Overall, the food was quite tasty, the portions small, but the steaks generally large and better than I get in most San Francisco restaurants. Prices range from \$3.50 on up. Morgan's is the most pricey restaurant (up to \$11) without the better food to merit it. The only enchiladas, rice and beans I found were at Los Tortugas, where they also serve superb conch cerviche. Mixed drinks average a buck or so, while Carta Blanca and Bohemia average about 60¢. Some hotels don't serve full breakfasts (the Barracuda serves only a continental breakfast and no other meals), so residents breakfast at the many restaurants, all of which are located near the pier.

Now, with all this mishmash, what do I recommend? I do not recommend Cozumel for first-time divers. With the crush of tourists, the failure of most dive guides to manage their hordes, and with the currents and depths of the initial dives, Cozumel is no place for one's first ocean experience. In the last couple of years, Cozumel has had more than its share of accidents, injuries, air evaluations, and even deaths. A Texas beauty queen, a novice diver, was one of the casualties. For divers who can take care of themselves, Cozumel can be a kick. But it is not for honeymooners who want to get away from it all, for the wealthy who want luxury and class, for the person who loathes crowds or diving regimentation and limits, for the picky, or for the serious photographer. Rather, Cozumel is for the tolerant, for the young at heart, for the diver who loves current cruising, for people who accept crowds and cattle-boats. With inexpensive accommodations, inexpensive food, quite decent and sometimes exciting diving, for the right people Cozumel can be quite a bargain.

Diver's Compass: No single credit card is universal; VISA and AMEX are the most popular, but some people accept only Mastercharge, and others only Diner's Club. . . . There is a bit of snorkeling off all the hotel beaches; about 100 feet off La Cieba is an airplane sunk by a movie prop. . . . Travel to the dive boats is a \$1.35 taxi ride or an 11¢ bus trip. . . . Bring your own gear. Several of our readers report rental gear is in lousy shape, and if your rental gear causes an aborted dive you won't get a refund. . . . Don't join the boat for snorkeling trips since the depths are too great to see anything. . . . Put your money and valuables in the hotel safe; I had \$30 lifted at La Cieba and \$20 at the Barracuda, and I can say that the notices posted in the hotels didn't warn me. . . . You cannot exchange Mexican currency for U.S. dollars, so don't be stuck with a bundle of pesos at the end of your trip. . . . The best of the big hotels seem to be the El Presidente and the Maya Caribe, although I heard plenty of complaints from guests. . . . When arranging a trip, check with your travel agent to determine if the hotel serves meals, which is a guarantee that you can get a full breakfast.

Stress Reduction And Panic Control

—New Tapes Designed For Divers

For all that is written about stress and panic in diving, very little has been done to control or eliminate it. For that is no easy task. Stress, being an emotional and physical response to a perceived threat, cannot be controlled or eliminated by only the written word or the didactic lecture. It's far more complex a phenomenon than that.

Nevertheless, stress is perhaps the number one cause of diver dropout, while panic -- which follows stress -- is, most likely, the number one cause of diver death. It would seem that oceans and oceans of research ought to be pumped into practical means for mitigating or eliminating the two companion reactions in divers.

Certainly there has been some effort. The debate between short and long training courses is often affected by the recognition that unless a diver feels supremely comfortable once he is certified, there's a good chance he may never dive again. Dive manufacturers claim that the new, improved equipment will reduce stress, because a diver has so much more control under water. (Others argue that it is the simplicity of gear that makes for less stressful diving.) Nevertheless, stress is the number one enemy of the newly certified diver. And panic is the number one enemy of a diver experiencing trouble in open water.

"The panicking -- or pre-panicking -- diver may telegraph his state with saucer-like eyes, by fixing on an individual or object, or by fluttering and splashing."

A stressed diver may experience any number of symptoms either prior to a dive or once he enters the water. His heartbeat may increase dramatically. His breathing rate may quicken while his breath becomes shallow. His palms may sweat, his feet may cool, his voice may change. His behavior, too, may alter. He may procrastinate. He may lose his keys, forget how to put his regulator on his tank, withdraw into silence or mask his fear with logorrhea or boastful claims.

Under stress, many divers scrap the dive; some never dive again. Those who do dive without overcoming the symptoms, may quickly find themselves in trouble. As a stressed diver panics, he loses control. He stops thinking, reacts irrationally, and may make all the wrong moves required to save himself. The panicking -- or pre-panicking -- diver may telegraph his state with saucer-like eyes, by fixing on an individual or object, or by fluttering and

splashing. If he comes out of his panic alive, he too may never dive again --and perhaps shouldn't if he can't overcome his fears.

Ten years ago, it wasn't "in" to talk about stress. Someone might have butterflies. Or a nervous stomach. But stress? No sir, not me.

Today, talking about stress is as chic as wearing a pair of Calvin Kleins. Everyone's got it and everyone talks about how they reduce it by taking StressTabs, jogging, drinking less booze, eating less meat, letting out one's feelings, or whatever. Serious people seeking a cure go even farther: biofeedback, mental imagery, deep relaxation, autogenic suggestion and even acupuncture are widely used for stress reduction and control. Even the stodgy medical community is recognizing that stress "may be" a precursor to a number of threatening diseases, and serious research is being done to determine the best means to eliminate stress. Perhaps the most famous work is being conducted by Dr. Carl Simonton, who uses stress reduction and imagery as techniques to curtail the spread of cancer.

So, with all these advances in the last ten years, why are 150,000 divers a year hanging up their snorkels? Why does panic lead to 150 diver deaths in the U.S. alone? Isn't anybody actually teaching how to eliminate it?

Well, at least two people are: Roger Allen, Ph.D., Director of Research and Graduate Studies, the Department of Health Education, University of Maryland, and his colleague, Tom Griffiths, Ed.D., Director of Aquatics at Maryland. They have produced a two-hour tape for stress control, aimed at any diver who may find stress a problem. With just enough theory to give the diver a good understanding of the causes of stress, Allen and Griffiths provide several effective exercises to be practiced while listening to the tape. For our money, it's the best effort in the diving community to come up with a practical means to control diver stress. The tapes will no doubt keep many divers active who might otherwise surrender to stress and stop diving.

The tapes are excellent for several audiences:

- diving students who are worried about forthcoming pool exercises and tests.
- certified divers who have yet to enter the open ocean and are concerned about their first big dive.
- a diver who has scrubbed a dive out of stress or who has panicked or nearly panicked under water and is contemplating giving up the sport.
- a person who would like to learn to dive, but has resisted out of fear.

•any diver who would like to better prepare himself to react safely in stressful situations.

The four sides of Allen's and Griffith's cassettes are divided as follows:

Side 1: The Causes and Symptoms of Diver Stress: By discussing the causes and symptoms, the diver learns how to recognize them in himself and others. A number of not-so-common causes are presented, as well as symptoms such as forgetfulness or procrastination that one may not otherwise recognize as a reflection of stress.

Side 2: Specific Techniques for Panic Prevention: The authors' major point, which is the base for many recognized stress-control techniques, is that breath control and relaxation go hand-in-hand. Here they teach the listener the "Calming Response" technique, which employs a combination of belly breathing -- that is expanding your stomach, not your chest, when you inhale -- and the recitation of certain autogenic phrases such as "I am calm, I am warm." They claim that within 5-10 breaths (i.e., within 30 seconds to a minute) a person who practices the techniques will reduce his stress symptoms substantially. There is a great deal of supportive evidence for their work, and by following the tape, one can learn how easy and comforting the exercises can become.

In addition, they teach a repetitive process of stopping, breathing, and thinking, which further permits a person to move himself from a panic or pre-panic state and get himself out of underwater problems.

Side 3: Mental Rehearsal for Controlling Underwater Stress: On this side, the authors take the listener into a state of deep relaxation, then guide him or her through two processes that they might experience under water. The first is a simulated experience for the student, where he jumps into the water with all his gear in hand and is required to dress himself on the bottom of the pool. The second is responding to having a mask kicked off and losing one's ability to see under water. Each case emphasizes slow breathing, relaxing, and thinking. And each approach no doubt is effective. The techniques can be applied to any stressful situation, and tips are given about how to practice other encounters one might fear, such as an out-of-air situation or the sighting of a shark. The theory is that by practicing mental responses to these situations beforehand, the diver will be familiar with them should they occur. He will then have already developed appropriate responses, and will therefore be able to handle the real-life situation without panicking.

There seems to be a fair amount of evidence that

Problems With BC Dump Valves

—One Stays Open, The Other Stays Closed

Two diverse problems with BC dump valves have come to our attention recently, the first through a recall of U.S. Divers Aqua Lung Pro Line BCs, and the second through the experience of a fellow diver in the British Isles.

In the first, U.S. Divers has discovered that on certain BC models, there is a possibility that the valve may not reseal should the diver pull the manual dump cord on the overpressure relief valve. The result can be both a loss of air through the open valve and a flooded BC when water enters. Needless to say, that could be hazardous.

The BCs being recalled, in cooperation with the Consumer Product Safety Commission, are Aqua Lung Pro Line BC Jackets Model Number 7653, 7657, 7658, 7663, and 7667. They have been on the market since February, 1983. The name Aqua Lung Pro Line appears on the lower left hand pocket of the BC, and a black knob is fastened on the end of the manual dump cord.

Will Halm, U.S. Divers' attorney, told *Undercurrent* that the company received two reports of a sticking valve. They believe 650 units might possibly have this problem. Those divers who filed warranty cards have already been notified by mail.

Should you have one of these recalled BCs, return it to the point of purchase for repair or to any U.S. Divers dealer or repair center. For additional information, you may call U.S. Divers collect; dial 714/540-8010 and ask for Customer Service, Pro-Line BC recall.

The second problem is the exact opposite. The dump valve on any BC may fail to open, not because of a design fault, but rather because of the properties of the rubber valve itself. John Twilley, editor of *Subaqua Scene*, reports that he normally washes out his BC after a dive, then when home he inflates it leaving the valve at the low end to let the air push out the remaining drops of water. The last time he did it he was in a rush. The valve failed to open and the seams ripped on the inner bag from over-inflation.

The stuck overpressure valve, Twilley learned after talking with the manufacturer of the British BC, is not uncommon. What occurred was that the rubber diaphragm was first firmly pressed against the plastic molding when wet; when it dried it then stuck to the moulding. The failure is unlikely when diving, because the diaphragm would have been wet again.

Since it is disturbing that such a problem can happen at all, it suggests that a diver should always manipulate the dump valve before diving to ensure that it's in proper working order.

such imagery works. For example, many basketball coaches now have their players rehearse foul shooting with imagery, imaging shot-after-shot being successfully completed. Those who use imagery produce significant improvements in their percentages of successful shots.

Side 4: Systematic Relaxation Training: On this side, the authors lead the listener through a number of exercises designed to increase one's awareness of physical and muscular stress, while providing several techniques to directly relieve that stress. The listeners are taken through steps for full body relaxation, so when this side is completed he will hopefully have reduced his own physical stress symptoms. If not, one may simply listen to the tape again or go through the same process without the benefit of the tape.

Overall, we found the tapes to be very well produced. Roger Allen's voice is pleasant, the tapes clear

and virtually static-free. They should be a staple in the library of anyone who teaches diving. Resorts, too, would be well-advised to keep a set on hand, so that when the diver from Duluth panics on his first boat ride to a reef, he can go back to his room and work out his fear so as not to spoil his entire dive vacation.

And though we know that you, dear readers, never experience anything remotely resembling stress or fear, you might suggest that your nondiving spouse listen in. Unless, of course, you delight that your spouse doesn't dive because it gives you the opportunity for a few hours of freedom. In that case, you had better rip this article from the newsletter before he or she reads it!

To order these tapes, you may send \$19.95 to: Winchester Press, 220 Old New Brunswick Road, Box CN 1332, Piscataway, New Jersey, 08854.

Diving For Dollars

—From *Davy Jones, A Tax Shelter*

For most investors, a tax shelter is about as tangible as an electronic banking transaction: a piece of paper documenting their part ownership of a shopping mall in the next state or an oil-drilling site half a continent away. But for some 30 investors with a special sense of romance -- and risk -- the payoff from an unusual Florida operation was the kind they could touch, even fondle: silver ingots the size of paving blocks, gold chains, gold bars, fistfuls of gold and silver coins, a coral-encrusted anchor, a bronze cannon, an emerald ring -- all lost at sea 361 years ago.

The loot was handed out last April in Key West at the offices of Treasure Salvors Inc., the outfit that found the hoard on the ocean bottom. Three years ago, the investors paid \$20,000 for each of the 35 units in a unique tax-shelter limited partnership. The money entitled the investors-partners to 17.5% of anything recovered during 1980 from the Spanish galleon *Santa Margarita*. That ship and a sister ship, the *Atocha*, both carrying New World treasure to Spain, sank in a hurricane off the coast of Florida in 1622. "It's a good feeling to finally be able to distribute this stuff. It justifies the faith people had in me," said Mel Fisher, founder of Treasure Salvors.

It was an uncharacteristic understatement from the usually hyperbolic Fisher, 60, an incorrigible optimist who for years was regarded along the Florida Keys as a dreamer at best, and at worst an unscrupulous hustler. Twenty years ago, Fisher and his indomitable wife Dolores, 46, began their search for the legendary lost galleons.

Following a trail discovered by historian Eugene Lyon in 1970 at the Archive of the Indies in Seville, Spain, Fisher found the wrecks lying in shallow water 30 miles west of Key West. So far, Treasure Salvors has recovered some 30,000 artifacts from both ships. The find has been appraised at \$27 million for insurance purposes, but art experts think the treasure could be worth several times that. The effort to date has cost \$7.5 million, much of it scratched together from the sale of early discoveries, outlays from a few adventurous souls who had faith in Fisher, and movie options. About \$2 million of the total has been raised since 1980 through tax-shelter partnerships.

"People think we just go out in row-boats and fish up treasure," says Treasure Salvors' Vice President Bleth McHaley, "but it took us seven years to find it, and seven more years to establish our right to keep it." Finding it involved 400,000 miles of crisscrossing the ocean, towing special magnetometers developed by Treasure Salvors' Fay Field, an electronics engineer. Occasionally, Fisher brought in seers, psychics and trained dolphins to break the technological tedium. There were thousands of fruitless dives into holes blown through 20 feet of sand. And in 1975 there was tragedy. A week after the Fishers' oldest son Dirk discovered bronze cannons that irrefutably identified the *Atocha*, he and his wife and another diver drowned when a salvage tug capsized.

Once Treasure Salvors began bringing up bags filled with gold and silver, the state of Florida, and eventually the Federal Government, laid claim to it all. Treasure Salvors fought a long, intricate legal

battle all the way to the Supreme Court, which in 1982 finally declared in effect: "Finders keepers."

Not a moment too soon. Recalls Fisher's long-time partner Bob Moran, 57: "If we could have had access to what we brought up, we could have gone ahead without borrowing and finding investors." Instead, by 1980 Treasure Salvors' financial situation was desperate. Then, during Easter vacation, Jerry Burke, who put together the shelter, visited an exhibit that Treasure Salvors had set up in Key West.

"I said to Mel, 'Hey, you're doing it all wrong,'" recalls Burke. He proposed organizing the tax-shelter partnerships for each year's work on every salvage site, loosely fashioned after oil-exploration tax shelters. So successful was Burke in attracting investors in 1980 and 1981 that his firm, Underhill Associates, is now trying to register a \$12 million tax shelter with the Securities and Exchange Commission so that it can be sold publicly. That money would go toward six new expeditions as well as for further exploring at the site of the Margarita and Atocha.

If nothing more is found -- and assuming the IRS does not challenge the concept -- most of the investment can be written off as expenses, as it is in unsuccessful oil-exploration partnerships devised to shelter income from taxes. If treasure is recovered, profits from the sale could be taxed at the capital-gains rate, currently a maximum of only 20%. If the finds are donated to a museum, the full appraised value is deductible. Of the 1980 Margarita partnership, Burke says, "I tell my investors they've made four or five times their money."

Actually, no one knows yet what most of the treasure is worth. "There has never been any situation like this," says Wiley Grant, chairman of the Commissioner's Art Advisory Panel, which must approve donations taken as tax deductions. "There's been nothing of this magnitude or the magnificence of these particular items. All of this stuff is documented, and the publicity has made it more valuable. Really, the market will have to determine what it is worth."

Meanwhile, Mel Fisher's dream has turned out to be a unique contribution to the world's cultural heritage. Starting next year, Thomas Hoving, a former director of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art who is now organizing traveling cultural exhibits, plans to take the 1622 haul on a world-wide tour. As for Fisher, he is still dreaming, this time of finding the mother lode: 1,078 silver ingots that sank with the Atocha. And maybe he will.

This article, written by Jane O'Reilly, originally appeared in an issue of Time magazine. Undercurrent takes all responsibility for editorial modifications and additions.

If you're interested in investing, you may contact Mel Fisher directly by calling 1-305/294-3336 or by writing:
Mel Fisher
Treasure Salvors
200 Greene Street
Key West, Florida 33040

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Dear Undercurrent

—Readers Give Us The Business

Although we get a fair stream of communication from our readers, our newsletter format seems to preclude publishing a typical letter-to-the-editor column. In the last couple of months, however, we've made a gaffe or two worth noting, and readers have written some pieces worth sharing with other readers. So, for those of you who have given us the business --here's our response.

Dear Undercurrent:

I just received my first issue of *Undercurrent* so I have no way of knowing whether or not your writers are usually as disoriented as the author of the piece on "Long Island and Block Island, New York." Either you have taken some unwise editorial privileges with his text or else he is in too deep, because we who dive these waters in control of our faculties know that Block Island is in Rhode Island. The community of New Shoreham, which constitutes the municipal entity there, has threatened to secede, it is true. But at last report they still belonged to our state. New Yorkers are undoubtedly envious, and the prices on the island are certainly "New York," but for the time being we are disinclined to give up so beautiful a place.

*Harold E. Kemble
Warwick, R.I.*

Since I wrote the headline for that article, our NY reporter insisted that I respond, even though I prefer to keep my embarrassment out of the public eye. We here on the West Coast always thought the RI meant Rhode Idaho and God knows there ain't no islands in Idaho. So we apologize and now give you back Block Island -- but only if you take Fire Island, as well.

CC

Dear Undercurrent:

I just received your March, 1983 issue and was quite surprised when I noticed that you misplaced Grand Turk in the Caribbean. The Bahamas, Turks and Caicos, the Florida Keys and Bermuda are in the Atlantic Ocean -- to be more specific the North Atlantic Ocean. They are not Caribbean-like nor do they have a Caribbean flavor.

*Gary Kilbride
St. Thomas*

Ah, how true. There is nothing like that deep chocolate flavor of the Caribbean. That can only be the taste of Chocolate ribbon farther north. But, frankly, it is not *Undercurrent* who misplaced Grand Turk, but the Great Mapmaker herself, for had she put the Great Barrier Reef and Australia in the

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Princeton Tectonics: Pressure Gauges & Bottom Timers

—How To Correct Two Annoying Problems

Princeton Tectonics' submersible pressure gauges, PG-1 and PG-2, come equipped with a blow-out plug. Should a leak develop inside the gauge, the plug will pop out and release the excessive air pressure. That's not a bad idea.

However, when the external (i.e., ambient pressure) drops below the pressure in the gauge, the plug also may pop. This may occur in a private plane where the atmospheric pressure is significantly less than the gauge pressure. Or when the sun heats up the gauge so that the internal pressure is significantly *higher* than the outside pressure.

If the plug has loosened or popped, the gauge will leak. Bill Stephens, President of Princeton Tectonics, told *Undercurrent* that they have changed the plug in the newer models of the gauge "in the hopes that this will eliminate the problem."

If the plug has loosened, it can simply be pushed back in, preferably with a small screwdriver (though it's possible to do it by hand). If it has popped out, it needs replacement before the next dive. Since the plug costs about 15¢, it would be wise to tote a couple of spares just in case.

As for the Bottom Timer, if it sits idle for a few months, the o-ring in the stem tends to flatten out, making it difficult to pull out the stem to set the time. To solve the problem, turn the stem *counterclockwise* to loosen up the o-rings. Then pull out the stem to set the timer. There is no need to apply silicon grease, nor should the stem be forced.

Caribbean, we wouldn't have to pay such exorbitant air fares to get there. And while she was at it, she could have made room by putting Puerto Rico in New York to save all those people the air fares. Better yet, she might have put it next to Block Island, to give the people from Rhode Idaho one more thing to complain about.

Ed.

Dear Editor:

In your May 1983 issue of *Undercurrent* you have an article entitled "The Free-Lance Diving Instructor."

The issue I take is the profound conclusion drawn by the author in which he stated that dive-shop/resorts were superior to the college/universities in instructing scuba diving.

I have been a certified scuba instructor for over 20 years. (PADI #527.) I have taught scuba classes in two college programs during this period. I have also had the opportunity to observe dive-shop programs here in the Southeast, and students produced by them have been active in my program -- both as students and doing recreational diving from the college boats.

My observation of divers fresh out of the diveshop/resort courses is that, as a rule, they are not nearly as prepared for openwater dives as those who come from a college/university-level program.

The advantages of college/university-level programs are dramatic.

1. College programs should be considered as any of the other physical activities taught without a profit motive: the main bearing is on instructing the student.

2. Instructors in college-level programs are usually better educated. Masters or Ph.D. degree is required which makes them more articulate and well-prepared to teach.

3. College/universities have excellent facilities: olympic-size pools, classrooms with the latest in audio-visual equipment and varied training aids.

4. Ample time is allocated for the class and pool practice, usually on the quarter system -- ten weeks long.

5. Since there are no sales involved, the program can be objective with the student and eliminate those that are lacking in the skills for safe pursuit of this sport.

6. Quality control is built into the system with a rigid chain of command. Instructor to department chairman to dean. Most college classes now incorporate a faculty evaluation by the students which gives instant feedback if there is a problem.

My observations of diveshop/resort scuba programs are:

1. The instructor is seldom an educator; most times they have another job and this is just a sideline.

2. The facilities are very poor at best. Often a borrowed pool of limited size such as a backyard type or small motel pool, and they have limited access to it.

3. There is seldom the weeding out of weak students due to the possibility of good equipment sales.

4. With limited facilities, the time/money factor places a sense of urgency on the program and they are rushed along.

5. Quality control is non-existent. The diveshop owner, who may be the instructor, is not going to go contrary to human nature and be objective about his program. The diving agencies, such as PADI or NAUI, can only provide minimum standards to follow. They are limited in their means of screening classes.

*James V. Miller
Albany Junior College
Albany, Georgia*

Your points are good ones, but the example we site in our story -- at San Francisco State University -- wouldn't necessarily fit your model. The truth is there are good and bad programs in both systems.

Our conclusion is not so much that you get better training at a diveshop, but that because a diveshop is in business to sell equipment, a diveshop owner will ensure that his students get their c-cards if they pass the course. In the case we site, the college was ambivalent. Its purpose is not the issuance of c-cards, but to ensure that its students get a grade and credit.

Ed.

Dear Undercurrent:

As an active sport diver, I have been impressed with *Undercurrent* over the years. It has been by far one of the most influential and informative dive magazines available to the scuba diving industry.

I would like to bring light to an article in your June issue that I found extremely biased. I found the author's comments about Divers Way, a Long Island shop, totally inaccurate. I also find it hard to believe that the gentleman who wrote the article had really ever visited Divers Way

*Robert Auteri,
Former President of
Divers Way Scuba Club*

Had this simply been a case of my "bias" (as a consumer reporter) against your "bias" (as an obvious friend of the shop), I would have discounted the letter. But someone at Divers Way raised enough commotion among their friends to get upwards of a dozen letters sent off to us, so a response is in order.

I stand by what I said, yet I can make some correc-

tion. I complained about the operating hours; in the summer they're fine, and I should have stated that. In the winter, however, they have a truncated schedule, so I select other shops which have longer operating hours.

I have visited Divers Way a number of times, sometimes to buy equipment, other times just to look around, as might any diving junkie. The service has always been spotty, and I sense that regulars get first call. That's why I make other recommendations in the article for visiting divers. Since the article has been published, I've revisited the shop and still stand by my comments.

Divers Way does have a large inventory and good prices. For local divers who get to know the people, I have no doubt they do just fine. For visiting divers, I still recommend Atlantis II, Danny's, Port Diver, Richards Aqualung, and 7Z's.

*The East Coast
Correspondent*

One other correction. I said the training pool for the Suffolk dive center is 40 miles from the shop. It was. Now they are using the pool at the much closer Huntington Y.

The NY Correspondent.

Dear Undercurrent:

In regard to your story on the treatment of stings, I recommend Preparation H for Man O' War stings. (Don't laugh, it works -- I tried it first hand!) It works faster and relieves pain when the usual methods don't work. Also, let me suggest Natural Papaya Enzyme for motion sickness. I recommend it any day above Dramamine.

*Julia Wright Anderson
Baytown, Texas*

Thanks for your suggestion. A few year's back I saw a Texas diver down on 7-mile beach in Cayman putting Preparation H on his arms. I just presumed he didn't know his ass from his elbows. Now I know better.

Ed.

Undercurrent correspondents are 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.
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