

undercurrent®

THE PRIVATE, EXCLUSIVE GUIDE FOR SERIOUS DIVERS

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The Grenadines, Windward Islands, Caribbean -- Tacking, Diving ... Cruising, Jibing

Dear Reader,

It was my job to man the starboard winch for the main staysail and to tail the jib sheet. She was a red-hulled 60-foot schooner and we were trucking into Carriacou's Tyrell Bay at a good 6 knots, on our fourth tack.

"Ready about," Captain Alfred Schmid yelled. "Ready," chimed the crew. I pulled in the sheet as fast as I could, switching to the winch when the strain became too great. We were headed into the midst of a dozen moored boats. With this untrained crew, Alfred was fearless. He zipped past a large catamaran, whose dozen French passengers stood with mouths agape. "Drop the jib," he shouted, and down it came, with the staysail following. He zigged to port to clear the bowsprit of a 90-foot schooner, zagged to starboard to avoid a bareboat charter, then turned 90 degrees into the wind. Down came the mainsail and Xerb slid to a stop in three boat lengths, surrounded by a flotilla of cruise boats.

Yeah, we were hot dogs, but the adrenaline was flowing. And the tension broke quickly as the French broke into applause and a cruising couple on the Irwin 38 raised their tonic glasses in a toast. It was all great fun. For five minutes I felt famous.

I had come to the Grenadines not only to dive, but also to sail, and indeed this was sailing. And the diving? Well, let me describe one dive, which rated among the best I've taken in 15 years of Caribbean diving.

We began the morning with a breakfast of cereal, mangoes, papayas and yogurt, boat-baked bread, and soft boiled eggs, then departed at 8:30 am by sail from Union Island. It was a leisurely three-hour trip in ten knot winds to the Sisters, two rocks less than two acres in size, a few hundred yards off the island of Carriacou ("Carry-a-coo"). Though most of our dives were from the

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Zodiac, this time Alfred motored Xerb near the rocks, and my buddy and I stepped over the side amidships. At 20 feet the current moved us gradually up between the two rocks. Not liking that choice, I reversed and dropped in 30 feet to ride a gentle lateral current that circumnavigated the stones. At once, I was aware of a magnificent garden of soft coral and sea fans rising more than six feet from the bottom. It was as thick as the underbrush in a Brazilian rainforest and stretched as far as I could see in the 75-foot visibility -- and well over halfway around the rock. Mostly brown and beige, it was dotted with fluorescent sponges, purple sea fans, and red and orange sponges. Eight-foot corky sea fingers bent gently in the current. Believe me, it was a beautiful forest, virtually unrivaled in my Caribbean diving. Among the corals were a plethora of tropicals, including scads of color-changing coney, spot fin and banded butterflies, a couple of large trumpets, scrawled file fish and, at the end of the dive, two enormous barracuda, surely six-footers. (You may suspect I exaggerate because of the magnification property of water; but I determine the length of a fish by comparing it to a nearby human, and these creatures were the equal of my six-foot buddy.) Wow.

The Windward Islands stretch from Martinique to the north to Grenada to the south. Within this 172-mile stretch are St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, with a score of civilized moorings at such islands as Bequia, (Beckwē), Mustique and Union where one can head ashore for a beer, a meal or a t-shirt. If one wishes to avoid commercialism, there are other safe anchorages in serene surroundings at these or a few of the 120 lesser islands. Anywhere from two to 20 people can charter just about any size craft, with or without a captain and cook, with or without a compressor, with or without food on board, for as many days as desired. It's freedom galore, at prices ranging upwards from \$50/day/person for a bare boat and \$100/day/person for a crewed boat.

It took me a week's time and a dozen phone calls to charter agencies (see sidebar) to find a sailboat with a compressor for the July/August dates when two longtime male friends and I could free ourselves from family or business responsibilities. A number of agencies offered boats with tanks (but without compressors), suggesting that we get them filled along the way. But when Undercurrent visited the Grenadines in 1982, we found one working compressor in all the islands and no one able to take out divers. Rather than chance it, a compressor was a prerequisite. And we wanted a captain who knew the dive sites, as well as a cook who would feed us well.

On both counts, German-born Alfred and Irene performed admirably. They have owned Xerb since 1980, operating it in the Caribbean in the winter, while frequently sailing to the Mediterranean for summer charters. Xerb was built for speed, not comfort, to which its eighth-place finish in the Whitbread 'Round the World Race in the 1970s will attest. Prior to the trip, we had been asked to provide our preferred itinerary -- we selected a one-way journey from St. Lucia to Grenada, from where we would fly home -- and comestible requests. Feed us fruits and cereals for breakfast, we said, with plenty of vegetables, salads and fish for other meals. And stick aboard mineral water, a decent wine, local beers, a bottle of good dark rum. It was all there when we arrived.

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Diving And Cruising The Caribbean

What is more adventurous than being in charge of your own liveaboard trip, making the decisions about when you want to dive, when you want to travel, and where you want to go? It's great sport.

Scores of charter boat agents can help you fulfill that fantasy in the Caribbean, Fiji, the South Pacific and elsewhere. They track down the kind of boat you want in the area you want, taking 15-20% commission from the charter fee. Depending upon the season, you can expect to pay from \$350 to \$600 per night to charter a skippered 40-foot boat, meals and diving included.

When I began looking, I first contacted Seven Seas Charters, the only agency I found advertising in *Skin Diver*. Sylvie Saint Cyr was quite knowledgeable. Although she was unable to find me a crewed boat with a compressor for the precise dates I needed, she had boats for other periods and offered several good suggestions. (900 Virginia Drive, Sarasota, FL 34234; 813/355-5355; 800/346-5355.)

Trade Winds Yacht Charters in St. Lucia (with headquarters in New York) found *Xerb*. They performed quickly and efficiently by fax and were always helpful when I called to discuss arrangements. That they are located 75 yards from where *Xerb* and scores of other boats tie up is no doubt an advantage. (475 Park Ave. So., 35th Floor, New York, NY 10016; 800/825-7245.)

Boats available in the Caribbean with compressors include *Moorea*, a 42-foot ketch whose captain is a PADI instructor (Port O Call; 816/756-2363); *Solace*, an Irwin 68 with a freshwater jacuzzi built into the deck (Windward

Mark, 800/633-7900) and the 43-foot *Soliloquy*, well regarded for its cuisine (Seven Seas, 800/346-5355).

When considering chartering a boat, one would be well served by picking up any of several sailing magazines at a good newsstand. Many carry all sorts of advertisements for crewed and bareboats. Especially useful to potential cruisers are two monthlies, *Cruising World* and *Yachting*, and a bimonthly, *Yacht Vacations*.

If you make the trip, take with you the indispensable *Sailors' Guide to the Windward Islands* by Chris Doyle. Its 224 waterproof pages are filled with plenty of information about marinas and safe anchorages (with basic charts), the bars, restaurants and shops you'll find ashore, and even the ship-to-shore channels you need to order up everything from a chartered dive trip to a prop replacement. Its section on diving has several tips about good dive sites, (\$17.45 from Cruising Guide Publications, POB 13131, Sta 9, Clearwater, FL 34621; 813/796-2469. They also offer the *Cruising Guide to the Virgin Islands* -- \$17.95 -- and guides to Tahiti, Tonga, and many other archipelagos.)

If you're going to bareboat, have your bookstore order you a copy of Alan Lucas' *Cruising in Tropical Waters and Coral* (International Marine Publishing Company; 21 Elm St., Camden, MA 94843), replete with information about dodging coral heads, predicting the weather, trade winds, emergency repairs, and the like.

C.C., travel editor

Chartering any boat is a free-form experience, so to give you the best flavor of this journey, let me simply refer to the notes I took each day.

Day 1: Fodney Bay to Marigot Bay, St. Lucia: Board *Xerb* at 11 am. Alfred, slightly cherubic in a Germanic sort of way, no doubt runs this craft while his wife is second mate. In addition to German, they speak Italian, French, Spanish and English. *Xerb's* an impressive craft above (a teak deck!), tight quarters below. Spread my camera gear on the top in my tiny double bunk cabin instead of the fold-out table. Light lunch, then pull anchor at 1:30 for 2 1/2-hour sail to Marigot Bay. I suggest going further, but Alfred prefers this safe harbor, where Dr. Dolittle was filmed. Go ashore by Zodiac for a hill climb and harbor photography, a couple of beers in the local pub where scores of sailors show for cocktails. Dinner aboard, with exceptional pork loin (such a rich sauce!), plenty of potatoes, freshly baked bread, salad, fruit and wine. Sleeping is a bitch. Hot, stuffy, and a squadron of tiny mosquitoes come aboard to drive all of us nuts.

Day 2: Bequia: After breakfast depart at 7 AM for 6 1/2-hour channel crossing to St. Vincent. Set the course, trim the sails, and once past St. Lucia's proud Pitons set sights on St. Vincent. When not at the wheel, I sit quietly much of the time, in peace with the wind, sky and sea. Only sounds of the bow hitting the water and the wind hitting the sails accompany my solo thoughts. That changes for the worse when we enter an isolated harbor with a grubby disco blaring bad rock and roll across the water. We buy a lobster from boys come alongside and have lunch before climbing into the Zodiac for a typical St. Vincent dive, of which I've had many before. On the south side of the inlet the bottom begins with boulders; then, as we move out to the reef, there are plenty of small fish, nice corals, gorgonia, black coral, scores of crinoids out and about in daylight, small eels, a profusion of black sea urchins, and less than 50-foot visibility. Back on board, we decide the disco sucks. We move on by motor, cruising in the dark, through a rain squall to Bequia for an 8:30 arrival, dinner of lobster risotto and sleep. Damned if a few mosquitoes haven't stowed away during the daylight.

Day 3: Bequia: Awake to watch the huge gaff-rigged schooner Friendship Rose depart Admiralty Bay and unfurl its canvas for its 6:30 AM daily trip to St. Vincent. With no airport, water is the only way to come or go. Thirty boats are moored in the harbor; stunning couple on adjacent boat with Danish flag walk about in the buff, cups of steaming coffee in their hands. She bathes in the harbor, than washes off with hose. Couldn't find the damn binoculars. After breakfast we Zodiac ashore. Alfred clears us through immigration while Mike and I arrange an afternoon dive with Dive Bequia. Arthur signs up for resort course. Roam the charming streets and duck into a rum house to avoid storm; three locals slug down copious amounts of white rum, then hop in their cars as soon as storm dissipates. After lunch Sachs picks us up at Xerb to dive "the boulders," five minutes away. Great and splendid gardens of black gorgonia and soft corals galore. Plenty of tropicals: scorpion fish with three coral shrimp climbing on it; large school of barracuda-like southern sennet circle; 12-foot nurse shark lies in a cut; I drop down to visit but realize that the passageway is so narrow, if she makes a fast exit I might get bashed. Visibility 40-60 feet. Sachs accompanies the entire dive. Arthur does well on first plunge and gushes with excitement afterwards. He's hooked on the underwater world. Go ashore for evening beers and eat Rotis (mashed potatoes and a chicken leg wrapped in a tortilla) at the Green Bowl. Half the people in the bars I saw in Marigot Bay. We nod to one another. Quite a circuit, this sailing circuit.

For The Landlubber

A diver need not sail the Grenadines to enjoy them. There are four small hotels, where guided diving is readily available. Any travel agent will be able to dig up more information for you.

Cotton House, Mustique. It's a short walk to the beaches from this hilltop resort, located on an island developed only for the rich and famous; Mick Jagger and Princess Margaret have digs here. Rent their houses by calling 305/833-4454 or contact the Cotton House at 809/456-4777.

Palm Island. Highly recommended. A 100-acre island with 24 rooms in beach side villas. Casual, friendly, and well regarded by return visitors and visiting mariners. A five-minute boat ride from Union Island. 809/458-4804; 212/535-9530.

Petit St. Vincent. 22 stone cottages on this 113-acre island. Isolated, expensive, and very well regarded. 513/242-1333; 800/654-9326.

Plantation House, Bequia. Simply furnished pleasant cottages on manicured grounds, a few steps away from Dive Bequia and a few more from the shops and restaurants along Bequia's shoreline. 809/658-3524.

Day 4: Tobago Cays: After breakfast, head with Dive Bequia for "the Wall"

which drops to a bottom at 120 feet. Fellow who dived here yesterday saw plenty of fish, he said, but today it is nearly barren. At the end of the dive, come to a rich vertical wall bathed with an upward surge. I hover between 40 and 20 feet in the direct sunlight from above; the colors are resplendent. The fish, coral and sponges know no up and down, so this vertical wall has all the characteristics of a horizontal bottom. With perfectly trimmed buoyancy my world is tilted 90 degrees. An ex-New Jerseyite, Dive Bequia owner Bob Sachs has his rough NJ edge; locals say he is difficult to work for (he says he can't get good help), but I forgive those traits when he lets me burn up my air alone -- without him and the others who patiently wait in the boat for me to surface. He drops us off at Xerb, where we bid goodbye. I go ashore one more time -- there's a great feeling to this little community -- to buy a hand-carved whaling boat. Told that locals still go out annually to harpoon whales and once in a while get one. Hoist sails for Tobago Cays. I take the wheel for awhile, but prefer sitting quietly. An hour before sunset we take a safe anchorage between small cays. A rum or two, dinner, stories about sailing and diving, and a hardy discussion about the fat content of the luscious butter and cream-laden sauces. Back in Sausalito it'll be Lean Cuisine. To bed by 9:30. It's been a full day, yet now it seems like I've done so little. But it's so complete.

Day 5: Union Island: After breakfast, head six miles into the Atlantic to lonely Sail Rock, where Mike and I climb down to the small Zodiac, which Alfred motors to the opposite side of the Rock. We check the surface current, then tell Alfred we will ride it clockwise around the rock. I toss my tank and stabilizing

Goodbye Grenadines

The Grenadines comprise scores of small and tiny islands with delicate marine environments. With much of the underwater beauty confined to relatively small areas -- the whole reef I wrote about at the Sisters probably incorporates about ten acres of bottom around two acres of rocks -- the diving remains virgin because few divers visit. A Carriacou resident told me that at the Sisters he sees a "couple of people out there once or twice a week."

Not for long. The 160-passenger/diver *Aquanaut Ambassador* will begin touring the Grenadines this December. When not diving, passengers can go to the beauty salon, the jacuzzi, or the swimming pools. Or the casino. Cruise ship dive boats get more than their share of turkey divers. After two or three seasons of traffic, I would wager, many of these beautiful reefs in the Grenadines will be beaten to rubble by the 160 divers descending upon them every other week.

There is no way to control such a massacre short of lining up one of these mothers in a periscope. While the training agencies do all they can to crank out more and more divers, they try to convince us ordinary divers that growth is good. It's good for them. But why is it good for me? So that the manufacturers have large enough to produce pastel stabilizing jackets? To support an industry

of floating casinos transporting resort course tyros to virgin territory? I want this?

Undercurrent is not "the industry." We're sport divers. We have the same number of subscribers today that we had in 1977. We target our publication to an elite corps of divers who care. So, I'm not interested in growth in numbers.

But I am interested in preservation. Passionately interested. 160 divers will forever change the character of these small Grenadine reefs. Ask anyone who has witnessed the deterioration of the reefs off Grand Cayman's 7 mile beach in the last ten years. Now, thanks to floating dive troop ships, every virgin reef in the world can follow that example. And I think it stinks.

Now I have no ill words for the smaller liveaboards that go to the remote parts of the world. These are marketed to experienced divers who know buoyancy control. They move from reef to reef, often not repeating the anchoring sites of previous trips.

But not the new fleet of floating hotels. They are marketed to the masses. And their anchors, their divers, their bilges, and their very presence mean that our ocean and our reefs will never be the same.

Goodbye Grenadines.

C.C., travel editor

vest into the water, but Mike wears a horsecollar, making it difficult for him to get dressed in the Zodiac. Below, I find forest of black gorgonia, interspersed with sea fans and corky sea fingers; bright chartreuse sponges with flat heads dot an area. A school of 100+ grey snapper play hide and seek in the coral heads. I swim into a thermocline; the terrain becomes dreamlike, like a view through a soft-focus lens. The current reverses itself and we can't continue to our rendezvous, so we return to the backside once, more surfacing ten minutes early at our entry point, 20 yards farther out. Here, surprisingly, the current moves away from the rock, and we soon find ourselves being carried out to sea, with no sign of the Zodiac. I finally see Alfred in the Zodiac moving back and forth, but we're 200 yards from the rock, 15 minutes in the water. In the two-foot rollers I can no longer see Xerb's hull. Mike sounds a little fearful and he clutches my arm. As we drift farther from the sight of Xerb, I assure him of Alfred's seamanship. He calms down, and soon Alfred's sweeping concentric circles help him spot us; 20 minutes after surfacing we climb into the Zodiac. On board, we note that the next stop was the Ivory Coast. Sailing back to Tobago Cays, we catch a barracuda which becomes ceviche, accompanied by cheese, bread, fruit and salad. Alfred and I take a calm dive, petting a sting ray, nearly bumping into a nurses shark, and spotting plenty of tropicals in this lush underwater terrain. The Grenadines are sensational macro territory; every dive has an unlimited supply of tube worms and plenty of varieties of small shrimp, occasionally flamingo tongues and other little critters. We pull anchor for Union Island, where at dusk we head ashore for cocktails and t-shirts, then back to Xerb for barracuda, beautifully baked. Irene puts up cowls of fabric to direct wind into cabins, which helps ventilation enormously. I should sleep on the cool deck, under the stars, but by the time I think of it, I fall back into dreamland.

Day 6: Carriacou: After breakfast we sail for Carriacou, arriving after our dive at Two Sisters. We consider another dive, but opt for a walk on shore and relaxing with books while Alfred cranks up his compressor to fill his ten 3000 psi tanks. It takes 15 minutes a tank, too slow if the boat were filled with six gorilla divers.

Day 7: Carriacou: Motor ashore and hop a jitney to town, so that Alfred can record our entry with customs (this is Grenada). A small island with virtually no

tourist development, it's preparing for race week, in which local boats race with one another, sloops race up from Grenada, and tonight the queen will be crowned. We jitney back for an afternoon dive, the least interesting of the week; plenty of fish and coral, but shallow and murky. Upon surfacing Alfred must pump up the

No Compressor Required

In 1982, *Undercurrent* found air available on only one island in the Grenadines.

Today, air, as well as guided dives, is available on several islands. You can call ahead from your home town to arrange diving, or call on channels 16 or 68 on your ship-to-shore phone. Most of these folks will pick you up at your sailboat for a dive, or even pick up your tanks for a fill.

Anse Chastenet, St. Lucia, 809/454-7354

Bequia Beach Club, Friendship Bay,

809/458-3248

Dive Bequia, Plantation Hotel,

809/458-3504

Canouan Diving Club (*air only*),

809/458-4413

Dive Mustique, Cotton House,

809/456-4777

Dive St. Vincent, 809/457-4714

Palm Island, 809/458-4804

Scuba Safari (Union Island),

809/458-8318

Sunspots (Bequia), 809/458-3577

With the availability of air throughout the Grenadines, chartering a boat with a compressor may make diving a little easier -- but it is certainly no longer essential.

C.C., travel editor

Zodiac before returning to Xerb; the Zodiac has been gushing air all week and liquid patching has not worked. After a 3000-calorie dinner we decide the Queen will have to rule without us.

Day 8: Grenada: Alfred is all smiles after landing a Spanish mackerel -- this is "the best," he says. As we sail into a rain squall, the wind dies. We drop the sails and I take the helm (Irene brings me a slicker and pants) for nearly two hours. Finally, sunlight strikes picturesque St. Georges, the first real city on the trip. The harbor is too urban after our quiet mooring elsewhere. Damn, I can actually see cars whipping by on the shore. Dinner at Mama's, where 17 plates of food, including plantains, breadfruit, pork, greens, mango and armadillo, are served to the five of us. My belly aches.

Day 9: Grenada: "Let's sail it," we say, and away we go out to sea, driving hard, hard tacking, and having one whale of a time in good wind and seas. Lightening cracks in the sky and rain falls in short spurts. We're goin' for it. After noon, we pull into Prickly Bay and Zodiac to the Horseshoe Beach Hotel, which I reviewed just last year. I loved it. But today a ganja-laced guard tells me the owner and divemaster split up. The hotel is ghostly quiet. Only my sweet memories remain. Now, time to motor back to the main harbor, where we must bid goodbye to Alfred and Irene -- they've become family -- and motor ashore to start our journey home.

Retrospective: All in all, quite a remarkable trip. Surprisingly good diving. Excellent meals. Wonderful islands. Great cruising. Alfred quite accommodating with his boat, giving us freedom to sail or dive whenever and wherever we like. Yet, there are certainly better cruising boats, and if next time I was to be part of a group other than three men in a boat, I would opt for more amenities. Air conditioning? Most people will sleep more comfortably with it, but to me it seems inconsistent with sailing with the wind, sea and stars. And that's what the journey aboard Xerb was all about.

C.C., travel editor

Divers' Compass: Xerb charters at \$3750 for seven days in the summer; the price hits \$5200 in the winter, all food and diving included, whether one or six persons are aboard. . . . Bring collapsible luggage, shorts, t-shirts, and not much else in the way of apparel. . . .

Beyond Embarrassment:

-- The Musings Of An Occasional Diver

A sailing friend of mine once said that 90 percent of what sailors do is to look good for other sailors.

Probably the same comment could be made about diving. Embarrassment is commonly defined as "experiencing a state of self-conscious distress," but I prefer the vernacular syllables right there within the word itself: "bar(e) ass."

As an occasional diver, "bare ass" is something I too often experience. I dive six to twelve times a year, usually on one or two tropical vacations. And like anything else, after a six- to twelve-month layoff, I am a "rusty diver." I am not unsafe. I have 13 years' experience and am very conservative. But some

things that happen can often make me the butt of diver jokes.

Preparation and Gear

I like to use dive gear for as long as it is serviceable, which can be forever with proper maintenance. (My equipment works well and I don't dive enough to warrant an expensive changeover. This carries into other areas as well. It caused my preppy wife no end of discomfort when I was still wearing bell-bottoms into the '80s.) All of my dive gear is at least 10 years old, and some of it closer to 15. I did splurge on a

new knife and mask for my last trip. The knife was inconsequential and the 13-year-old mask worked better than the new one. I am about to inherit a "second-generation" wet suit top from the same buddy who gave me his original (I cut the arms off that one because there were unpatchable elbow holes in the dried-out neoprene). I still use a horse collar BC. My gauge console is jury-rigged and I don't have an octopus. I pack my gear in an ugly, 20-year-old suitcase. (No one will steal that at the Miami airport.) Once on site, I transfer it to a net bag. However, despite the utility, I get a lot of comments from people. "Nobody uses a horse collar anymore." "Does that top still keep you warm?" "What's the suitcase for?"

Though I check the gear before I leave, occasionally age does show. The last time out, the zipper on my wet top stuck. I forgot how to climb through all those little straps and into my horse collar. And it took some thought to remember over which shoulder the regulator should fall (it helped to watch someone else hook up his regulator first), then it took a couple of false starts before I got mine attached to the tank correctly. Everyone is helpful, but heads shake. I even learned of a magic substance to unstick the zipper: spit.

The Diving Frame of Mind

I accept that I am rusty. To counter this, I review the basics before a trip and even listen to DAN's diving medicine review tapes. I ask the guides for a little extra watchfulness.

Unfortunately, this often garners an unhelpful response: "Do you have a log?" (No.) "Listen to the lecture for the people being certified (don't hold your breath, here is how to clear your mask)." "Can you handle the first dive?" Granted, there are safety concerns being expressed. Yet, I feel like it is the third grade again.

The Pace and the Race

My life is swift with a serious job, a family (two children) and numerous other responsibilities. When I vacation, I want to *slow down*, to leave the rush of life behind. Patrick Finley, a San Francisco Bay Area writer, states that the word "vacation . . . comes

"Many of us turn vacations into quasi-duties filled with schedules and intentions. Everything a diver does can be subsumed under the phrase, 'do it slowly.' Yet, I find the pace frequently set by other divers more like my work pace."

from the Latin 'to vacate, to empty' . . . nothing to account for, support or accomplish . . . or justify."

Yet many of us turn vacations into quasi-duties, filled with schedules and intentions. Everything a diver does can be subsumed under the phrase, "do it slowly." Yet, I find the pace frequently set by other divers more like my work pace.

Everyone rushes to the boat. They're anxious to leave the dock. The pace does slow somewhat during the ride, but once there, it is like Marines landing at Iwo Jima, "everyone in, move it, move it." What is the rush? And once in, it is full bore around the site. The philosophy seems to be: "cover the most territory." And the trip home is often a race across the waves. Pile out, unload the boat, pay the bill. Go. Go. Go.

I like to follow photographers: let the reef come to me. On a trip to the Grenadines, it was myself, my dive buddy and our own sailboat (the two of us!). No herd, slow down, take your time. After a few dives, I heard, "Are you usually the last off the dive boats?" And even when I rushed, it never was quick enough. I started sounding like my four-year-old son: "I'm trying, I'm trying."

Going Down, Coming Up (Where is the Anchor Chain?) and In Between

A big problem is remembering how much weight I need, and it never seems to be the right amount ("You look about 9 pounds"). I let the air out of my BC and watch everyone else descend while I keep bobbing, the water barely over my head, getting sick from the surge. I fin down like a wounded fish. On Bequia, the guide was concerned and guided me down. Thanks. The price: "How long have you been diving?" "13 years." More head-shaking.

I suppose part of the thrill is large fish, especially sharks. I tend to stay clear -- dorsal fins make me anxious. On one dive my rapid retreat became a positive signal for my buddy. When he saw me race out of a cave, he knew it was something he wanted to see (a 12-foot nurse shark with a head that appeared two feet across).

Surfacing, I have a terrible fear of the open water swim to the boat. I'm an average swimmer and fatigue somewhat easily. And on occasion, a current has made this a reality. On one dive, after slugging against a current and being asked twice, from the boat, whether I was okay, I decided to pack it in. The guide swam the distance in five seconds and hauled me on board. Everyone had a chance for a few wise cracks. Fortunately for my ego, someone else was bitten on the ear by a turtle.

On another occasion, while drifting toward Africa, I had five minutes of near panic. The current was swift, the boat was lost in the swells and the guide was searching in the wrong area. I clamped onto my buddy and, at his encouragement, listened to stories

about how we could survive for two days! We were picked up 20 minutes later and, as expected, my "near panic" received a full (and reasonably gentle) airing.

Years ago, after a dive in Hawaii, I had a pain in my toe. A couple days later, still worried, I confessed the pain to my buddy, and wondered out loud whether I had been bent. When the pain returned after the next dive, I learned that my fin was too tight. We both got a laugh, he more than I.

Moral

On my next vacation I will probably repeat some of the above lapses and gaffes or create some new ones. I have learned that I can avoid some if I figure out my gear before my first dive. And before each individual dive, I need to anticipate the time we're going to hit the water so I can start getting my stuff together early to respect my own pace.

Why Divers Die: Part III

-- Older Men, Younger Women, A 10-Year-Old Boy

The National Underwater Accident Data Center (NUADC) at the University of Rhode Island investigates and analyzes the diving fatalities of United States citizens wherever they were diving. For several years, *Undercurrent* has been analyzing these reports, editing and condensing them, and sharing the relevant data with our readers. We believe that by reporting the unique and varied circumstances in which divers die, we may all learn how to become safer as we conduct our own dives. This is the third in a series of articles discussing the 181 sport diving deaths that occurred in 1986 and 1987.

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Experience and Training

Early entrants into the sport accounted for 23% of the casualties during the two years. Yet, the great majority of fatalities during these years were individuals whose experience range from "some" to "substantial."

In 1987, there were seven deaths of students in beginning or advanced training and in 1988 there were eight deaths. Some of the cases from which we might learn lessons include:

A 64-year-old male who had been diving for 18 months and had completed a basic and intermediary training course was undergoing an advanced diver course. He and his buddy had been operating at 110 feet when the victim suddenly rushed for the surface. Upon surfacing, he appeared to be alright until he reached the boat, when he went into un-

"Most important, I can ask for, without embarrassment, a little bit of help."

Nonetheless, at my age (going on 50) and with a degree of success and maturity, embarrassment is less of an issue. I now chuckle openly at myself, apologize if necessary, and try to correct the problem. Most important, I can ask for, without embarrassment, a little bit of help. The price used to be high; it decreases each year. I am more relaxed and learning a lot more.

There are worse fates than appearing bare-assed before your buddies.

Michael H. Smith, Ph.D., is a consultant in organizational management and development in Oakland, CA. Much of his commentary comes after reflecting upon his diving with his frequent, always ready to go-go-go buddy, who only slows down once he gets below the surface: C.C., our speedy travel editor.

consciousness. CPR was attempted but it was impossible to revive him. The death was due to an air embolism.

Off the coast of Monterey, California, a 55-year-old male was in an advanced diving class. He had made an uneventful dive to 80 feet for 20 minutes with a normal ascent, but soon after surfacing he became unresponsive then went unconscious. Extensive CPR was immediately started, but was unsuccessful. The autopsy indicated asphyxiation due to drowning with no indication of any embolism or coronary condition.

Several training facilities involved older persons. These students require a more stringent physical examination to determine whether they can withstand the extra stress and effort of diving.

An embolism was the cause of death of a 27-year-old female who had been conducting a free swimming ascent with her instructor from a depth of 30 feet of water in a fresh water facility in New Mexico.

A 40-year-old woman who had displayed classic symptoms of apprehension during her pool training was about to take her first open water dive in the Gulf of Mexico. Almost immediately after entering the water, she felt so nervous and uneasy that she grabbed the anchor line of the dive boat. A wave swept her against the boat, but not hard enough to knock her unconscious. However, she suddenly collapsed. Despite all efforts at CPR, she died in the water. The doctor who conducted the autopsy was quoted as saying that she probably developed a very

rapid heartbeat when experiencing extreme nervousness, then apparently went into cardiac arrest.

An instructor must be constantly looking for the signs of anxiety, nervousness or fear on the part of a student. This is especially true of the first open water experience. Several of the cases cited were the result of such anxiety with panic and air embolism resulting.

An Oregon boy who reached his 10th birthday in March of 1987 died less than three months later on a beach in Seattle while engaged in an open water scuba class in which his father was also a student. The instructor and seven students, including the victim, had made a successful swim underwater to a buoy approximately 100 yards offshore. All of the students were returning, with the victim next to last on the underwater line with his father following him. Visibility was less than 18 inches. The boy surfaced without his mask on and his regulator out of his mouth, yelling for help, then disappeared below the surface. The boy was not missed until the father and other students arrived on shore. The victim's body was recovered after a two-hour search. Apparently the boy was wearing a wet suit too large for him with the sleeves and cuffs rolled up; he wore approximately 25 pounds of weight.

The death of a 42-year-old male took place on a Cape Cod beach during the victim's first open water exercise. The instructor entered the water with six students on a swim to a marker buoy and dive flag about 100 yards off the beach. The instructor proceeded to the bottom with four of his students while leaving the victim's buddy at the buoy to wait for the victim to reach the buoy. Winds of 20 to 25 miles per hour with 4- to 5-foot swells may have affected the situation. The victim was wearing about 36 pounds of lead, considerably more than necessary for his wet suit and other equipment. The victim called for help once or twice and was almost immediately pulled ashore. However, he was unconscious and did not respond to extensive resuscitation efforts.

Nearly every year of this study we find early open water fatalities resulting from the improper weighting of a student. Special care should be taken by the instructor on every first open water dive to determine proper buoyancy for each and every student.

At Jamestown, Rhode Island, a dive plan was laid out by an instructor for a simulated decompression dive of 90 feet for 20 minutes. During this exercise, the 35-year-old male victim indicated to his buddy after 17 minutes of diving that he was out of air. The two apparently buddy breathed up to 50 feet, where the buddy thought that he too was out of air. He tied off the victim at that depth and raced for the surface and called for help. An immediate search located the victim at a depth of about 50 feet, entangled in line. Extensive CPR efforts were unsuccessful and the autopsy revealed death from embolism.

Shark Attacks

It's rare for divers to be killed by sharks. But it happens. Since 1976, the National Underwater Accident Data Center has reported six deaths. This year, there have been none, but at least one scuba diver and three free divers have been attacked. We reported on two last month. There were two more hits in September.

Larry Stroup, a real estate developer from Albuquerque, was a tourist aboard the Ventura, California boat *Scuba Lover* to film blue sharks off the Channel Islands. Once the water around the boat had been baited to attract the blues, Stroup entered a shark cage. But he left the cage to get better shots, and a testy six-footer got nosy. Stroup said he bumped the shark a few times with his camera to chase it away, but it latched onto his right arm. He tried to pry open the shark's mouth with his free hand, but the shark refused to let go until it was struck by another diver. After returning to the boat through a cloud of his own blood, Stroup was picked up by the Coast Guard and the deep gashes on his forearm were repaired at the UCLA Harbor Medical Center.

In northern California, a 12-foot great white shark came out of nowhere and ripped into the left leg of an abalone free diver, shook him and dragged him through the water. After beating the shark away, 38-year-old Paul Tisserand was brought ashore by a Navy rescue helicopter for surgery to repair the 3-inch gash. He may have been mistaken for a sea lion, which breed in the area, said his partner, Scott Smith. "You enter the water here and you're entering the food chain," said Smith. They were diving at the Farallon Islands, renowned great white territory, 25 miles off San Francisco.

A freshwater-filled quarry in Pennsylvania was the site of the death of a 22-year-old female who was engaged in her second checkout dive during instruction. This victim apparently drifted away from her buddy diver and was not found until an hour later in 80 feet of water. The diagnosis was embolism.

A state beach in Los Angeles was the location of the death of a 19-year-old male who was undergoing a final checkout dive for basic certification. He had been accompanied by another student and an assistant instructor. Upon completion of an exercise, the victim was escorted to the surface and told to wait there until the other students had finished their exercise. Upon surfacing the victim was missing. He was soon found 30 feet deep, on the bottom with his regulator out of his mouth, mask off and one fin mis-

sion. Despite extensive CPR efforts, he was pronounced dead due to drowning.

It seems imperative that students be under close supervision at all times during open water training.

Leaving an individual student with an equally inexperienced buddy is an invitation, not only to a single disaster, but also to a possible double fatality.

Continued Next Issue.

DAN And The Insurance Business

-- Free No Longer

The Divers Alert Network (DAN), an offshoot of the Duke University Medical School, offers worldwide medical assistance to injured divers. If a diver gets bent, DAN physicians can be reached 24 hours a day to provide treatment consultation and to organize evacuation to the nearest recompression chamber. DAN solicits individual memberships at \$15 each, although their services are available to anyone.

Support in the dive community for DAN has been universal. A nonprofit organization, DAN has been able to get many dive publications to supply free advertising and DEMA to advance its membership.

No longer. You see, in 1987, DAN began offering its members a \$15,000 insurance policy, by North American Life and Casualty, to cover air evacuation from remote destinations and recompression chamber treatment for an additional \$25 above the \$15 dues. A year later, businessman Hillel Segal of Boulder, Colorado, began offering a similar policy underwritten by Casualty Underwriters Insurance, through his own company, Divers Security Insurance. Once Segal caught wind of the favored treatment DAN received, he began raising hell, trying to convince those who favor DAN to stop.

Segal has been lobbying DEMA, Skin Diver and anyone else who has given DAN free space to treat DAN like any other commercial entity. "If DAN restricted its activities to selling memberships at \$15 per year," he told *Undercurrent*, "that would fit into the nonprofit mode. But actively selling insurance, t-shirts, pins and other things is profit making and DAN is misusing their nonprofit standing."

On that count, Segal is wrong. The nonprofit American Association of Retired Persons was established mainly as a vehicle to sell insurance. The Sierra Club sells calendars, Greenpeace sells t-shirts, and every museum in the country sells replicas of artifacts and books. Furthermore, many nonprofit organizations offer these items as bonuses to attract new members. The law doesn't prohibit such activity. It regulates it only to the extent that net income from these activities, unlike income from membership dues and donations, is taxable.

According to DAN's Director of Marketing, Chris Wachholz, DAN doesn't take direct income from the insurance. "We are remunerated for expenses we incur while promoting the policy," he said, "and for

support services such as membership dues billing and maintenance of the membership list."

In 1987, DAN developed its insurance "product" to stimulate growth and provide a service for members. Nowhere else was such insurance available. Divers jumped at the opportunity, especially when they learned that injured divers without insurance were often required to demonstrate financial responsibility *before* an air ambulance would evacuate them to a chamber. DAN membership increased from less than 14,000 to 41,000, adding hundreds of thousands of dollars to DAN's coffers to finance its services. More than 35,000 members take the insurance option.

Segal charges \$25 for his policy for evacuation and chamber treatment, but with additional coverage for other diving-related injuries. He says it covers more than the DAN policy and claims it is cheaper because the additional \$15 membership fee isn't required. He also offers short-term coverage: 7 days for \$10; 21 days for \$15.

"Segal says that DAN's free advertising places DSI at a competitive disadvantage. DAN and DSI, he says, 'are not playing on a level field. DAN is selling insurance and making money from it.'"

Wachholz doesn't dispute Segal's claim as to the better value of the DSI Insurance, but he discounts it. The DSI policy gives the impression "that an equally severe problem exists for people who have minor cuts, trauma, bites, stings and ear problems as a result of scuba diving. But these problems are almost always covered by a diver's regular major medical plan."

But the real debate is not about the quality of the policy. To Segal it's about competition in the free market or, more specifically, Segal's desire to make money selling an insurance product similar to DAN's. Segal says that DAN's free advertising places DSI at a competitive disadvantage. DAN and DSI, he says, "are not playing on a level field. DAN is selling insurance and making money from it."

Wachholz is unhappy with Segal's claims. "We are not in the business of selling insurance. We don't make a commission. We get remuneration for expenses we incur." By providing insurance, Wachholz says, "more of our funding and staffing can be allocated to our primary activities of providing medical assistance." In July, DAN received more than 650 calls regarding medical questions and 158 medical emergency calls.

"We have been able to expand our services with the growth in memberships and, of course, by not having to allocate dollars and staff time to things like maintaining mailing lists, getting out dues billing and the like." Says Wachholz, "All the funds generated are spent with expanding present programs and developing new ones, such as our pilot study of diving fatalities."

Segal doesn't discount DAN's value. He told *Undercurrent* that "DAN is doing a great service by supporting medical advice and decompression and related research."

"When divers join DAN, they are taking a significant step to improve their own safety as well as that of diving in general. Members receive valuable information on how to be a safer diver. A significant part of the dues goes to support DAN's emergency hotline. None of this occurs when divers choose to simply buy insurance from DSI."

And that's precisely why Wachholz feels that Segal is inappropriately upstaging DAN. Says Wachholz: "When divers join DAN, they are taking a significant step to improve their own safety as well as that of diving in general. Members receive valuable information on how to be a safer diver. A significant part of the dues goes to support DAN's emergency hotline. None of this occurs when divers choose to

simply buy insurance from DSI. Other organizations in diving could have come out with a similarly competing plan as has DSI. However, the 'players' in the industry have consciously declined to do that because they recognize the importance of this program to DAN's viability."

Nonetheless, Segal's whistle-blowing has gotten to some of the "players" and affected DAN's ability to get free advertising. *Skin Diver* has been a generous supporter of DAN. Publisher Bill Gleason told us, "We have been donating public service space to DAN. However, there is a good case for seeing insurance as a for-profit activity. We'll continue to support DAN in membership solicitation, but not in selling insurance or promoting activities such as dive trips. These clearly are in the area of for-profit activities that directly compete with some of our advertisers."

Even with the change, *Skin Diver's* stand is more lenient than publications such as *Time*, *Mother Jones* and others that provide occasional free space to certain public interest organizations. They'll permit a brief message and the organization's address, but no direct pitch for members is accepted.

Wachholz isn't deterred now that DAN must play by new rules. They have been test-marketing four new membership/insurance packages by direct mail, one at the price of \$129.95 per year. "We're not going to stop offering insurance," he told *Undercurrent*.

How does this affect DAN financially? The very existence of Segal's policy certainly persuades many divers to sign up with DSI, rather than pay the additional \$15 to join DAN just to enable them to purchase the \$25 policy. But what about the loss of free space? Will this hurt DAN financially?

Perhaps not. Wachholz acknowledged that DAN does not pay for advertising expenses incurred for promoting the insurance. The financial burden resulting from Segal's successful lobbying falls on DAN's insurance carrier, North American Life and Casualty.

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