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THE PRIVATE, EXCLUSIVE GUIDE FOR SERIOUS DIVERS

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Isla Mia, Roatan, Honduras

-- *Hard Living, Easy Diving*

Dear Reader:

If you are faced with only a single week off from work, you have a choice. Serious diving on a liveboard, or serious hanging out on a beach with a dive or two a day. If you're stressed out, you might very well opt for the latter. One of our longtime stressed-out correspondents decided to switch gears this time and try to cool out on a liveboard. Here is his report.

C.C., travel editor

Coming off an eighty-hour work week, I was exhausted. I knew I would be. It's my pattern. I work like a crazy man for four months, then go diving for a week, then repeat it again. Though I've taken both land and liveboard boat trips, I selected a week aboard the Isla Mia in the Honduras, hoping that in seven days I could drown the stress in the Caribbean sea.

Even with only one pain-in-the-ass passenger stuffed into a liveboard, my stress might remain untreated, but it doesn't often happen and a smart captain has ways to deal with that. I'd take the chance for the quiet intimacy of the sea, the companionship of a few friends, and the next dive only a couple of steps away. Armed with my precious little computer, two bathing suits, and too much photo and dive gear, I headed off.

I expected my stress to be obviated by Honduras' national airlines, TAN-SARSA, but the flight from Miami to San Pedro Sula was on time and a connecting flight continuing on to Roatan's new jet airport via a Boeing 737 was a snap. (Does this signal an end to the horrible delays in getting to and from Roatan?) Upon disembarking, a representative of the Isla Mia met us on the airstrip, collected our passports, return trip tickets, and baggage claim stubs, and led us to a waiting van. We didn't touch a bag or see a customs rep and instead went

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straight to the boat docked at French Harbor and an open bar. My office was still in my mind, but a rum punch was in my hand.

Captain Jon Tromm, Isla Mia's quiet and easy going owner, briefed us on the boat's layout and proceedings. Once a seismographic vessel, the Isla Mia is a 75-foot, twin screw boat with a deep-vee, stabilized, north seas hull. The Tromm's bought it 15 years ago and rebuilt it into a diver's yacht. Quite a nice craft, I must say, and quite comfortable in the 85° April weather. Air-conditioned throughout, she has plenty of amenities: a stereo, VCR, slide projector, book library, and B6 film lab so the crew can process your film overnight. The wood-paneled main salon (with adjoining honor bar) has comfortable padded seating for the full complement of 16 passengers at dinners. The dining tables and lots of 120-volt outlets also have slide-out light trays for examining slides. Every inch of the Isla Mia has been cleverly utilized.

Passengers bunk below in a large quad, a huge double (with lots of storage space and large windows), two decent-sized doubles or three others that I found uncomfortably small -- only one person could stand at a time. The three heads (roomy, by boat standards) have a sink, marine toilet and shower -- and the water is hot. On the stern is a small covered lounge area with a spacious sun deck above. I often sat there at night, among the myriad of twinkling stars, without a thought about completing a report or missing a deadline.

After spending the first night dockside, we headed out right after breakfast. I was ready. Along the way, Jon filled us in on the diving facilities and arrangements on the boat. Our first dive, decent enough while providing an opportunity to warm up, was in the 81° F, 75' visibility water at Half Moon Bay, where indigo hamlets abounded and lettuce coral flourished. Rock beauties also posed shyly among many staghorn and elkhorn corals. That afternoon, we anchored at Fort Cay, which provided a dive to a maximum of 70 feet where many large barrel sponges decorated a "hill-and-dale" reef populated by many french and grey angelfish. A four-foot, green moray eel provided good photo opportunities. And not a telephone rang, nor did an employee complain. My boss never shouted. I was alone with my buddy and my bubbles.

Diving was completely unguided, yet no c-cards were requested. Each diver was required to sign a waiver. Although Jon offered to lead anyone who requested it, it's not the norm. This is not to say that my buddy and I just jumped overboard and saw whatever we saw. Jon knew the good spots and briefed us when asked. He always would draw a picture of each site on blackboard to describe pictorially the wall and reef formations below. By basing the Isla Mia at the west end of Roatan, it was easy to choose a dive site on the North or South side, depending on the weather. He switched back and forth to give us good sites to avoid the sea conditions that bring forth our lunches. The Isla Mia advertises as cruising Roatan, Barbaretta, Guanaja, and other Bay Islands. On this trip, we only visited Roatan's North and South coasts and its West end, with more than 60 miles of reefs and walls, generally starting in about 30 to 40 feet of water and going down to 120 feet or more. The open water buttresses consist of spur and

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La Strega and The Tropic Bird, Revisited

If you have reservations for a future trip on *La Strega*, a boat homeported in Belize, or on *Tropic Bird*, a boat supposedly homeported in the British Virgin Islands, you may be out of pocket and out of a trip.

If you are considering booking either craft, don't. At least, not until the situation clears up.

Last month we reported on the tribulations of investors who got tied up with Lester Netherton, owner of American Travel Leisure, and *La Strega*. Netherton sold his majority interest in April to Roger Hubbard, a diver and investor. Hubbard told *Undercurrent* recently that American Travel Leisure (i.e., Netherton), is continuing to make reservations and receive deposits, but is failing to provide Hubbard with a list of those people who have made reservations, and, Hubbard believes, keeping money in excess of that due him.

Hubbard says that just a few days before a group of San Jose, California, divers were about to depart for Belize, Hubbard learned of the charter. Jenny Berry says her dive shop paid \$10,000 to American Travel Leisure, but Hubbard says he had no information about them from Netherton and none of the payment. Hubbard was able to negotiate a way through the problem for the divers and provide the trip.

Hubbard has stopped honoring Netherton's bookings because he says he has received insufficient money from Netherton's travel agency. Netherton told *Undercurrent* that "I've not done a single thing wrong and can account for every cent of the depositor's money." But Hubbard says he has received no accounting from Netherton to support that claim.

Last December, Drs. Edward and Julia DeMartini of San Diego joined a *La Strega* trip, but on the second day the rundown craft had to return to port and the trip was scrapped. The Director of Operations, Joel Pitchford, promised a refund, but none has been forthcoming. After repeated requests from the DeMartini's, Nancy Netherton, Lester's wife, sent a letter saying she would be forwarding their refund request "to the owners of *La Strega*." Hubbard did assume some debt from Netherton, but he told *Undercurrent* that he has discovered additional debt that had not been disclosed at the time he purchased the boat.

Hubbard had originally expected to refurbish

the boat upon purchase, but his financial quarrels with Netherton have made it impossible. "Lester is trying to do the same thing to me as he did with the other investors," he said. "He is looking for a way to renege on the deal and get the boat back." Hubbard says his attorney will be filing suit against Netherton for a shopping list of charges, which may include fraud, breach of contract, and misrepresentation.

In addition, *Undercurrent* has been in contact with the U.S. Security and Exchange Commission and the Ventura County District Attorney's office, both of which have expressed interest in the case.

As for the *Tropic Bird*, she's been in drydock in Venezuela for several months. Netherton claims it will be in the water in June. We talked to several investors, all of whom are irate. Netherton has the investors' cash -- well into six figures -- and is still booking passengers and holding deposits.

Jack Orlove, a Northern California attorney, gave American Travel Leisure a \$300 deposit last October for a July *Tropic Bird* trip. In May, he heard through a friend that the *Tropic Bird* wasn't in the water and called American Leisure. He told us he talked with a "Nancy" who said that "she just worked there" and hadn't heard of any problems with the *Tropic Bird*. Now, that wouldn't be Nancy Netherton, would it?

Orlove said that when he talked with Lester Netherton, he was told Netherton was trying to get hold of the owners. But Netherton is the majority owner -- or else he has been selling someone else's stock as his own. Orlove demanded his money back, but it has not come.

For some time, Netherton has been trying to sell his majority interest in the *Tropic Bird*. One potential investor, Kym Le Baron of Los Altos, California, was interested until he saw the numbers and had several conversations with Netherton. "The *Tropic Bird* could be a great boat," he told us, "but something crooked was going on and I just walked away from it."

Some people, such as Joel Pitchford and Rick Snidtker, have investments in both the *Tropic Bird* and *La Strega*. As one investor told us, "When I first met Lester two or three years ago he didn't have a pot to pee in. Now he has a travel agency, a Jaguar, a nice home, and a Grand Cayman corporation."

groove formations, great fun to explore after diving deep. Topography and interesting fish were the highlights of this trip. A few big thrills, but no sharks, no rays. Yet plenty of pleasant and easy diving.

The second afternoon we dived at West Rock on a 40-80 foot sloping reef that had numerous spur and groove formations that were home to queen and grey angelfish, coral crabs, lobsters, and large horse-eyed jacks. The 100-foot-plus visibility allowed us to view a number of grooves always beckoning us on to explore the next. That night we went to Bakin Swash where, with 80-foot visibility, we dove a wall with very high buttresses and deep cuts that was alive with lots of plate coral which provided a beautiful mosaic background for great schools of creole wrasses that cruised the walls from 50 to 110 feet. Once, my mind slipped back to the office and I wondered about a problem I was to face next week. "How absurd," I said to myself, recalling the paraphrased words of Alan Watts. "There is no future," he wrote, "because it is yet to happen. There is no past, because it's gone. There is only now." I looked around and got back to now.

Rating Based on Caribbean Scale

Accommodations (for a liveaboard)	★ ★ ★ ★
Food (for a liveaboard):	★ ★ ★ ★ ½
Diving for Experienced:	★ ★ ★ ★
Diving for Beginners:	go elsewhere
Moncyworth	★ ★ ★ ★

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

This was easy diving, exactly the RX I needed for stress reduction. I found the boat very well laid out for diving. Both sides of the forward section were reserved for the compressors, diving gear storage areas, and tanks, which were racked along the outer rails. The first day we secured our BCs to the steel 72s (aluminum 80's aren't essential to unlimited boat diving with a computer) and attached our regulators. Divemasters Louis and Moncho filled the tanks in place, so we never had to do more than suit up, sit down to slip into our tank harness, dive and reverse the process. Opposite each row of tanks and seats were additional bins and shelves for personal gear. Everything was either readily available behind me (tank, BC, regulator) or in front of me (wetsuit, mask, fins, snorkel, weight belt, etc.). Large shelves available to lay down photo equipment meant no one stepped on my camera gear, keeping my blood pressure normal. After a divemaster logged the time in and checked to ensure that my air was on, I made a giant stride entry of about five feet over the side. To exit at the stern, a large-water level platform along with a "pole and peg" type ladder made it easy without my having to remove my fins. The divemasters were always there for assistance to log time, maximum depth and air remaining. They even rinsed my camera each time in a freshwater tank. Indeed, the service of the staff is as well planned as the boat itself, providing many dividends for the divers. Easy diving, that it is.

The third day we anchored on the North side at Cathedral. A short 50-yard snorkel trip from the Isla Mia led to a 20-foot deep cut in the protective reef crest. This opening led to a coral amphitheater 75 yards in diameter with the coral walls coming within five to ten feet of the surface. By staying "in the now" I had a near-spiritual experience swimming down through the opening and looking up and around I saw flying coral buttresses forming an encompassing amphitheater; the sparkling light rays shining down through the crevices created an aura of awesome humbleness. I was stoked.

The sand bottom quickly sloped down into a dim tunnel leading to an upward bifurcated exit to the inner reef. While swimming down into the darkness, I was suddenly greeted by ten tarpon disturbed by the intrusion. Rather than avoiding

our presence, they swam through us, brushing our arms with their silvery sides -- what a rush of adrenalin as these five- to six-foot-long magnificent fish shouldered us aside as they sped out to sea and reminded us that we were intruders in their refuge. At 100 feet, we saw a three-foot jack, two-and-a-half-foot-long midnight parrotfish and a resident five-foot green moray.

The following days we dove at: Man-O-War Cay, where in 50 feet of water we observed three- to four-foot barracuda, four-eyed butterfly fish, french angelfish, and jewfish; West Boulevard which, in 100-foot visibility, showcased a five-foot green moray in the open, relatively unafraid porkfish, blue tangs, and orange spotted filefish. At West End in 40 feet of water, a huge school of jacks, each about a foot long, completely surrounded and engulfed me in a stunning kaleidoscope of flashing reflections. But there was another, more unusual thrill here. On April 28 we were lucky enough to see a precise, annual occurrence few divers ever see. I entered the water at 7:10 A.M. The underwater terrain featured a sloping reef in about 50 feet of water which led to a deep wall starting at about 70 feet. Along the bottom, many low profile spur and groove formations were home to numerous barrel sponges that, on this very date, were programmed to reproduce. Each sponge on this deep reef individually knew it was time for procreation. Clouds of light and dark smoke consisting of eggs and sperm from various barrel sponges were simultaneously released into the ocean's currents; the sponges resembled the smoke stacks of the industrial revolution attempting to achieve production levels. Grey, french, and queen angels were everywhere, hovering around each "smoking" sponge, feasting on this once-a-year smorgasbord. (Come to think of it, how do these sponges deal with a leap year?)

Topside we had quite a smorgasbord ourselves. Crew members Nick and Daisy produced varied and plentiful meals and snacks. Breakfasts variously consisted of eggs, bacon, ham, pancakes, waffles, cornbread, and refried beans, always with freshly squeezed o.j. Lunches included shrimp salad, cheeseburgers with fantastic french fried onion rings, shrimp Newburg on toast, beef stew, chicken salad, always served with fresh pineapple, cantaloupe, watermelon, papaya, or mangoes. Dinners, served sit-down style, were Nick's forte: spaghetti with shrimp, conch casserole, roast beef with gravy, fried chicken with real mashed potatoes, and the last night, lobster tail, with parsleyed potatoes! Homemade cakes with real whipped cream, cheesecake, coconut cream pies made from freshly grated coconuts, and peach cobbler. Since my stress was being kept well in check by the peaceful diving, I succumbed to the cholesterol.

As one would expect from any well-run boat, snacks were served around 4:00 in the afternoon: homemade tortilla chips with freshly-made salsa or guacamole, conch fritters, platters of fresh fruit. Nick kept a coffee pot going 24 hours per day; he would rise between 4:30 and 5:00 A.M. each morning and prepare great orange, bran or blueberry muffins, peanut butter or oatmeal cookies, and chocolate brownies for a pre-breakfast sampler of things to come.

Six days at sea provided just the break I needed in my tough work schedule. The Isla Mia provided me with a memorable diving vacation free of the hassle of schlepping dive gear back and forth to the boat and allowed me to experience the best of Roatan. Roatan doesn't have the thrills of the South Pacific and Belize may have better fish life, but I have no complaints. From portal to portal, this was one pleasant trip. I am ready now for another round of 80-hour work weeks -- and another trip three months down the pike.

Booking the Isla Mia: For several years, the Isla Mia has been booked by See and Sea Travel. Just as we were ready to go to press, we learned that they no longer represent the Isla Mia. All bookings are to be directed to Captain Jon

Tromm at 011-504-451478 or 011-501-451460 at the French Harbor Yacht Club, where the Isla Mia is docked. If Tromm is unavailable, he will return the call. For the time being he is only taking groups of 10 to 16 at \$995/person for six nights and six days of diving. He expects to have an agent to handle individual bookings by September. Individuals can still give him a call because he may be able to suggest groups looking for more people. Written information can be obtained by writing to Gilbert and Co., 1530 Geosource Plaza, 2700 Post Oak Blvd., Houston, TX 77056. Undercurrent will inform readers of his stateside booking number as soon as it becomes available.

Diver's Compass: Check into the TAN-SANSA desk for luggage check and seating assignments in Miami at least 2 to 3 hours prior to scheduled departure; the lines are very long and slow; overweight baggage seems to be no problem. . . . Rentals on board include underwater video equipment with 30 minute tape: \$70/day, \$250/week; Skinny Dippers at \$10/day, \$35/week. . . . Beer was \$1.25 each and soft drinks were \$.75; liquor was \$2.25/shot. E6 processing was \$9/roll. . . . Dive carefully; air evacuation is required of anyone with a bends hit. . . . The Isla Mia has several fire extinguishers and smoke detectors, excellent safety features. . . . Although Spanish is the primary language of Honduras, English is the main language on Roatan.

Readers' Comments:

HONDURAS: The beautiful Bay islands lend themselves to a few generalizations: Lush and beautiful, they are loaded with sand fleas and no seeps. (See sidebar on page 7.) For a few people with allergic responses, the critters are a serious problem and the Bay Islands are no place to visit. For many others they're more than an annoyance, while most divers seem to say that Avon Skin So Soft (not a bug lotion, but a body oil that is the underground repellent of choice by those in the know) prevents bites. Furthermore, sizeable fish are rare and fish populations have been reduced, due to heavy fishing. Some divers have some big fish experiences, but most divers get their kicks from the fine topography and aquarium diving. Here's what the readers report:

Only a couple of readers have visited Cayos Del Sol. S. Feldman (Houston) writes: "Hundreds of possible dive sites. Excellent fish populations on the outer banks. A frontier experience for the true adventurer." David Mangan (Littleton, CO), there in April, says, "A very nice, remote and picturesque resort. Lacks aggressive direction as a dive resort but management very accommodating. Lack of fish does not help situation." (504/693-1234)

Posada Del Sol, on the island of Guanaja, we reviewed in June, 1987. A few readers did not find what our reviewer did. Writes Richard Goldfarb (NYC): "We loved the resort but your review on diving was not up to par, which we found surprising, since it is usually right on the money." As we reported in our article, our reviewer, a member of a group, got special dives that were negotiated with the hotel. Some of those dives are obtainable for an additional \$40/person these days, but cannot always be arranged. Yet, most readers seem to love the place. Suzanne Leeson and David Vickery (Hoboken, NJ) report from last year: "Diving at Posada Del Sol has ruined us because very few dive resorts are of this caliber. Hotel staff friendly, efficient and hospitable. Dive shop and divemasters safety-conscious and attentive. Diving is varied, exciting and easy. Hotel is luxurious (considering the remote location), clean and comfortable. Food is good but occasionally not up to snuff." Says Jeff Denning (Phoenix): "Afternoon visibility consistently less than morning. Had back problems so crew

insisted on carrying tank to rear of boat for dive. Private island afternoons with lobster, wine, a two-way radio, excellent snorkeling and lots of romance with your favorite buddy. The best lava canyons and cavern around. Sunset cruise a must; hikes and side-trips; large sea turtles, 10-foot barrel sponges, rare black and white crynoids." Michael Lubell (Teaneck, NJ), there in April, writes: "People terrific. Food great. If you like isolation, no pollution, no noise, this is the place. Boats excellent. Not enough marine life, but spectacular pristine coral." Order our full review from ATCOM for \$5; it's still valid. (407/848-3483; 800/642-DIVE; 800/226-DIVE (FL).)

Bayman Bay Club, the original resort on Guanaja, is more rustic than Posada and to the liking of those who go for fewer amenities and more out-of-the-way places. One has to expect the unexpected, our readers tell us, such as a generator malfunction or unwelcome room critters. Steve Rolstad (Rochester, MN) says it doesn't have "as many fish as Bonaire, but a wonderful setting to relax and dive for a week. Iguanas on my doorstep! Jungle was great." Don Emmons (Birmingham), there last summer, says: "Best coral we've seen anywhere! Very remote, no civilization, which we love! Beautiful setting and total relaxation. Food is buffet and very good, with lots of native-style." Clare Szilagyi (Audubon, PA), there last October, writes: "Keeping in mind this is an out-of-the-way, primitive location, we made allowances. The setting and concept are beautiful, but they need a better divemaster, some new boats and a backup compressor. (We had some foul air.) The food was not terrible, but not good either, and we're not fussy eaters. From the airport we took a boat exactly like the Jungle Queen. I think it was the original. For lights, the mate was lying on top of the roof with a flashlight. The plane was a DC3 with all original interior!" (800/524-1823; 305/525-8413.)

One thing stands out about our readers comments about Anthony's Key: inconsistency. For a few months they love the food, then a cluster of complaints arrive. Most find the place quiet and idyllic, but some complain about noise from the bar, noise from the shuttle boat and noise from the disco down the road. Most say the dive guides are first-rate, then a few complain. My take on it is that most first-time divers and novice travelers generally give it high marks, while many divers who have been around the block are less complimentary. Frank Simons (Colorado Springs) was there last year and four years before: "AKR has grown way too fast. The disco and casino add nothing to the experience. It's getting overbuilt and the whole area seems to be expanding at expense of quality of experience. Would only recommend AKR for divers who have not been there." Darrell Briggs (Chelmsford, MA) says, "November and December are not the ideal months to go; there is frequent rain and high winds; being on the north side of Roatan, the resulting heavy surge and runoff reduced visibility to as low as 20 feet. January to June better. Everything at AKR is so well organized that it runs itself. Divemasters are knowledgeable and effective. The food was adequate and generally good." Richard Meise (Sudbury, MA): "Very good wall dives. Some were drift dives. Coral was spectacular, but the area is overfished. Food was home-cooked, Caribbean-style -- good and plenty of it." Diane Short (El Cajon, CA) there in January says: "Fantastic coral. Freedom to explore site within divemaster's limits. Probably won't return because there are too many other possibilities." And Jim and Laurie Salmon (Mechanicsville, NY) write: "Every dive was different and exciting. Three dives/day on time and well paced. Accommodations attractive, functional, and comfortable; not luxurious, but very satisfactory." (800/227-3483; 800/336-7717; 305/858-3483.)

Coco View, a downhome laid-back retreat, seems to the resort of choice on Roatan. Our review of June, 1983 still holds up pretty well, it seems. J. Lee Gibson (Irving, TX), who was there last year, sums up our experience as well as

"My Kids Thought I Was Going To Die!"

A Central America Malaria Alert

A week after 38-year-old Paul Fogelberg returned home from his February diving trip to the island of Guanaja, 80 miles off the coast of Honduras, he came down with a case of the flu. Or so he thought. He felt sick to his stomach, ran a fever accompanied with chills, and generally felt wiped out. The bout lasted about 12 hours, then disappeared. But two days later the symptoms returned, this time more intensely.

The second attack dissipated, but two days later the symptoms returned, this time so intensely his wife took him to the emergency room of a St. Paul Minnesota hospital. Again the symptoms ebbed. The medical staff suspected malaria, but that could not be confirmed until the symptoms reappeared -- only then would the parasites be visible in the blood.

When the symptoms returned, they were so severe that Fogelberg was delirious for 12 hours, talking gibberish, and shaking so badly from the chills that the bed rattled. His temperature hit 106°F. "My children thought I was dying," he said. "And so did I."

The diagnosis was malaria. A drug regimen was immediately started. Fogelberg spent a week in the hospital and two more at home, exhausted and unable to work. It's been nearly three months since his first attack and it will take another three months before he feels normal. He says he will have permanent liver damage.

No Bay Island resort indicates there is any problem with malaria. But the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers says that "persons vacationing in the resorts of Ceiba and Tela or the Bay Islands should take a malaria suppressant." The malaria-carrying mosquito, the female *anopheles*, "feeds on humans from dusk to midnight."

Chloroquine is the prescription drug recommended by the IAMAT. It is to be taken once a week, beginning two weeks before arrival at one's destination, and continued for four weeks after departure. In use for many years, its side effects are few, if any. Sophisticated travelers also carry another drug, Fansidar, which they take only if symptoms appear.

Dr. Hans Lobel at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta told *Undercurrent* that malaria is "a major problem" in Honduras and Belize and that travelers are advised to take chloroquine. In 1987, nine Americans traveling to Belize contracted malaria and seven traveling to Honduras came down with the disease. Lobel said these numbers are a "gross underestimate" because relatively few who get malaria recognize it or report it. Although it is impossible to determine whether the Bay Island's appear in these numbers,

Fogelberg's incident alone underscores the potential. Lobel said those who contract malaria are often scuba divers on vacations.

George Cundiff, the owner of Posada del Sol, where Fogelberg stayed, is mystified. Although he readily acknowledges sand fleas -- "our spraying has cut them back about 90 percent," he says -- he has seen few mosquitoes on the island (Fogelberg too said he saw very few) and had never heard of malaria attacks. As soon as Cundiff learned of the malaria, he visited the local health clinic and discovered that seven cases had been reported by the 3000 residents during the past 25 years. Cundiff says that there are few pools of breeding water on Guanaja and speculates that all cases might have originated on the mainland or even in Roatan. Guanaja residents, mainly fishermen, travel there frequently and Fogelberg too changed planes at La Ceiba and on Roatan. The only hitch is that he was there during the daytime, when the *anopheles* mosquito is in hiding. Cundiff says he will include a malaria warning in packets sent out to prospective guests.

Dr. Lobel said the CDC has tried to open communication with the travel industry, "but they are not always interested. They are more interested in selling travel." The best hope for getting information to travelers, he said, is through the press.

Fogelberg hopes to return to Posada del Sol because he liked the dive operation and the hotel. "I am not an alarmist," he said, "but I think anyone is crazy to go there without malaria prevention. You can't imagine how violently ill I was. If I took all the times in my life I've been sick and rolled them into one, they still wouldn't compare."

Malaria kills more than a million people a year, nearly all of whom are unable to get or afford proper treatment. In addition to Honduras and Belize, countries in which the IAMAT indicates there is at least some risk, especially in the rural areas, include: Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Thailand, and Vanuatu. The President of IAMAT, M.A. Uffer-Marcolongo, told *Undercurrent* that the "worldwide malaria situation is deteriorating as the parasite becomes more resistant to the drugs."

For more information, one may join the International Association for Medical Assistance to Travelers (417 Center Street, Lewiston, NY 14092). Members receive a World Malaria Risk Chart, a brochure "How to Protect Yourself Against Malaria," a worldwide directory of physicians who assist travelers, and a worldwide climate chart. There is no charge for membership, but they finance themselves from donations. At least \$20 would seem appropriate.

the readers: "A beautiful island. A hilly tropical jungle with beautiful beaches and little development. No restaurants, shopping or nightlife. Coco View is an unpretentious, basic divers' lodge. Buffet-style meals are adequate, not outstanding. The dive operation is topnotch and completely professional." The underwater environment has a lot of variety and few divers return home disappointed, especially because diving right of the beach is quite good. Says Chuck Seleen (Colchester, VT), who was there in December: "Superb diving -- best shorediving -- three sites: two walls and a wreck. Dropoff dives on return to resort from both A.M. and P.M. trips plus night dive equals five easy dives a day. Two drawbacks: poorer visibility and no-see-ums! Book the bungalows -- unless you like camping. Everything runs smoothly and on time -- well organized. 53 dives in 12 days says it all!" But all is not sanguine in paradise: Dick Young (Denver) says, "Worst room since the army." And, to give dive resorts a look into what they must be concerned about in the future, if not now for California divers at least, Bob Thomas (Morro Bay, CA) says: "Tobacco smoke was unbearable. No provisions were made for the nonsmoker, and most everyone, staff and guests alike, was discourteous about their smoking. We paid for several days on their liveaboard, but when we arrived we found that the boat had been broken down for weeks. A loud, obnoxious group disturbed everyone. The diving was great, which saved the trip." Generally, 95 percent of the divers who write us come home happy, but I must add that when something major such as a liveaboard is inoperable, it's unconscionable when a traveler isn't notified in advance. (900/282-8932; 800/336-7717; 904/588-4131.)

C.C., travel editor

The Oceanic DataMaster II

-- With Table Variations For Everyone

The first thing one notices about the Oceanic DataMaster II dive computer is that it attaches directly to the tank and provides a readout for tank pressure. It's a feature that many readers who responded to our dive computer questionnaire last fall liked best about this computer. It makes it an easy device to use.

A unique feature of the DataMaster II is that it measures the air remaining in the tank and the air consumption rate. Dive time remaining, then, is not just a number from the tables; it is the lesser of the table time or remaining air time. That is, if you have ten minutes left on the tables, but five minutes of air supply left, the number you get for dive time remaining is "5 minutes." A high percentage of users indicated that they find this feature very desirable.

"With the conservative nature of the DataMaster, I feel comfortable by following its limits up to the maximum time."

The DataMaster II algorithm is based on the U.S. Navy tables and therefore, for multiple dives, provides less bottom time than, for example, the Orca computers or the Suunto. To divers who wish to play it safe, such as Garyton C. Echols, Jr. (La Plara,

MD), that's a real advantage. He writes: "It is conservative and I feel that I need this at the age of 54." Or, as Barry S. J. Czachura (Worth, IL) says, "With the conservative nature of the DataMaster, I feel comfortable by following its limits up to the maximum time."

The users generally like the computer; 86 percent said they would buy it again. Only 12 percent said their device malfunctioned while diving, one of the lower rates of all computers reported on. People who are not clearly aware of the conservative nature of the DataMaster II can be dissatisfied once they take it underwater and compare to the tables the Edge or Skinny Dipper offers divers.

Since our survey was completed, Oceanic has marketed the DataMaster Sport, which appears identical to the DataMaster II, but uses modified Haldanean tables similar to the Edge. These tables provide more bottom time on multilevel and multiple dives and are just the answer to users such as Peter and Karen Suetty of Larchmont, NY, who write: "We wouldn't buy it again simply because the tables are much too conservative for multi-level and repetitive diving. The DataMaster II does not allow for enough bottom time when you compare it to the Edge or Skinny Dipper." Now, however, the Suetty's can have their tables changed by Oceanic for \$75. •

With 70 users responding, we cannot draw scien-

tifically valid conclusions about the DataMaster II, but a few problems can be highlighted. Except for comments about the tables, we think it's fair to say that the comments about the integrity of the DataMaster II apply to the DataMaster Sport.

Tank Pressure Readings

Several users reported problems with the very feature that distinguishes the Oceanic from other computers, the tank pressure. Asa Fulton of Orlando says he has had "two failures of my DMIs. Both were on the tank pressure transducer, where they read 500 psi approximately regardless of pressure in tank. Rest of device functioned OK." Peter Suetty writes, "In my wife's computer the air pressure shut off. We ascended and checked the tank; naturally it showed 2800 psi."

Peter Radsliff, Oceanic Marketing manager, told *Undercurrent* that they believe that static electricity was the culprit, so current models have been modified to shunt static electricity to another part of the device where it has no effect. A few early models, he said, have been returned and the problem was corrected. Anyone with this problem should return the computer for correction.

One weak point with a gauge that reads the air pressure and is turned on by the air can be the high pressure hose. If it fails, the gauge doesn't work. "The only problem I've ever had," writes a reader from Harrison, NY, "was when my hose (which, by the way, was brand-new) blew. It must have been a defective hose to start with." John Ott (New Berlin, WI) says, "Faulty crimping on the gauge hoses has caused me to abort both dives attempted with the computer. The first was my first dive with the computer, the second was the first dive with the brand-new replacement computer."

Radsliff says that those hoses with which they have had a problem have had insufficient perforations in the rubber cover and developed a big bulge. If the high pressure hose fails to deliver, Radsliff said, a dive shop can replace it with a new Oceanic hose.

"On the third day of use," says Wayne Burger (Anchorage), "it failed to activate when I turned on the air. Oceanic replaced the unit in approximately seven days." Robert Jaffe (Long Beach, CA) says, "After two dives, I turned on air and gauge remained blank." Two other readers reported similar problems.

The Battery

Although many computer users like to change their computers' batteries, The DataMaster comes with an internal battery (Oceanic claims 6000 hours life) that can only be changed by the factory. There is no doubt that this reduces and nearly eliminates the constant risk of flooding when a user changes the battery. That's a problem which has plagued Orca. But

it doesn't bother the Oceanic user. Only one user reported that his device had flooded. Even so, David Day (NYC) says: "I want to be able to take it to an authorized dealer for a battery change and check out; I don't want to send an expensive piece of equipment through the mail every year."

But every manufacturer's computer must be returned to the factory for a checkup, and most recommend that it be done annually. Even if a local

Greenpeace Questions Cousteau

In 1987, Jacques Cousteau and Calypso visited the French nuclear test site at Mururoa, in the south Pacific. In the February *Calypso Log*, the journal of the Cousteau Society, writer Tim Knipe says, "The waters of the lagoon displayed only infinitesimal traces of radioactive elements, primarily cesium and plutonium, well below allowable proportions. . . . Analysis of the samples do not seem to indicate a dire situation for the short- or mid-term, but there is concern over the implications posed by the development of fissures for the long-term. Surveys of the site by Cousteau divers revealed a network of recent fractures and slides. The spreading of radioactive elements through the sea bottom could be accelerated through the creation of deep fissures. Rifts in the reef also do not bode well for the longevity of the atoll's structure. While the Cousteau Society continues to be categorically opposed to the continued development and testing of nuclear weapons, it was reassuring to discover that the Mururoa test site is not contributing in a more severe way to the degradation of the surrounding environment."

Greenpeace reports, however, that after the tour many South Pacific activists were bitterly disappointed. "Instead of the condemnation they expected, the Cousteau Society produced what one observer called 'a whitewash.'" Tahitian anthropologist Bengt Danielsson called the expedition a "guided tour, which lasted only five days and included no medical doctors to examine the effects of radiation on neighboring islands. Cousteau's minibus . . . proved inadequate to the task of inspecting cracks in the atoll . . . and Cousteau completely neglected to examine the suspected relationship between the destruction of Mururoa's reefs and the alarming rate of ciguatera poisoning among Polynesians."

In Tahiti, a pro-French government newspaper editorialized that Cousteau's "green light should therefore silence the voice of the often partial and dishonest individuals who criticize the Mururoa tests."

dealer were to take it in, it would have to be returned to the manufacturer to handle maintenance. Unlike personal computers, enough aren't sold to have local repair capacity. As for the DataMaster, Oceanic replaces batteries for \$40 and, according to Radsliff, it will take about two weeks for the computer to be returned. "It's actually faster," he said, "to assemble a new unit than to replace the batteries." When the batteries are replaced, the unit is also recalibrated.

No Decompression

The DataMaster II is not a decompression computer. If a diver exceeds 130 feet, the computer cannot be used for twelve hours. It will provide information to get the diver back to the surface, unless a diver takes it beyond the negative ten minutes zone. Says Barbara Perry Skinner (Chapel Hill, NC), "I wish it would accommodate 130 feet without limiting dive information for the second dive. We dive off the coast of North Carolina on wrecks and would frequently like to go to 130-140 feet to see the deepest portions of the wreck. Multilevel dive information is needed here to give one a reasonable bottom time."

"Oceanic can now modify the DataMaster II to incorporate the less conservative tables of the Sport."

The newer DataMaster Sport answers this criticism with a limit of 160 feet for no decompression dives and a 175-foot limit for short decompression dives. If a diver gets into the negative zone and follows the stops, the unit can be used for repetitive diving. If not, then the unit is not ready for twelve hours.

Oceanic can now modify the DataMaster II to incorporate the less conservative tables of the Sport. Owners may simply send their computer to Oceanic or take it to an Oceanic dealer who will then send it on. The charge is \$75.

Other Problems

Don Bellew (West Des Moines) says that "starting

the second dive of the day, the unit read current depth of 150 feet with zero time left. The air pressure and temperature functioned fine. The unit cleared overnight and I used it the next three days, but Oceanic replaced it with a new unit."

A number of users complained that the faceplate scratches too easily. Daniel Bardon (Walnut Creek, CA) suggests "a tough see-through tape used to protect snow-ski tops as a protective layer on the display face."

Several people noted that the optional compass didn't work properly. Radsliff told *Undercurrent* that after they made internal changes in a later model of computer, there were electromagnetic changes that, when coupled with the earth's magnetic field, created instances where there were variances greater than five degrees. They have since solved the problem with a redesigned boot, Radsliff reported.

A couple of people commented that the temperature gauge gave incorrect readings. But the temperature feature otherwise is well liked. Says Barbara Perry Skinner: "I like the temperature feature since studies have suggested temperature is an important factor in whether a person is likely to get bent. When water temperature at the dive depth is cold, we allow a larger safety margin that the computer requires."

A few people noted that the DataMaster is especially easy to read in daylight, but as with all other gauges it is difficult to read at night. One person suggested that a longer hose might be helpful.

All in all, the users of the Oceanic DataMaster II are quite content with their computer. Here's why:

"There's only one number to look at giving me my limits of the dive based on either no decompression limits or my air consumption. I've been very happy with my selection." (Barry S. J. Czachura, Worth, IL)

"Very easy to use, if only for the standard readouts. The multi-level computer is just a great extra, so long as it is used judiciously." (Charles K. Jett, Virginia Beach, VA)

"Easy to read and lots of safety margins." (Patsy

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Lorieau, Calgary, Alberta)

"I feel very secure with the caution zone, the dive time remaining, and the next dive information." (Kay Madsen, Saratoga, CA)

"I did a lot of footwork and reading prior to purchasing and this one answers more of my wants than any others. I still haven't read about any other that comes closer." (Jeff Mangel, Edmonds, WA)

"It's a complete console with a temperature display, air consumption indication, and repetitive group at the end of the dive, as well as very good battery life." (Danny Rossi, Newark, CA)

Oceanic and U.S. Divers

The U.S. Diver DataScan II is essentially Oceanic's DataMaster II, modified slightly for the U.S. Divers label. The DataMaster Sport is equivalent to the DataScan III. Radsliff says that the internal theory of the computers is the same. Although only a handful of readers reported on the DataScan, their com-

ments, problems and criticisms paralleled the users of the DataMaster.

Both Oceanic and USD will be coming out with new computers. Oceanic's will be based on tables developed for the PADI wheel, while the USD computer will be based on Bulmann-developed tables and will be manufactured by Uwaterc of Switzerland.

The DataMaster II and the DataSport list for \$599. Oceanic Industries, 14275 Catalina St., San Leandro, CA 94577. 415/352-5001.

The U.S. Diver DataScan II retails for \$675 and the III retails for \$725. The tables of the II may be changed to the less conservative tables of the III for \$125, which includes an overhaul and a new battery. U.S. Divers, POB 25018, 3323 W. Warner Ave., Santa Ana, CA 92799. 714/540-8010.

So far in this series, we have reported on Orca's Edge and Skinny Dipper and the Sunnto. In the next issue we report on the Beauchat, the last computer for which we have sufficient reader comment to report on.

Eye Tests Reveal Dangers In Diving

-- "A Few Inexperienced Divers Had Extensive Damage"

Serious potential eye problems may plague divers, reports Lesley Newson in the British magazine *New Scientist*. This is a summary of Newson's January 21st article.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

An investigation of the circulation of blood in the eyes of divers has produced the strongest evidence yet that tissue damage caused by diving is more common and more severe than had been previously thought.

Phillip Polkinghorne, Kulwant Sehmi, Darwin Minassian and Alan Bird of Moorfields Eye Hospital in London and Maurice Cross of the Diving Diseases Research Centre in Plymouth examined the retinas of 80 divers of varying experience. The researchers found evidence of damage in nearly half the divers.

"The study is the first evidence of damage to the eye tissue in amateur divers and it suggests for the first time that a career in diving almost inevitably leads to damage."

Of the 26 professional divers studied, all had abnormal retinas. None of the divers taking part in the study had visual problems as a result of their damaged retinas, but Bird said that he "would not be surprised to find divers whose damage has progressed far enough to affect their vision."

Evidence has mounted during recent years to show that exposure to pressure during diving subtly damages the central nervous system. Doctors believe that the damage is due to obstructions in the flow of

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blood through the tissues.

People who take up diving as a sport know they are at risk of getting the bends or an air embolism, but if they follow the correct procedures, the risk is very low.

All professional divers know they also run the risk of bone necrosis. About five percent of them develop small dead patches in their bones. Active professional divers have the bones of their thighs and upper arms X-rayed as part of their annual medical examination.

Doctors have been concerned that if diving caused dead patches to appear on bones, other tissues may be suffering a similar fate. Their concern increased in the early 1980s when detailed neurological examinations, and tests of the memory and reactions of experienced professional divers, suggested that some of them might have slight damage to the brain and spinal cord.

Then, in 1986, nuclear magnetic resonance imaging revealed small areas of damage in the brains of apparently healthy North Sea divers. The following year, Ian Calder, a pathologist at the London Hospital in the city's East End, published the results

of a postmortem study of 11 professional divers. Seven of them had areas of damage in the spinal cord that had not been detected while the divers were alive. The samples were too small for researchers in the studies to draw conclusions as to how common such damage might be. The fact that few divers are currently complaining of neurological symptoms does not mean that they will not experience problems later in life. There is a great deal of extra capacity in the nervous system of young people that begins to diminish in middle age. Most people who have dived deeper than 50 meters are still relatively young. Deeper diving did not become common until the mid-1970s, when drilling for offshore oil began in the deeper water of the North Sea. Over the same period, recreational diving became more popular and the amateur divers began to go deeper.

In order to determine the size of the problem, the researchers needed a method of looking for the damage in a large sample of divers that did not involve surgery. The damage which occurs in the tissue of both the bones and the nerves of divers is similar. Minute areas of tissue had died, probably because they had been starved of blood, suggesting that

Losing Your Lunch Underwater

Two Techniques Toward Safe Sickness

If you have to vomit underwater, it can be extremely hazardous. If you remove the regulator to throw up, you will probably inhale water due to involuntary gasping. If you try to vomit through the regulator, you may clog it and render it inoperable.

You are best off if you carry an alternate air source. You can throw up through one regulator and breathe through another. The value to your buddy of the second stage into which you vomited will be questionable, but at least you will be safe.

If you have only one regulator, remove it from your mouth, and locate it tightly against one corner of your mouth. Depress the purge button completely to obtain maximum free flow and hold it that way. This should allow you to vomit into the water without clogging the regulator yet still get air when you gasp.

I have watched many people on the surface throw up and then go diving, claiming they are fine once they empty their stomachs. If you are a "one tosser" and this works for you, that's fine. But too many people are prone to throw up more than once. If the second or third time occurs underwater, it could be serious. Following the procedures outlined above can help render the

process safe. Unfortunately you cannot practice these skills effectively until you require them, but it is better to try one of these than to take any other actions.

Of course, the best way to deal with nausea is to prevent it. Too many people go diving without proper nourishment. When you arise in the morning, your stomach is acidic. If all you put into it is coffee or orange juice, you are compounding the problem and asking for nausea. Try eating cereals, pancakes or french toast and see if your queasiness is less than usual.

If you still become nauseous, try nonprescription seasickness medications until you find one that is effective, yet has no side effects. Strong ginger tea works for some people. Seabands that use "acupressure" (See *Undercurrent March*, 1989) are effective for many people, while producing no side effects whatsoever. Try Pepto Bismol to settle your stomach. When the boat is underway, sit in the center of it in fresh air with your back and head against a wall and watch the horizon. This simple procedure helps many who are prone to *mal de mer*.

The author, Dennis Graver, is the Director of Education for NAUI.

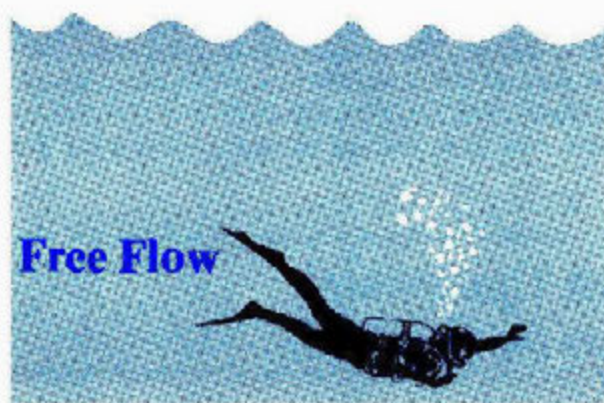
capillaries that supplied blood to the areas had been blocked. The bone necrosis of divers closely resembles that seen in victims of sickle-cell anemia, whose capillaries are temporarily blocked during a sickle-cell "crisis" when their red blood cells become too rigid to pass through. Sickle-cell disease damages the retina, which doctors can see using the technique known as retinal angiography. . . . The abnormalities that they detected in the angiograms of divers were very similar to those seen in sickle-cell disease.

There was clear evidence of obstruction to the capillaries. The researchers suggested three mechanisms to explain how diving causes this obstruction. When divers come back to the surface, air bubbles sometimes form in their veins and their lungs. If bubbles also form in the arteries, they would

block the capillaries. Bubbles forming in the lungs trigger changes in the body's clotting mechanism which could result in minute clots becoming trapped in the capillaries.

The third suggestion is that the mechanism might also be similar to that of a sickle-cell disease. The pressure that divers experience at 30 meters causes their white blood cells to become rigid just as red blood cells do during a sickle-cell crisis.

The researchers hope that clues to the cause of the obstruction will come from investigations into the individual differences between divers. Some of the divers studied had relatively little damage even though they had been diving for many years and done a great deal of deep diving. On the other hand, a few inexperienced divers had quite extensive damage.



Japan does not earn high marks for environmental awareness. The nation is under attack by organizations such as Greenpeace for their continued whaling and by the African Wildlife Foundation for their great use of elephant ivory (the African elephant population has dropped from 1.3 million to 600,000 in ten years). Our *Undercurrent* review on Palau noted that Japanese tourists cut the lips from marvelous giant Tridachna clams for sushi -- even in waters that should be reserved for scuba enthusiasts. In April, the second-largest Japanese newspaper, *Asahi*, published a story criticizing the spiritual poverty of Japanese who damage the environment. Included was a front-page photograph of a rare coral head said to be the largest of its species in the world, with large initials carved on its surface. The article claimed it was damaged by private divers, even though it was located on a reef protected by the Japanese government. Local divers cried foul. They said the newspaper photographer had himself damaged the coral to get photos. On May 26 the president of *Asahi*, the nation's second largest newspaper, admitted the wrongdoing. Several employees were demoted, the photographer was fired, and the president himself stepped down, a disgraced man.

In the last couple of years the price of natural sponges increased from the normal \$4 for a top-grade item to \$16, due in part to a sponge blight in the Mediterranean. In a week at sea, a good diver can harvest 400 or more sponges. That bonanza has led to a growth spurt in western Florida's sponge diving industry. Where a year ago only five boats made weekly trips from Tarpon Springs to harvest sponges, today more than fifty boats carry divers to the relatively shallow shoals of the Gulf of Mexico. But it's not as glamorous as Robert Wagner, Gilbert Roland, and Terry Moore made it appear in their 1953 flick, *Beneath the 12 Mile Reef*. During a four-week period earlier this year, three divers, all newcomers to a profession once dominated by Greek immigrants, died in depths averaging forty feet. Another inexperienced diver died in the fall. In the meantime, the flood of bath-quality sponges has once again driven the price down to as low as \$4 apiece. The old-time sponge divers, who view sponge diving not only as a way to make a living, but also as a way of life, are concerned that the next step may be government regulation.

Recently we wrote that there's no science behind the claims that Cheez Whiz is harmful to fish. Even though it seems antithetical to nature, photographers can offer it to their finny friends without visions of an impending massacre. At least in small quantities. But what's this? Could it even be good for fish? Researchers at the University of Wisconsin have found that ground beef and cheese contains a very high level of fatty acids called CLA's that may establish a permanent defense against cancer. Cheez Whiz has 4.5 times more CLA than parmesan cheese, the next most CLA-rich cheese tested. It's the concentration of whey that produces the high level of CLA. Could it be that we ought to be feeding Cheez Whiz burgers to our finny friends to combat the high level of carcinogens found in polluted waters?