
Hooked on the Reef

How to string yourself along

In a past issue, one of our reviewers mentioned his surprise when a dive guide on Palau took out a rope with a hook on the end, attached himself to the reef, and “surfed” in the strong current. Since then several readers have mentioned doing the same thing. Is it safe? Is it ecologically correct? In Depth subscriber Keith Reynolds makes his case. We would like to hear opinion on the subject.

There are a few places in the world where the diving is spectacular and the currents run like rivers. Blue Corners in Palau and Dirty Rock at Cocos Island are good examples. It is these powerful, nutrient-rich currents that created and support the great mass of sea life in these special places. As breathtaking as these dives are, the currents frequently encountered here are, at the very least, a huge inconvenience, and at worst, potentially very dangerous. In many of these places, drift diving is either not practical or not advisable; you have to grab some rock or coral and hang on. But if you lose your handhold, you could easily get blown up or down the wall faster than you can compensate, ending up either with an embolism or narked to oblivion.

One simple and cheap solution to dealing with these currents is a “reef hook” — basically a four-inch fishhook with about three feet of nylon cord, a handle, and for extra safety, a quick-release buckle. When hooked onto the rock or coral, you can surf one-handed in the current. Attach it to a strap or D-ring on your BC, and you can fly like a kite with both hands free to work a camera. When you get

really good with it, you can work yourself around to any point within a six-foot semicircle just by changing the angle of your fins in the current.

This simple tool has become indispensable to me whenever I’m diving on submerged seamounts with very strong currents, or on

walls with strong vertical currents, or just about anywhere else with currents I can’t drift dive. Now, I’m sure many would say it’s too dangerous to be tied to the reef in strong currents, and some of the more politically correct critics might even say we shouldn’t damage the coral with hooks. Nonetheless, people will continue to dive these sites, and if they’re not using a reef hook, they will be using their hands. The greater surface area of a hand causes more damage to the coral than the point of a hook.

As to safety, these are dangerous dives to begin with. You shouldn’t be diving in these conditions unless you are very experienced. The reef hook allows you to be more comfortable in the current and gives you one or both hands free to handle cameras and console. Attaching a quick-release buckle to the handle will let you drop the hook instantly if you don’t have time to work it out of a crack. ■

Got an Opinion?

How do you feel about roping yourself to the reef? Write us your views. Our mailing address is

In Depth
P.O. Box 90215
Austin, TX 78709



PUPPY PARLOR — ALL YOU CAN EAT. I’m not worried much about sharks, but catfish are another story. In February, Malaysian rescue workers tried to catch a catfish seen gobbling up two dogs struggling in the River Endau. Armed with 80-pound lines, they were determined to reel in the 10-foot-long fish “for fear it could swallow villagers amid rising floodwaters along the river

banks” (Deutsche Presse Agentur).

REALLY PRIVATE DIVERS. In our January issue, we discussed three traditionally designed live-aboards that were operating in Indonesia from Bandanaira, Manado, and Bira Beach in southern Sulawesi. The small vessels carrying four to six divers are being marketed as “Private Divers.” In fact, they were