
In September, Nancy French called me. Everyone was out to get her, she said, and we were publishing lies. I said that if she would tell me specifically where we had erred, I would correct it. She could not. When I asked her specifically about individuals who had complained to us, she denied that she and her husband Bob had done anything wrong. She repeated that the industry was out to get her, but could offer no evidence.

Meanwhile, the Sea Safaris charade continued, but got more complicated. Judith Caldwell of Santa Barbara, California, told us that she and her husband and another couple had paid Sea Safaris \$11,374, in two installments, by credit card in May and by check in July, for air fare and accommodations at the Garden Isle and Marlin Bay Resorts in Fiji. In return they received vouchers for accommodations and diving from something called Select Escapes.

In September, both Fijian hotels refused to accept the vouchers. Neither had heard of or been paid by Select Escapes. When Caldwell explained that the vouchers had been provided by Sea Safaris, the hotels explained that Sea Safaris owed them a bundle and they had stopped doing business with them. The Caldwells and their friends paid a second time.

When they returned to Los Angeles, they went directly to the Sea Safaris office in nearby Manhattan Beach. It was closed. Through the window they they could see a few travel posters and cardboard boxes. At home, they opened their credit card statement to learn that in September, without authorization, Sea Safaris had billed their credit card an additional \$4,925 for airfare, for which they had paid with the July check. In effect, they paid twice for the airfare and twice for the land.

While Sea Safaris is no more, the Frenches may still be doing business under other monikers — in particular, Select Escapes, Manhattan Marketing, and Safaris Cayman, and perhaps Express Travel Group and Summit Travel as well.

How they continue to take money from divers while staying a step ahead of the sheriff boggles one's mind. But they do. The Redondo Beach, California, law firm of Hruska and Lesser, which is representing several clients, has received a default judgment — in effect, the Frenches didn't answer — but attorney Gina Schott says it will still take up to two years to conclude the suit. An Illinois collection agency is pursuing the Frenches for business debt. Credit reports show that they have walked from other debts. Rick Lesser says there may not be much to go around when the divers' suit is concluded.

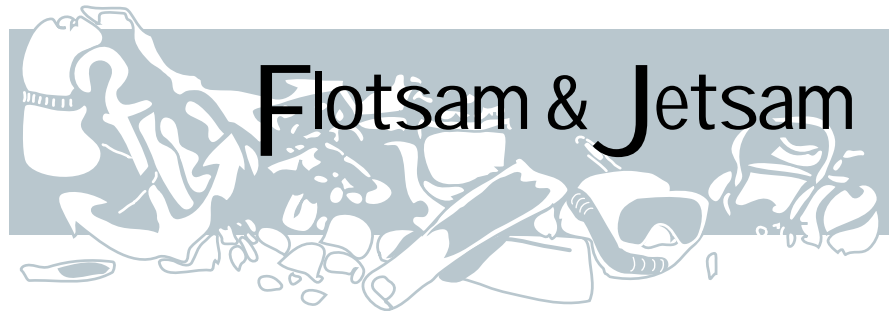
Readers have also told us that the California Attorney General's office is preparing a complaint,

but the AG's office refused to confirm this.

After a lot of wrong turns, I recently found a phone number for Manhattan Marketing in Rolling Hills Estates, where the Frenches reside. Nancy French was more interested in how I got the number than in answering my questions. She wouldn't acknowledge that she was out of business or that they had stiffed or failed to satisfy any of their customers. Instead, she blamed Bill Gleason, the publisher of *Skin Diver*, and attorney Rick Lesser for her troubles. When I asked what they had done, she told me she had said too much already, and hung up.

By alerting our readers to the Sea Safaris ripoff in previous issues, we helped many avoid it. If you feel you've been treated dishonestly by any business associated with the diving industry, please let us know. We'll pursue it, do our best to stop it, and share our findings.

Ben Davison



MARINE SUPER HERO. What makes a mean bowl of soup, fights venereal diseases, and swims like a fish? Sharks, which are already suffering from the pressure of “finning” — cutting off the fin for soup — may now be facing additional demand. At Magainin Pharmaceuticals of Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, research-

ers are working on a potential antibiotic taken from sharks. The substance, called squalamine, appears to be effective against a variety of sexually transmitted viruses and bacteria, including gonorrhea, herpes, and the AIDS virus. It may also be useful as a spermicidal contraceptive.

DIVING WITH SEALS HAS ITS DANGERS. An abalone diver was killed by a shark this month in Australia's southern waters. The attack took place in about 30 feet of water, near Hopetoun, southeast of Perth. The deck hand who witnessed the attack from the surface was not sure what sort of shark it was, "but from the appearance of the tailfin, it was certainly big."

Local fishermen said schools of sharks had been attracted to the area in the past four to five weeks by calving whales and an abundance of seals.

VOLCANIC ERUPTION KILLS CORALS. Scientists just released studies in the science journal *Nature* that conclude that the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines in 1991 killed corals in the Red Sea.

The eruption, one of the largest this century, threw 20 million tonnes of sulphur into the atmosphere, filtering out sunlight and lowering temperatures around the world. The drop in temperatures had a dramatic effect on the Red Sea.

The water circulated much more than usual, bringing nutrients to the surface, fueling large blooms of algae and plankton. The phytoplankton bloom was huge, and lasted more than two months; the usually clear blue waters of the Gulf of Eilat (or Aqaba) became greenish. Thick mats of algae covered broad sections of the underlying reef, causing extensive coral death.

PHOTO EXPERTISE. Subscriber Robert Shaklovitz of Houston calls our attention to Internet's Underwater Photo forum, which has been around for the past several months and, at last count, has over 200 subscribers. The level of expertise is generally high, and discussion covers every aspect of underwater photography, including equipment and film preferences, techniques to improve results, and digital enhancement of images. Still photographers predominate, but

some videographers pop up occasionally. An Ikelite rep is a regular contributor, and he seems to know everything there is to know about any u/w strobe on the market. He has a dry wit, to boot.

To subscribe, send an e-mail message to "majordomo@world.std.com"; leave the subject line blank, and in the main body of the message, type "subscribe uw-photo" (without the quotes).

WILD & WOOLY REGULATOR. A commercial diver showed up at an emergency room complaining of an intense throat irritation after breathing from his regulator. The reg had not been used for the last nine months, so he had attached it to a cylinder to test it. One breath sent him immediately into a violent coughing fit and eventual vomiting. Because it felt like little pins in his throat, the diver was convinced that the dive shop where he had last filled his cylinder had somehow contaminated his air with metal shavings. However, when the second stage was disassembled, the mystery was solved. It seems a large wooly caterpillar had found a quiet place to die.

SEA PORK. At least 50 dolphins a day are killed off Peru, even though it's been illegal there since 1990. Dolphin is considered food in only a handful of countries, including Japan, China, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. The custom is only 15 to 20 years old in Peru.

A recent government crackdown on killing dolphins off the Peruvian coast and selling dolphin meat in local markets hasn't stopped the slaughter. Fishermen now bring in butchered dolphin in black plastic bags, and restaurants use code names, such as "pork soup," to let clients know they are eating dolphins.

NET WORTH. Overheard on the Internet: I'm sure PADI didn't plan it this way, but if you dial 800-PAY-PADI, it's PADI headquarters that answers the phone. *In Depth's* number is 800-326-1896. What can you make out of that?

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