
Walker's Cay offers by far the most exciting Bahamas shark dive. In September, E. W. Strawbridge (Jacksonville, Florida) joined the

animals. "The reason to go is the shark dive! The feeding is done so the sharks do not directly associate the divers with the food. They

treat divers like a rock they have to swim around. You can be comfortably in awe in the midst of more than 100 sharks, along with large groupers, chubs, and snappers. We went back on nonfeeding days to photograph 20 to 30 sharks. Reef diving is unremarkable, but shallow and pleasant."

Don't Feed 'Em!

The top of my trusty (rusty?) Nikonos IV camera bears the bite of a shark's tooth, obtained during a shark feed in Vanuatu. The excited but pea-brained pelagic blind-sided me as we lay on the bottom, and knocked my hand off the camera where it was poised over the shutter, biting the camera in the process. It was quite a few seconds before I had the courage to look at my right hand, which fortunately remained unscathed.

On another feed, in the Coral Sea, shark bait dropped from the chase boat floated down directly over our heads, and we scuba tourists had to scatter out of our predesignated hiding place to flee the middle of the feeding frenzy.

I can understand that a diver who has never had the experience might want to get a close look at these incredible creatures in action. However, my experiences lead me to believe that shark feeds might not be such a great idea. Maybe I'm just getting to be an old, not-so-bold diver, but I am perfectly happy to appreciate sharks in the wild without putting blood in the water to bring them up close and personal.

Kenneth D. Knezick
Island Dreams, Houston

February saw Irby Hartley's (Hixson, Tennessee) second trip aboard the *Nekton Pilot*. "Diving sites varied from super wall sites to ho-hum. But the shark feed was only good for two divers who had air after 90 minutes at 55 feet. Saw one big hammerhead. While the chief divemaster has an attitude problem — needs some shore duty — the rest of crew worked their butts off; anything you wanted to do was supported. Boat is the ultimate dive base."

J. Q.

Affair of the Heart

When your doctor says yes but theirs says no

Do you have any medical conditions? Do you take any medication? When you travel abroad to dive, you'll be asked to answer questions like these, sometimes in great detail. Then, if your condition or medication is on the dive operation's proscribed list — or some teenage divemaster thinks it should be — you may be refused the opportunity to dive. None of this "you-assume-the-risk" business; you're just not going to dive with them. They want no liability for you.

While there are clear reasons for the inquisition, it can get silly. A couple of years ago we got a letter from a reader who was not

permitted to dive on his Caribbean trip because he admitted to taking Prozac. The drug didn't count him out, but he was told that "depressed people shouldn't be diving."

So it's not surprising that many divers whose physicians have assured them they're fit to dive elect never to mention their medications or medical conditions.

However, the condition of reader Tom Alsip of Mobile — a benign one, he says — caught up with him in Bonaire. Alsip, 63 years old, has, as his personal physician writes, "relatively infrequent episodes of supraventricular tachycardia (SVT). When he has these, he is not incapacitated. I do not feel that these are a contraindication for him to dive." Alsip describes these incidents as rapid, fluctuating heartbeats.

While on a surface interval between dives with Sand Dollar Dive, Alsip felt one of his rare attacks coming on. He asked the boat operator to radio back and request an ambulance to take him to the hospital, where he could deal with the problem. They did (although Alsip says the ambulance was really a truck). At San Francisco Hospital on Bonaire, Dr. E. W. van de Griendt got Alsip's heart regulated, saw no reason for him to discontinue diving, and said so in a note on hospital stationery.

Alsip showed both notes to the Sand Dollar staff, but they insisted he visit their doctor, who

refused to certify Alsip for diving. Disappointed, to say the least, Alsip requested a partial refund for the diving he had prepaid and Sand Dollar referred him to Caradonna Caribbean Tours (Longwood, Florida), with whom he had organized his trip. Alsip wrote Caradonna in October to say that he was deprived of two-thirds of the dives and “I therefore deem it fair and just that you reduce your billing by the same percentage.”

Caradonna responded two days later with a breakdown of the costs — which included air far, car rental, meals, and lodgings, and agreed to refund only \$87.50 of a bill that exceeded \$1,100. They noted that he had used other services and could not be reimbursed.

Alsip is unhappy with the decision. After all, he says, he only went to dive and his diving was curtailed.

I too would be disappointed if I were 86'd from diving, and I sympathize with him. But I think that Caradonna is correct and is under no legal or moral responsibility to refund Alsip's payments for air, hotel, meals, or car rental. I do believe that they are morally committed to refund the money for the missed dives, but I'm surprised — and pleased — that they did.

Ben Davison

Arms Race

A little light on lightweight strobe mounts

Most underwater photography is not for the casual shooter — it takes dedication, perseverance, big bucks, and a ton of equipment. An anal personality is helpful.

One who has indulged himself in this pursuit knows the importance of positioning the camera's strobes; it can make the difference between a great photo and a trash-can photo. Generally the best way to wrestle strobes into the right position is to mount them on flexible arms attached to a tray, or directly to the camera or housing. Ideally these arms should be easy to pack, sturdy, and lightweight.

Several years ago, Technical Lighting Control (TLC) introduced lightweight arms that, although expensive, provided a new degree of flexibility and usability. I rushed out and spent my money. Now, another manufacturer, Ultra Light, claims significant improvements over TLC's version of the arms. Not only are they supposed to be even

lighter and more flexible, they also have O-rings in their ball joints that, says Ultra Light, provide greater holding power to maintain the position of a heavy strobe.

To test these claims, I packed enough Ultra Light arms and trays to secure two strobes on both my Nikonos and my housed camera system and headed for Fiji.

Although it took me a while to get used to the new setup, the Ultra Lights were truly light and strong and a pleasure to use. The ball mount at the strobe made aiming much easier and caused less drag than my standard TLC arms. (TLC now offers a lighter set of arms for macro work.) They packed nicely too, breaking down into smaller and lighter components than the TLC system. A spring in the clamps made assembly easier (the trick was to hold the clamp together with one hand and spin the knob with the other). The knobs were much easier to tighten than the TLC's.

Quibbles, Gripes, & Kvetches

Although the flexibility of the ball joints was a plus for positioning the strobes, it also let the arms slip out of position when I handled the camera above water, especially when using large strobes such as Ikelite 150s. I learned to prevent this by carefully folding the arms and carrying the setup, but it was hard to get this across to the boat crew who handled the camera.

The tightening screw for the dovetail tray mounting brackets kept working loose. So did the adapters mounted at the ends of the camera pivot and the clamp securing the camera pivot to the Nikonos. Putting in a lock washer helped, but that's easy to lose when you remove the camera from the pivot.

The Bottom Line

Fortunately, the Ultra Light is fully combinable with TLC's equipment, so I can mix and match components as funds allow. Normally I would need two arms (\$48 each), three clamps (\$28 each), a strobe adapter (\$22) and a tray adapter (\$22) to mount one strobe on a system (total: \$224). Ultra Light offers special arms for the