

undercurrent

The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Two Harbors, Santa Catalina Island, CA

the other Catalina

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Dear Fellow Diver:

If you stroll around the scrubby town of Two Harbors on Santa Catalina Island, you may feel like you're in a 60s time warp by the music wafting from behind the open-air bar, the only bar in town. But it's not much of a town. There's a hotel, probably last decorated in the 60s, a smattering of houses and places to stay for students on field trips, and a dive shop smack on the pier where the ferry docks when it arrives from San Pedro in Los Angeles Harbor. Two Harbors is a two-hour bus ride to Avalon, the town with all the action.

The Banning House, perched on a small hill above town, is as comfortable as a shaggy old sweater, but not particularly welcoming. When I stayed there, I had Room 8, apparently the most expensive in the place because it had a few more square feet, a couple of chairs and a porch that doubled as a patio. It also had an expansive view of the remote Catalina Harbor on the west side of the island, but so did most other rooms. Room 4, with a shared patio, might be the best deal in the house. Only breakfast was served, a modest buffet with fresh fruits, a couple of cereals, little sweet rolls. So lunches of burgers, fish and chips, etc., were down the hill at the West End Galley. Dinners at the Harbor Reef restaurant were a reasonably priced variety of decent pastas, meats and fish, with prompt service and a full bar. It was a five-minute walk or a hotel employee was always willing to drive guests back and forth. (Occasionally a bison or two wandered by, their ancestors brought to the island decades ago for a movie but now in peaceful retirement.) Aside from climbing the hills, walking a few dusty roads, or kayaking, staying here



The Garibaldi anchored in Two Harbors



is all about diving -- the best land-based diving in California. I'll let my colleague describe it, because he has also dived round the island on live-aboard boats and has a lot to compare it to.

-- Ben Davison

* * * * *

Most of the diving here takes place in and around a marine invertebrate preserve just off Isthmus Cove on the west end of the island, facing Long Beach. Although I've dived Catalina for years, I was blown away by the water clarity and scenery. Lobsters, eels and other fearless critters posed patiently for photographers. Brilliant orange Garibaldi fish were in my face like border guards. (They must know they're the state's official marine fish and therefore protected.) Two Harbors Dive & Recreation Center, a full service PADI operation, runs a 45-foot dive boat, named -- guess what? -- the Garibaldi. It rides smoothly on a catamaran hull, is square-ended fore and aft, can hold up to 24 divers, and has a marine head. While THDRC isn't exactly a valet diving operation, the conscientious crew attended to details.

On the most recent trip, my first dive, at a site called the Sphinx, set the tone. Seated on a bench amidships, under the cover of a canvas awning, I set up my tank and BCD on an aluminum 80 filled to 2800 psi, which I humped back to the spacious open-air fantail. Sitting on the deck with my feet on a surface-level swim step, I pulled on my fins and divemaster Josh helped me into my BCD and I stepped right in, no giant stride required. THDRC offers either guided or individual diving, but the guided tours must include all divers. So we opted to dive on our own, following the thorough briefing given by Captain Dave. The only glitch occurred when two divers, wearing rental suits, were improperly weighted and had to return to the boat.

My buddy and I swam to a wall forested with bull kelp, where I could sample the beauty of the huge leafy vegetation without risking entanglement, or penetrate as deeply as I wished. Fog had rolled in so there wasn't much color underwater, and visibility was only 30 feet. At 1500 psi, we turned back and after a leisurely downcurrent kick in 68-degree water, I heard classical music playing! The Garibaldi crew lowers an underwater amplifier to help divers find their way back. Following the sound, I hovered under the boat for my safety stop, then kicked up to the three-part swim step. It was easy to pull myself onto the submerged center portion, then sit on one of the surface-level platforms while Josh removed my tank. After I had stowed my gear, Josh offered me a cup of hot chocolate, but no towel -- bring your own. In the 70-degree weather, I managed to drip dry.

In mid-October, my group had the Banning House almost to ourselves and with as few as two divers, the Garibaldi was virtually a private charter. On our second day, we rescheduled the departure time to 9:30 a.m., allowing for a leisurely breakfast. We also could request specific dive sites, so I was able to avoid some in the area I consider liveaboard clichés, like Bird Rock and Ship Rock. At the end of the day, I left my regulator and BCD on the Garibaldi, rinsed the rest of my gear and hung it on a drying rack at the shop. Shop manager Hilary moved everything indoors overnight, even after our last day of diving -- a thoughtful service that let us pack relatively dry gear for our trip home.

On my second day, the sun came out and visibility improved to 40 feet at Parson's Point, near a campground outside the preserve. In bright sunshine,

Two Harbors, Santa Catalina

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Diving (<i>experienced</i>) | ★★★★ |
| Diving (<i>beginners</i>) | ★★★★★ |
| Snorkeling | ★★★★ |
| Accommodation | ★★★ |
| Food | ★★★★ |
| Service and Attitude | ★★★★ |
| Money's Worth | ★★★★ |

★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent

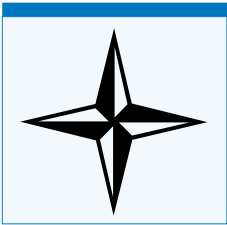
Worldwide Scale

I enjoyed viewing a lush array of kelp and other vegetation. Showy little blue-banded gobies were everywhere. The Garibaldi deployed a current line but they never dropped us in a site with substantial current. In fact, they revisited a few sites until they decided the current was dive-ready.

At Emerald Bay, I stayed above 33 feet to enjoy the play of sunlight on colorful gorgonians, with just enough surge to keep things flowing. Streams of bait fish swooped by, just out of reach of the photographers who were diving solo. I even spotted a few living abalone -- an encouraging find in an area where the tasty mollusks had been hunted nearly to extinction in the 80s. They're still protected in the Channel Islands -- for now. Visibility continued to improve to 50 feet or more with increasingly sunny weather as we visited sites like Sea Fan Grotto, rarely-dived Eagle Reef and Isthmus Reef, occasional home to giant black sea bass, which were out when we came to call. Conditions were gentle and none of my dives exceeded 75 feet.

On our final day, we arranged a tour of the University of Southern California Catalina Hyperbaric Chamber, reachable by water taxi or kayak from Two Harbors. Operations Manager Lorraine Sadler gave us a primer in decompression theory, and then led eight of us into the chamber. She secured the hatches and took us down the equivalent of one foot underwater. I felt the pressure immediately in my ears, and could only imagine what a two-hour treatment at a depth equivalent of 60 feet would be like. It was a sobering experience. Hopefully, I'll be able to enjoy diving Two Harbors again without a return trip to the chamber.

-- Larry Clinton



Diver's Compass: Most of my group flew into Long Beach and chartered a shuttle to the Catalina Express ferry terminal in San Pedro (www.CatalinaExpress.com) . . . A two-tank dive is \$89, one dive in the morning and one in the afternoon, and don't forget your c-card; half price for freedivers (you can take game outside the preserve) and snorkelers . . . A guided tour for up to six people is \$80 per dive, and divemasters lead guided kayak dives or snorkel tours from kayaks or off the Garibaldi . . . More dives and greater flexibility are available mid-October and later, when hardly any groups are chattering; no night dives in the summer because it gets dark too late . . . THDRC has plenty of rental gear, including wetsuits . . . Shore diving, snorkeling and kayaking is available off Two Harbors' beaches . . . Banning House rates start around \$125 and go up to \$200-plus . . . Web site: www.visitcatalinaisland.com/twoHarbors

Vista Sea Sports, Baja California, Mexico

as fishy as it gets this close to home

Dear Fellow Diver:

The East Cape of Mexico's Baja California sits about halfway between La Paz and Cabo San Lucas (about an hour drive from the Cabo airport), with little seaside towns in between. While the area has long been known to sport fishermen, 90s money brought \$2 million, five-bedroom waterfront estates. The little towns of Los Barriles and Buena Vista still have a tad of Mexican character -- well, just a tad. Having been here a decade ago, I find today's pockets of conspicuous wealth disconcerting, especially when I watched a bandy-legged, emaciated, pregnant beach dog digging for scraps at the gates of an estate. But if suffering dogs bother you, then you really can't visit Mexico (though Americans seem to create animal shelters wherever they immigrate).



Vista Sea Sports operates out of Mark and Jennifer Rayor's beachfront compound in Buena Vista, from where they send covered pangas south to Cabo Pulmo Marine Park if the sea is flat and two paid divers are aboard. In November, I expected to dive at least four days but ended up in the water only two days; insufficient for a comprehensive review though I'm no stranger to Baja diving. I know there are plenty of fish, unique species, often surprises, and a bottom dominated by rocks and boulders without much in the way of colorful coral. It's a great switch from the Caribbean.

On my first day, we drove north to the Bay of Dreams. Mark told me over the phone that it was the only site they could dive because the brisk wind

made other sites too difficult to dive or even to reach in their little boats. I and three other divers who were staying at the Rancho Leonero were picked up just before 8 a.m. for a 90-minute ride in an SUV. Simon, an English expat and the instructor in charge, is a witty fellow who kept his wits about him underwater. He provided a good pre-dive briefing, and we had plenty of time to get organized as he and the driver hooked up gear and loaded it into a 20-foot, leased fishing panga sitting at the surf line. Callo, the boat owner, motored us 15 minutes along Punta Perrico to the site (we dived it twice after returning to the beach for lunch, which each of us had ordered in advance from the hotel). Below, we cruised between barren boulders dotted with occasional chunks of coral and sea fans, a typical Sea of Cortez bottom. Visibility was a murky 45 feet but as one can expect, fish were prolific -- a free-swimming green moray, hawkfish, bumphead parrotfish, schools of grunts (burrito, Cortez), snapper, graceful Moorish idols, guineafowl puffers, in fact, more puffers than you'll see in a lifetime diving the Caribbean. Scattered about were snatches of fishing nets and strands of nylon line. A conch was entangled in one line, limiting its radius to six feet, so I pulled it free. One could spend weeks here cleaning up the decades of fishing detritus.

With the wind whipping up whitecaps, the next day's dive was to be at the same site but to me it wasn't worth the three-hour, round-trip drive, especially when I learned the other divers would be a group of Czechs learning to dive. I was happy to read The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo and roam Los Barriles. The next day, the seas flattened and we headed for Cabo Pulmo Marine Park, a common goal on calm days. On the first dive, among boulders reminiscent of a tumbled building, pinnacles spotted with gorgonia provided interesting relief to the landscape. Two stone fish were wedged in a narrow groove; a pair of jacks flitted by; there were plenty of spadefish, grunts, Moorish idols, butterfly fish and an endless array of white spotted, guineafowl and

Recalls for a Regulator and a BCD

Don't use the Cressi Ellipse Black MC5 regulator: Turns out you might have less air in your tank than you think. A recall issued by Cressi says, "Partial obstruction of the high-pressure port can produce an inaccurate reading on the pressure gauge, resulting in a slow descent of the BC needle in the pressure gauge. The inaccurate reading on the gauge poses a drowning hazard to divers." About 200 regulators have been recalled in the wake of Cressi-Sub USA receiving three reports of inaccurate pressure readings. "Cressi MC5" and "Cressi Black" are printed on the faulty regulators. If you have one, return it to a Cressi-authorized dive shop for a free repair, or call 800-338-9243.

And stop using your Dive Rite Wings BCD post-haste.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has issued a recall of 16,000 Dive Rite Wings because the overpressure valve springs could rust and fail, allowing the BCD to leak and posing a drowning hazard. The affected models include the Travel, Venture, Rec, Trek, Classic, Nomad and Super Wings, and were sold in red, blue or black. Faulty springs were used on wings that have an opaque white or blue-tinted bladder and welded in flanges. Wings with a black bladder are not affected. Only the Dive Rite wings that have a serial number ranging from 42,000 through 72,000 and were sold from June 2006 to October 2008 are included in this recall. If you have one of them, return it to an authorized distributor or call Dive Rite at 800-495-1046.

Boldly Wear What No Diver Has Worn Before

To my knowledge, there weren't many underwater exploits on any of the *Star Trek* series, but that didn't stop Eugene "Rod" Roddenberry, son to *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry, from creating "The Original Series Wetsuit" that would make his father proud...I think.

While Gene was crazy about outer space, Rod loves the watery depths and created the Roddenberry Dive Team to increase ocean awareness. "Our mission is to use the notoriety of the Roddenberry name and *Star Trek* to get people's attention that indeed our oceans are truly the final frontier," he told *Undercurrent*. A \$50 membership fee gets you discounts on team events and logoed gear sold on the Web site.

For the wetsuits, Roddenberry worked with West Coast custom shop JMJ Wetsuits to create 3-, 5- and 7-mm one-piece, full-length wetsuits with the uniform colors and rank insignias that Kirk, Spock and the rest of the crew wore. And yes, these are real wetsuits, Roddenberry says. "These are not novel gimmicks, these are the real deal, made using the highest-quality materials and expert craftsmanship."

Priced between a whopping \$435 and \$470, these may be wetsuits only devoted Trekkies will spring for, but each wetsuit is custom-made. You need to get yourself sized and measured by a professional tailor first, then you send the measurements to JMJ and it'll deliver your perfect-fit wetsuit in six to eight weeks. You've got your choice of Command Yellow, Science Blue and Engineering Red, although you may not want to wear the latter on a shark dive. To buy the wetsuits and join the dive club, go to www.rodtenberrydiveteam.com.



sharp-nose puffers. Simon gently lifted my foot off of a gorgonian as I was concentrating too hard on a balloonfish in a crevice. More of the same on the second dive, with two green turtles, a large green moray free-swimming and a patch of garden eels. The water temps were in the mid-80s but by the end of the dive, my old, three-mil, shorty wetsuit didn't keep the chill away. The dives were good, by Sea of Cortez standards, but in my short stay, none of the bigger guys -- schools of rays, mantas and sharks -- visited. But I know they're here, and Vista Sea Sports has a pretty honest Web site, with a decent description in its "Dive Report" section of what to expect.

Rancho Leonero is a very nice yet isolated property, about four miles off the main highway down a sand road. My bungalow -- half a duplex, actually -- was basic, clean and roomy, with a large tiled shower, a comfortable king bed, a large dresser and a second door opening onto a tiled patio with a table, chaise lounge and partial ocean view. The restaurant overlooks the sea but doesn't take advantage of the view. While the bar was lively at night, most everyone was here to fish. Big-game fishermen seem to me wealthier, more glitzy and better dressed than us divers -- and certainly drunker because they don't have to stop fishing after their first drink of the day.

On the two buffet nights I ate here, the food was good, hearty, uncomplicated -- a barbecue one night, Mexican on the other. In Los Barriles, a 15-minute drive from Rancho Leonero, there are several restaurants. One night, I sat at Baja Papa's East Cape Smokehouse's streetside bar and had a great smoked seafood plate. There are also several small Mexican spots and Tio Pablo's, a larger quasi-sports bar. Plenty of places with dinners in the \$10-\$15 range. Beers run about \$3, margaritas average \$6. Last time here, I rented an ORV to cruise the miles of beach but when I learned I needed to depart a couple of days earlier than expected, I let that pass.

Truth is, I like the East Cape a lot. Yeah, the gringos are here, creating a Barrio Americano, but it's off the beaten path. To dive Cabo Pulmo, it's certainly easier to stay at Cabo Pulmo itself, but if you don't mind an hour-long ride in Vista Sea Sport's small panga -- essentially the equivalent of a Boston Whaler -- you'll find more to do here. For West Coasters, it's a perfect very-long-weekend destination.

-- Ben Davison



Diver's Compass: A two-tank dive at Cabo Pulmo was a pricey \$125; Vista's Web site (www.vistaseasport.com) has links to the local hotels, and its boat picks you up at the hotel docks at 7:30 a.m. . . . Rancho Leonero rates run from \$150 to \$250 a night, double occupancy, and include all meals (www.rancholeonero.com). . . Hotel Palmas de Cortez, on the beach along the main drag in Los Barriles, is recently renovated, with a large swimming pool, bar and restaurant; a good choice if you want to walk to restaurants or have a long beach to stroll (www.palmasdecortez.com). . . Driving is no sweat, roads are

good but winding at times; you can find major car-rental agencies at the Cabo airport, or your hotel can arrange transportation to and from the airport . . . The dollar seemed to be the main currency at the local restaurants; English is spoken everywhere . . . Winter water temperatures fall below 70 degrees but are in the mid-80s in September and October.

Barra Lodge and Diving, Mozambique

put this African dive site on your bucket list

Dear Fellow Diver:

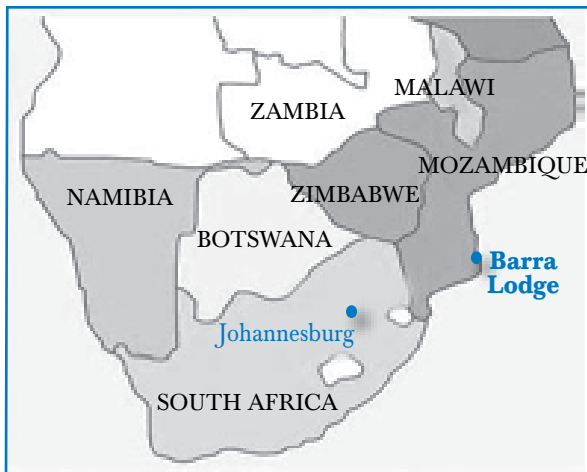
Now and then, Undercurrent reports on destinations far from those covered in American dive magazines. Mozambique, on Africa's southeastern coast and bordered by Tanzania, Swaziland and South Africa, is worth a place on your bucket list, especially if you're planning an African safari. The rocky dive sites (not much in the way of colorful corals) are a bit stark, like Mexico's Sea of Cortez. But there are plenty of fish and in the African winter (June to November), humpback whales migrate from Antarctica to give birth.

Barra Lodge is on the spectacular and just-developing Punta Barra. Barra Diving has a PADI 5-Star rating and is well-equipped with top-notch rental gear, including ScubaPro 5-mm wetsuits, rinse tanks and gear storage. It offers two dives a day from its surf-launched, hard-bottom Zodiacs. The first trip leaves at 8 a.m. and returns about 10 a.m. You have time for a quick brunch before launching again at 11:30 a.m. Zodiac diving requires upper body strength (these rubber rafties are ladder-less so you must be able to arm-press and kick your way aboard), a strong stomach and a back that can take the pile-drive slamming of riding through the waves and onto the beach.

On my early November trip, my first dive was to a site called Sherwood Forest. The ride out was as exciting as any rolling and slamming carnival ride -- we went directly into the six-foot swells for 40 minutes. After that, I was happy to backroll into 60-foot visibility on this mushroom-shaped rock. We dived it as a drift dive, with a maximum depth of 90 feet. I saw a huge fantail ray, a seven-foot-long honeycomb eel, a stingray, a large octopus, several sizeable barracudas, lionfish and many reef fish. After 35 minutes down time, plus a five-minute safety stop, I rode back with the swell. To get the Zodiac far enough up the beach so the tractor can recover it, the captain idled outside the surf line while the divers "brace for impact." That means feet stuffed into the foot straps, and hands grasping safety lines with a death grip. Then he punched the throttle and rocketed toward the beach. At the last second, he yanked up the twin outboards just before the boats slammed onto the sand and jerked violently to a stop. Yeehaw.



Barra's Carnival-Ride Zodiacs



Once a week, Barra Diving offers a snorkeling trip down the coast in search of whale sharks and, in the winter season, humpback whales. Our divemaster Mariano (an Argentine married to another divemaster, Ruth, a Brit) told us afterwards (he didn't want to jinx us with premature hubris) that they had spotted whale sharks on 13 of their last 15 safaris. On our trip, the captain spied a 12-footer, and we swam with her for 45 minutes, as she would drift down to 25 feet and then rise, nearly breaking the surface. While in the water, I also heard the unmistakable singing of humpback whales. Lots of exuberant flying fish rounded out our safari. Barra Diving staff was very safety-conscious without being overbearing, and they loaded and unloaded gear on the Zodiacs. Their dive briefings were some of the best,

never mind that we were on a secluded African beach.

On the last day, I visited "The Office," an offshore site 75 feet down on a rock wall with S-shaped penetrations. The ride out was a smooth 45-minute cruise, but the current was ripping. Since the reef is short, overflying it while riding with the current would have meant a five-minute tour, so I kicked into the current hard. But this site offered the best coral and sponges I saw, along with scorpionfish, octopus, large schools of reef fish, a swim-through cut and a seven-foot leopard shark on the sand. Some of the divers in my group didn't get to see the shark because they blew through their air fighting the current.

After brunch, we visited "Mike's Cupboard" nearer shore, which consists of eroded rock with multiple cut-outs varying in size from room for two cozy divers to room for six or eight. The surge was strong, so getting into a tight cut-out with another diver was tough. Peering into crevices at 50 feet depth, I saw tons of nudibranchs, scorpionfish, lobsters, puffers, crocodile fish and octopus. Four sociable cuttlefish hung out with me for a good 10 minutes, flashing an array of colors.

Barra Lodge is a well-run rustic lodge with 20 ocean-view casitas. Equipped with full bathrooms and electricity, they feature simple platform beds (one double and two singles), fans and mosquito nets. The resort has a few large casitas with kitchenettes, and a bunkhouse. Because they are thatched-walled and thatched-roofed, the casitas are not mosquito- or bug-proof. It was breezy and in the low 80s when we were there, so the mossies weren't bad but on a calm, mid-summer day or a hot evening, the lack of penetration-proof walls would be problematic. Mozambique does have a malaria problem, so you need to protect yourself as much as possible against the mosquitoes. I took malaria medication (Malarone), as is recommended, and used bug repellent at all times.

The lodge has a swimming pool, dining room and seaside bar and restaurant. The European-style meals were very good, plentiful and safe -- you can eat the veggies and drink the tap water. The seafood, particularly the giant local prawns, was outstanding. Some fish and chicken dishes were prepared with the spicy South African Peri Peri sauce, which I washed down with the delicious local beer, Laurentian Clara, at \$2 a bottle. Most guests here were South Africans and Europeans in the Generation X age bracket.

Barra Lodge, Mozambique

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Diving (<i>experienced</i>) | ★★★★★ |
| Diving (<i>beginners</i>) | ★★★★★ |
| Snorkeling | ★★★★★ |
| Accommodation | ★★★★★ |
| Food | ★★★★★ |
| Service and Attitude | ★★★★★ |
| Money's Worth | ★★★★★ |

★ = poor ★★★★★ = excellent

Worldwide Scale



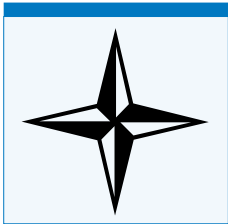
Barra Lodge

Although Punta Barra is dubbed "the Manta Coast," I didn't see any mantas. And although the lodge's web site says visibility ranges up to 125 feet, I had 50 to 60 feet on my dives, which the staff considered quite good. There's no decompression chamber nearby, so Barra Diving is conservative in its profiles. Water temps range from 71 degrees in their winter season (June to September) to 84 degrees in the summer "wet season" (December to March). In early November, it was in the mid-70s. Mozambique has a number of diving locations on its coast; Tofo (pronounced tofu) is one of the better known, as is the Pemba area. But if you're traveling all the way

to Mozambique, you're already up for the beach

less traveled, right? So, with the nitpicks aside, add Mozambique and Barra Diving Resort to your bucket list for a unique diving adventure.

-- Kathleen Doler



Divers Compass: Portuguese is the official language, but English is widely spoken and U.S. dollars are widely accepted . . . Prices for Barra Lodge's regular casitas range from \$120 to \$140 per person, per night, including breakfast and dinner; the lodge can arrange sailing, fishing, horseback riding, quad tours and town excursions to Tofo or Inhambane (www.barraresorts.com) . . . Single tank dives with all gear are \$58, \$48 if you have toted your own, and multiple dives are discounted (www.barradiveresorts.com) . . . Travel is easy via flights to nearby Inhambane from Johannesburg on LAM, Mozambique's national air-

line; the trip is about an hour and 40 minutes, then the drive on dirt roads to Barra Lodge is 30 minutes . . . My partner's bag got lost but was delivered to Barra Lodge intact three days later . . . Before visiting, read the State Department's security warnings at <http://travel.state.gov>, but we had no security troubles whatsoever.

A Diver's Report From Copenhagen

how much time do we have to fin around living reefs?

I arrived in Copenhagen for the U.N. Climate Change Conference in December, not as a diver but in my volunteer capacity to organize the International Court for the Environment Coalition in the U.S. Quite simply, a movement is under way to create such a court to hold nations and multinational corporations accountable for environmental disasters. As it is, there is no accountability and no sanctions. The movement is modeled on the effort that created the International Criminal Court in the 90s.

A few steps after I emerged from my flight at 4 p.m. in the Copenhagen airport, I was greeted with a large sign stating: "Price of a dive vacation in 2050. 350ppm in CO2. Protect our oceans from acidification, which threatens corals, reefs as well as fish and shellfish stock. Find out how you can make a difference at www.oceana.org."

Now we all know about coral bleaching and may have seen it firsthand. Increased water temperatures, happening rapidly now due to global warming, kills coral polyps, leaving behind just the coral structure, bleached white. While many reefs recover because warmer water temperatures aren't sustained long enough to kill all the polyps, about 16 percent of the world's corals bleached and died in 1998, as an example. That's not all. The bottom cover of corals on

Caribbean reefs has dropped by more than 80 percent in the past 30 years due to global warming and coral diseases, many of which are directly related to global warming.

I took in dozens of expert presentations on ocean-related issues, such as receding glaciers and the melting of Greenland's snow and ice. Of course the ice melt, along with the expansion of seawater as it warms, is raising sea levels, an immediate concern of island nations. But a more significant threat to the health of the oceans is coming from increased acidification, attributed to the increased levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

Guy Midgely of the South African National Biodiversity Institute pointed out that coral reefs are the most immediately threatened of the ecosystems. They are being lost nearly five times faster than rainforest. While many scientists believe that increasing temperatures will make bleaching an annual event in a decade or two, acidification is not only killing reefs but poisoning the entire ocean. As more and more carbon dioxide is pumped into the atmosphere, more is absorbed by the oceans. It's rapidly altering ocean chemistry by dropping the pH level, meaning seawater is getting more acidic.

The acid reduces the availability of carbonate ions in the water, an essential element that corals, clams, urchins, oysters, mussels, shrimp, lobsters and even some plankton need to build skeleton and shells. Fewer carbonate ions mean many species are having an increasingly difficult time building their shells and structures and in many species the shells are thinner. Many corals are building a less sturdy structure, so coral reefs are becoming weaker and more susceptible to destruction from storms and wave surges, which decreases the natural barrier between raging seas and a human population on shore.

While a preponderance of data supports the deleterious effect of acidification on marine life, a study released in December by Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute suggests that "different types of marine calcifying organisms will respond in very different ways to any future ocean acidification caused by increased CO₂." Justin Ries, who directed the study, says "Crabs, lobsters, shrimp, calcifying algae, and limpets could build more massive skeletons, while tropical corals and urchins, and most snails, oysters, and clams could be less successful at defending themselves from predators than they are today. . . . It's hard to predict the overall effect on benthic marine ecosystems," he says. "In the short term, I would guess that the net effect will be negative. In the long term, ecosystems could re-stabilize at a new steady state. The bottom line is that we really need to bring down CO₂ levels in the atmosphere."

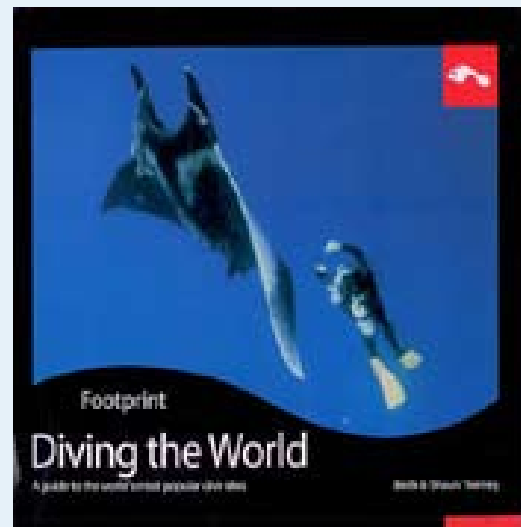
That's the thing about climate science. While scores of studies will clearly show a trend, one may show a counter trend. A critic can cherry-pick to argue contrary to the majority. Or claim America's brutal winter as proof there is no warming (while ignoring the exceptional heat waves in Australia in January and November 2009). But

Diving the World: A Guide to the World's Most Popular Dive Sites

Authors Beth and Shaun Tierney describe 220 dive sites in 19 nations, with site maps. But for my money, the real value comes from the country reviews, seasonal dive information, destination ratings and general travel information. The Tierneys mention preferred dive operators and liveaboards, provide a bit of chit-chat along the way, and illustrate this U.K.-published book with hundreds of color photos.

Their text is no critical review but it seems reasonably honest, though you can be sure the authors got comped much of the way and the 360-page softbound book does carry a few advertisements. If you're interested in the Caribbean, you won't find much: the Yucatan, Honduras, Belize and Grenada. But the key countries in the Pacific and Indian Ocean are all covered. If you're an adventurous traveler, there's a lot of good reading here and the book belongs in your library.

If you go to www.undercurrent.org, click on "Books" and buy it through us, you get it from Amazon.com and our profits go to conserve coral reefs.



the overwhelming evidence is inescapable. The burning of fossil fuels is changing the planet far faster than species can adapt.

Oceana, perhaps the most prominent citizen-based and ocean-oriented NGO, distributed a paper that showed which nations will be hardest hit by ocean acidification. Using criteria such as fish and shellfish catch and consumption, importance of coral within their economic zones and projected level of acidification in local waters, it listed the U.S. the eighth most vulnerable out of 25 countries, with Japan, France and the U.K. leading the pack. Its conclusion: Many of the most vulnerable nations are the largest producers of carbon dioxide – the cause of ocean acidification – and they have the greatest ability to stop it from worsening.

After the conference, the Associated Press reported on a team of experts led by an MIT professor who calculated that the average global temperature is likely to rise 5.7 degrees Fahrenheit above current temperatures over the next 100 years. Reef scientists don't believe any coral reefs could survive more than 30 to 50 years, if that, with such an accelerated climb in temperature.

Everywhere I looked inside the convention center, the number "350" was painted on banners and backdrops and adorned T-shirts. That's what many scientists say is the acceptable level of parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, roughly the level back in 1990. Today, it exceeds 390 ppm, and the U.S. and the European Union are only aiming to stay below 450. Going above 450 ppm "will change everything," NASA climate researcher Cynthia Rosenzweig told me. "There will be changes in water, food, ecosystems, health, and those changes also interact with each other."

At that point, among other things, millions of people would be subject to regular coastal flooding, droughts would cause food shortages, coral reefs would dramatically die off, therefore affecting the ocean food chain, and about 20 percent of the world's known species would be significantly endangered, according to Rosenzweig and other climate scientists.

But not much happened in Copenhagen among the leaders of the big nations to stop carbon dioxide levels from exceeding 450 ppm. This means there's a fair to middling chance that we divers will be among the last generation to fin among living coral reefs – and that's just the least of our worries.

-- Ben Davison

P.S. If you're interested in helping to create an international court for the environment to hold accountable those governments and multinational corporations that do serious harm to it, e-mail me at bendavison@undercurrent.org.

Fittest of the Fins

our gear expert dived in feet first to test the best

What makes for a good pair of fins? One that you find comfortable and that performs the way you want it to. But because we're all different in our dive capabilities, leg strength and aerobic capacity, it's hard to make a definitive decision as to which fins work best overall. It truly is what suits you, sir.

That being said, I asked a bunch of dive gear distributors to send their best-performing pair of open heel fins in size XL for my side-by-side comparison test. To ensure absolute fairness, I swam exactly the same route at Wraysbury Lake, near London, during the course of one day in balmy 71-degree water. This allowed me to do the test runs in a sleek semi-drysuit; I wore a single tank and a sleek-fitting BC with nothing dangling except for my regulator's intermediate hose.

I'm of average fitness with body mass index and blood-pressure numbers in the normal range. I was well rested between each swim and made sure my heart rate and



Atomic Aquatics SplitFins

breathing had returned to normal before donning the next set of fins. As a control, I used some of the fins from the beginning of the day at the end as well to confirm I was getting constant results. I kept the range of my fin strokes to within the area of water pushed through by my body, and held an underwater speedometer calibrated in meters per second out in front of me at full stretch with two hands. I swam gently at first, accelerating until I was doing my heart-busting best to get the maximum speed out of the fins registered on the speedometer.

What has speed got to do with it? I was testing these fins in still water so all the effort I made was transformed into forward motion. If I had been finning into a constant head-on current of one knot, my speed over the ground would have been one knot slower. It's the speed in still water that is meaningful and equates to thrust. At first glance, the speeds I achieved might not seem that quick but Richard Major of Wraysbury Dive Centre, swimming along behind me at the end of the day, reported difficulty in keeping up with me. This was even though I was using one of the poorer-performing pairs of fins and thought I was swimming slowly. On the other hand, I'm sure an athlete at the height of his powers would have managed better than three feet per second during the test runs. Here are the fins I tested, listed from fastest to slowest.

Atomic Aquatics SplitFins (\$200; 2.9 feet per sec.; 5.8 lbs.; S-XL) On this split-bladed fin with a stainless-steel spring strap, I felt that the foot pocket was a little large and consequently they felt loose. I was concerned this would be reflected in a poorer performance but not only were these fins among the fastest during my sprint but I could also cruise at that speed with little effort. (www.atomicaquatics.com)

Omega Amphibian (\$169; 2.8 feet per sec.; 4.6 lbs.; M-XL) These "flip fins" have a foot pocket that swallowed most of my foot. That meant that, even though the blade was stiff and unforgiving, I could go for it without any ill effects and no complaints from my leg muscles. The unique folding effect has advantages for shore divers because you can safely walk around in them, and they click into place as soon as you start finning. (www.flipfins.com)

Tusa SF-6 Imprex Tri-Ex (\$99; 2.8 feet per sec.; 3.9 lbs.; XS-XL) These conventional fins, despite being boring looking, were very comfortable. With most of my foot encompassed in the pocket, I experienced no pain in the leg department when finning hard, and achieved a surprising top speed as good as the best. Seems you don't need fins with an avant-garde design to get good results. (www.tusa.com)

AquaLung Slingshot (\$198; 2.6 feet per sec.; 5.9 lbs.; S-L) These hefty fins have blades that look big enough to use as surfboards, and they have adjustable flexibility by means of movable silicone springs. I got good speed at the most flexible, i.e., weakest, setting. At the stiffest setting, I was slightly slower, at 2.4 feet per second, and the fins were then agony to use, indicating a powerfully built diver might get even better results. (www.aqualung.com)

Cressi Reaction (\$110; 2.6 feet per sec.; 5.2 lbs.; XS-XL) These are fins for the super-fit. The foot pocket swallowed most of my foot, thereby making the best use of my thigh muscles, but the blades are so rigid I felt I had planks of wood attached to my feet. Although I got a good result, someone with stronger legs would probably have gone faster. Fins with stainless-steel spring straps are available at extra cost. (www.cressi-sub.it)

IST Bora Bora (\$80; 2.6 feet per sec.; 5.7 lbs.; S/M and L/XL) A narrow foot pocket that left a lot of my foot protruding from the back meant I got tired feet and calves quickly. The massive blades were very effective, reflected in

Embarrassing Dive Moment Leads to a Major Diet

A year ago, Blanaid O'Sullivan from Loudwater, England, weighed around 230 pounds. Her dress size was 22. But thanks to a moment on the dive boat that left her mortified, she weighs 140 pounds and wears a size 8.

O'Sullivan, 47, who works as a medical company director, said that constant travel had led to bad, on-the-go eating and too many dinners with clients. She became so heavy that she couldn't haul herself unaided back onto the boat after a dive. The thought of not being able to operate effectively as a diver was the last straw. "I realized that if I didn't do something about my weight, I might never get back into the water again," she told *Diver*.

In January, O'Sullivan was awarded "Action Woman Slimmer of the Year" by the British chain of fitness clubs she belongs to. Because of her 90-pound weight loss and her regular exercise routine, O'Sullivan now slips into a size medium wetsuit.

the speed I achieved, but they were uncomfortable. I felt the tops of my feet would have got sore with extended use. However, they offer a lot of performance for very little outlay. (www.istsports.com)

Mares Excel Plus (\$150; 2.6 feet per sec.; 5.2 lbs. XS-XL) Although I'm told the foot pocket is longer than on the first Excels, they still left about 1.5 inches of heel protruding. These are much stiffer fins and consequently need more effort to push through the water but that effort will pay off when you need it. The strap buckles are unique to Mares and allow you to lever the straps tight but with hands softened by long immersion, I managed to cut myself on them. (www.mares.com)



Tusa SF-6 Imprex Tri-Ex

Oceanic Vortex V16 (\$190; 2.4 feet per sec; 5 lbs.; S-XL) A comfortable foot pocket and a blade that flexed easily meant I should have been able to keep up top speed for longer without my legs complaining. However, the two inches of my protruding heel meant calf cramps limited what I could achieve. (www.oceanicworldwide.com)

Aeris Velocity (\$90 list price; 2.4 feet per second; 2.5 pounds; S-XXL) American-branded, these look like simple paddle-style fins but are said to be designed by split-fin guru Pete McCarthy. Around two inches of my heel protruded out of the foot pocket, which didn't auger well for a totally painless sprint, but I didn't suffer any calf pains and got a fast result nevertheless. (www.diveaeris.com)

Beuchat PowerJet (\$110; 2.4 feet per sec.; 4.8 lbs.; M-XL) A very rigid fin that felt unforgiving. Most of my foot was encompassed by the foot pocket and I got a good speed, but I wondered if my fitness level was good enough to get the best out of them. They'd probably suit someone with shorter, stronger legs. (www.beuchat.fr)

Scubapro Seawing Nova (\$220; 2.4 feet per sec.; 5.5 lbs.; S-XL) With an avant-garde design that looks a little silly but works well, these were probably the most comfortable of all the fins I tested. The foot pockets completely swallowed my feet and the elastic, bungee-style spring strap kept them snug. I got a good speed that I could maintain without pain. (www.scubapro.com)

APS Mantaray (\$150; 1.9 feet per sec.; 3.2 lbs; S-XL) These American-made, lightweight small fins are very comfortable to wear but no pain, no gain. I worked exceptionally hard to get an effective speed, resulting in cramps in both my legs. Their positive buoyancy is unusual and needs getting used to, especially in a drysuit. They'll feel good until you find yourself head-on into a current. (www.apsmantaray.com)

John Bantin is the technical editor of DIVER magazine in the United Kingdom. For 20 years, he has used and received virtually every piece of equipment available in the U.K. and the U.S., and makes around 300 dives per year for that purpose. He is also a professional underwater photographer.

San Diego Dive Shop With a Dark History

a suicide, a dead diver and accusations of lies and theft

Dive Connection in San Diego apparently has so many violations, complaints and near-fatal mistakes that it was not a shocker to the local dive community when an Arizona policeman died while diving from one of its boats last fall.

But when you have feuding owners accusing each other of lies, robbery, and identity theft, and one of them apparently commits suicide after a diver dies, what can you expect? And what can *Undercurrent* expect when we receive a suspicious, self-incriminating e-mail allegedly from one owner that may have fraudulently been written by someone else - - maybe even the other guy? These are some very bad vibes.

A History of Violations and Disgruntled Divers

On September 28, Daniel Forchione went on Dive Connection's *D&DII* dive boat for a noontime dive a mile off of San Diego's Sunset Cliffs. San Diego lifeguard Nick Lerma told San Diego TV station KFMB that Forchione was overweighted and surfaced in a panic. He was found an hour after the dive, unconscious at 65 feet. He had taken off his BC but still wore his weight belt. Lerma said he was out of air, tangled in the kelp, and sank to the bottom.

It's not hard to find operational complaints levied at the company. Ryan Wilbarger of Waterhorse Charters told KFMB after Forchione's death that he has heard plenty of horror stories from former Dive Connection passengers. "They run up on Dog Beach [in October 2008 when the new captain missed the channel]. They run out of fuel at Coronado Islands. You name it, they've done it." Online scuba boards have plenty of bad stories as well. One diver complained that the captain anchored in the middle of the kelp "so thick you couldn't even get off the boat. Two people had to have the divemaster go get them." Another said "a third of the tanks had to be replaced because they weren't filled prior to departure, the captain didn't know how to turn the battery on, and crew forgot breakfast and the bread to make lunch."

But more seriously, KFMB researched U.S. Coast Guard records that show a history of mechanical and safety violations on various Dive Connection boats. There was worn-out equipment, failure to keep training logs, and rudder and steering problems. Coast Guard reports over the past five years detail medical problems with divers surfacing in distress, coughing up blood, running out of air, and having to be airlifted to hospitals.

Moreover, KFMB discovered feuding partners, uncovering lawsuits filed against each other for breach of contract and false ownership of stock shares. Apparently, two of the owners have even filed restraining orders against each other – Barry Punshon claims that Richard Sillanpa tried to run him over with a van, but then Sillanpa accused Punshon of holding him at gunpoint with a .45-caliber gun.

"A Disgrace to the Dive Industry"

Barry Punshon, Dive Connection's former majority owner who says he still has shares in the company, has taken his complaints against Richard Sillanpa, the majority owner, online. At the Web site PsychoSoloDiver.com, he wrote that the operation went downhill after he gave control to Sillanpa and three other men in 2007. He also wrote that Forchione's death was gross negligence, and the owners should be charged. (Punshon claims to be just a shareholder when the death occurred, however, that means he was an owner of Dive Connection at the time.) "The divemaster, Robert Ellis, was not insured that day, required by our lease, and he had let his divemaster certification card lapse two and a half years before. Sillanpa pumps bad air, explodes tanks and compressors, runs boats aground and almost sinks them, drives boats with no divemaster or valid captain's license. All the good people I had left when I was gone . . . These men are a disgrace to the diving industry. "

We e-mailed Sillanpa at his Dive Connection e-mail address in mid-December to get his side of the story. To our surprise, we instead got an e-mail answer the next day from Barry Punshon, who had apparently been forwarded the e-mail by a Dive Connection staffer. In his e-mail to us, Punshon claimed Sillanpa is guilty of tax evasion and using a rigged credit-card machine to hide money. He says Ellis, the divemaster, was a known drug addict who was using drugs on the day of Forchione's death and ran away from Coast Guard investigators to avoid a drug test.

But get this. The day after receiving Punshon's e-mail, we got an e-mail signed by Richard Sillanpa, admitting he was responsible for every one of Punshon's charges. "My inexperience of running dive boats has left this company in shambles . . . I realize with great shame that everybody, including myself, would have been much better off if we would have continued to allow Mr. Punshon to run the company . . . Mr. Punshon somehow acquired proof that I have been processing credit cards through a credit card machine used for Hawaii Snorkel Surf and Dive. I admit to doing this . . . I was able to disguise how much money DCI was making each

No way is anyone going to send Undercurrent a confessional that would put him in jail.

Grand Cayman Officials Say Alcohol and Stingrays Do Mix

Do the piscine residents of Grand Cayman's Stingray City really need a bar and restaurant floating in their midst? On December 10, Cayman's Liquor Licensing Board granted a retail liquor license and a music and dancing license to Bernie Bush, a local businessman, for the proposed floating bar. But Cayman local Peter Van der Bol told the Cayman Net News that Bush's application was deceptively done because he said the license would be applied at a nearby yacht club, but it then turned into a floating bar.

Undercurrent reader and Cayman local Jack Augsburg wrote a protest letter to radio show Cayman Crosstalk. "What does this say to the children who will visit Stingray City in the future? Here is a beautiful natural setting to safely interact with nature and, oh yes, there is the bar. I have heard the argument that because boaters go there and drink alcohol, then why not a permanent floating bar. There is a huge difference between temporary boaters with personal freedom and a permanent alcohol-dispensing structure."

More than 100 locals and tourists gathered in George Town last month to protest the license. "Even if a clean operation is done, trash will still end up in the water, and you can't swim with stingrays in the wild," protest organizer Natasha Kozaily said. "Putting a bar there is encouraging people to drink beer while they are swimming and they can drown. They can step on stingrays and harm them or get harmed."

Bush says the place will be more restaurant than bar, serving Caymanian dishes to let tourists sample the local cuisine and served with biodegradable cutlery, while drinks will be served in souvenir cups as incentive for customers to hold onto them. He says he won't be anchored in Stingray City and won't be the first to change the family atmosphere. "Half the people have beer or liquor in their hands drinking. So this is nothing new. The fact is it is high time that a local person started to make something out of this so-called piece of pie here in Cayman Islands."

So while it's business pure and simple for Bush and Cayman officials, looks like the underwater residents -- and the area's main attraction -- are the ones who will benefit the least.

month which resulted in paying less [to the] city . . . at the end of the month . . . I apologize for these mistakes openly and only hope you will post these regards in your story. I was a victim of my own greed and pride and only hope I am not held responsible for my bad decisions."

No way anyone is going to send *Undercurrent* a confessional that would put him in the pokey. And when we called Sillanpa in mid-January to ask, he denied sending the response and said he had never even seen our original e-mail to him. He believes Punshon wrote the e-mail response, charging that his nemesis hacked into Dive Connection's web site last year and stole its e-mail addresses and URL. "We haven't been able to run a dive trip for the last two months because we no longer have access to the web site, and Barry has slandered my reputation in the dive community."

Sillanpa's Side of the Story

Seven years ago, Sillanpa owned five percent of Dive Connection; Punshon and six other partners owned the rest. In 2005, Sillanpa bought out four partners, raising his stake to 54 percent of the company which, he says, irked Punshon. Still, Sillanpa gave Punshon the title of president but he says that when he found out Punshon was forging documents, stealing money and selling off assets, he and the other shareholders voted him out as president and off the board of directors. Sillanpa claims Punshon ran off to Mexico to avoid jail time for a minor crime, and that's when he started bad-mouthing Dive Connection. Last September, Sillanpa negotiated with Punshon to buy out his remaining 32 percent of the company. After Sillanpa had made several regular payments, Punshon told Sillanpa he was changing the terms. Then, Sillanpa says, he found out he was paying for shares Punshon didn't own -- the man had lost the stock back in December 2008, leveraging it to buy cars while in Mexico.

Sillanpa says Punshon belittled the company to the point where Dive Connection lost the lease late last year on the dock where its boats were docked since 1987. He says Punshon stole \$8,000 from the bank accounts, broke into the credit-card accounts, forged Sillanpa's name on bank records, and finally broke into the shop and stole the computer. "It has been domestic terrorism for the last two years."

Punshon's Side of the Story

We also contacted Punshon in mid-January to see if he knew about this forged e-mail with Sillanpa's signature. After all, we had sent our original e-mail request to Sillanpa only once, at Dive Connection's e-mail listed on its web site, in mid-December, and Punshon had replied, though apparently he was no longer affiliated with the business. Punshon denied forging the e-mail and said that it did not come from his IP address (how he would have known the IP address is unclear, as it was not written anywhere on the suspect e-mail). Punshon says he took control of Dive Connection's web site in early January, after Sillanpa was facing trouble with city officials. "Whoever hacked into their system must have done this." However, he added, "Everything on there is pretty darn accurate. It's the definite truth."

Punshon denied losing his stock and said he still owned 34 percent of the company, while Sillanpa owned 43 percent, not 54 percent. He said he was in Mexico to get a visa for his stepson but meanwhile, Sillanpa was putting private investigators on his tail and getting court injunctions accusing him of things he had never done.

But Punshon admits he did get into the company's bank account, only to find that Sillanpa was diverting funds to another company. He got liens put on Sillanpa's boats and got the marina owners to evict Sillanpa. "I want him out of business and I do not want him to hurt the general public anymore. His lease ends on January 17. He's done."

The Aftermath

After having lost his marina lease, Sillanpa told us he would shut down Dive Connection in late January. The Dive Connection web site is now owned by Punshon, who renamed it GottaDive.com and farms out divers to "reputable dive shops in the community." Whoever, if anyone, hacked into and stole control of Dive Connection's web site is unknown, as is the truth about all the charges these two are aiming at each other.

Sillanpa says the Coast Guard, after investigating Forchione's death, ruled that Dive Connection was not responsible. However, Robert Ellis, a Dive Connection shareholder and the divemaster on that fatal dive, was found dead with a knife wound in his chest on December 20. He was discovered in his bedroom five days after dying. According to the medical examiner, the cause of death is suicide.

- - Vanessa Richardson

Hawaii Crushes a Reef with 50 Tons of Concrete

Hawaii's Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) bungled its artificial reef deployment off of South Maui in December, dropping more than 50 tons of concrete modules on top of a pristine Maui reef, virtually destroying it.

The state submerged about 1,400 concrete blocks to expand the artificial reef at Keawakapu Beach, between Kihei and Wailea, and create an additional marine life habitat, but some of the blocks inadvertently landed on live coral. Fragile and endemic finger coral serving as nursery habitat for juvenile fish was crushed by the modules as the DLNR barge dumped its load without anchoring.

Despite GPS and buoys marking the way, the DLNR barge dropped the whole load way off target while it was being maneuvered by a tugboat. Don Domingo of Maui

Dreams Dive Shop and Terry Hunt, a former commercial net fisherman, were two divers recruited by DLNR to help coordinate the project. Both declined responsibility for the mishap, blaming the barge operator. Hunt said, "Shit happens."

DLNR is whitewashing the event, calling the damage minimal. According to its spokesperson, "New coral and seaweed will grow on the forms, which will provide additional habitat to new communities of reef fish . . . artificial reefs increase potential fishing grounds for fishermen."

Artificial reefs are controversial with conservation groups because they aggregate fish, making them easier targets, and lead to overfishing. Maui does not suffer from lack of fishing grounds but it does suffer from a lack of fish. Now fish habitat is covered by cement blocks. And the damaged reef at Keawekapu may now be exposed to further devastation from natural disasters, including the giant swell on its way.

Rene Umberger is a Maui dive instructor and guide, and she also works with the Hawaii Reef Fish Recovery Project.



The Private, Exclusive Guide for Serious Divers

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Flotsam & Jetsam

Underwater in an Earthquake. Dive photographer Alex Mustard was diving in Grand Cayman on January 19 when he felt the 5.8 earthquake that hit a week after the 7.0 one that devastated Haiti. Mustard told DIVE, "It was clear all was not normal. The noise was a deep, roaring, rumbling sound, not unlike engines on a large ship. My next thought was that it was a free flow. After 15 seconds, the sound stopped. No sand was stirred, and I didn't notice any changes in the fish. I'm glad I was not diving in an overhead environment when it was shaking."

Treasure on the Vandenberg. Pat Clyne, a documentary filmmaker, has hidden a \$2,400 silver coin from the 17th-century Spanish wreck *Atocha* on the *Vandenberg* near Key West, and finders' keepers. Clyne worked with Mel Fisher's crew to salvage the *Atocha's* treasures and he says, "I had a couple of coins left over, and thought it would be exciting for divers." Clyne says he has clues on his YouTube page (user name: pjclyne) but the URL he's referring to is defunct, so e-mail him there or at imacdigest@aol.com to ask him for the seven clues. If you find the coin, he'll send you its certificate of authenticity.

Scuba Tank Helps Climate Research.

Scientists take air samples to learn about the atmosphere, but the oldest samples of pristine air only date back to 1978. Now the archive has been expanded thanks to a diver who never throws anything away. John Allport of Melbourne, Australia, dropped off a tank to be filled with air back in 1968 but never got around to using it. When Allport, 76, heard Australia's Atmospheric Research Centre boasting about having the oldest air archive in the southern hemisphere, he said, "No they haven't, I've got the oldest air." While it's not the cleanest air sample, the Centre says Allport's donation is indeed the oldest one known to science.

Speaking of Tanks. If you're going to recycle your tank, please, exhaust all the air first. At a recycling station in Needham, MA, last month, an employee removed an aluminum tank from the discard pile and put it in the main office because it required special handling. When it fell over, the tank's top valve was knocked off and it flew through the air, striking a chair and smashing through a sheet of drywall. Luckily, no one was in the office at the time, but they've got it out for the offending diver who dropped off the tank – and has been told in the past to empty his tanks before bringing them in.