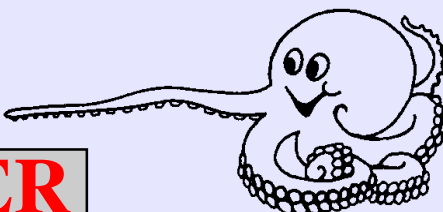


THE REEF SEEKER



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LESSONS OF THE THAI CAVE RESCUE

We'll start with the most obvious one: Don't go in dry caves that might get flooded.

And while it was nice to see scuba diving portrayed in such a positive light (since normally the only time we makes headlines are when someone dies), in all seriousness, there are some lessons that can be gleaned from all of this that may have application in our day-to-day diving.

The first is never to give up hope. I am stunned and impressed by the resilience of the group as a whole, and that they never panicked or gave up hope that someone was coming to get them. In that same vein, if you get into trouble while diving, it's quite important to keep your head and wits about you and don't feel overwhelmed by the situation. Never give up the hope that you can fix the problem. Sometimes, that's half the battle.

Another lesson is the importance of dive planning. The old NAUI

saying is "Plan your dive, and dive your plan." If you've watched any of the long-form stories and documentaries about the rescue (the piece on ABC's *20/20* was especially good I thought), one of the aspects they covered was the planning that went in to how the rescue was going to be done. They had a scale model of the tunnels to deal with tank placement, they ran drills in a pool with other boys to test proof-of-concept for getting the kids out, they were constantly comparing notes and trying, after each journey in and out, to think of ways to do it better the next time. And while a "routine" dive at a familiar location may not require that type of detailed planning, you certainly should have SOME sort of a plan rather than just "We'll dive until we're done."

The other valuable lesson is how complicated true tech diving is. I am still dismayed by the number of people who seem to think tech diving (cave, wreck, deep, whatever) is the next logical step after you get that Advanced card and have 10 dives under your belt. What could go wrong?

We, as an industry, are very guilty (IMHO) of fostering a mindset over the last few years that diving is easy, doesn't really require much effort or attention to do it (I mean - look!!! - you can even do most of it on-line), and even if something

goes wrong, it's not that big deal (don't want to emphasize the negative - marketing, marketing, marketing), and you'll be able to easily recover from the malady.

And yet the death of the highly-trained Thai SEAL should put that notion to rest, especially when you hear the details of what happened. According to the ABC *20/20* story (and I think this came from the former governor of the Thai state who was heading up the overall operation), while on one of the underwater transits to place tanks, the mouthpiece on the regulator came off. Now think about that for a second. How does the mouthpiece come off? Because a tie-wrap (zip-tie) broke. A simple problem that could happen to anyone. Except this guy was in a flooded cave with no access to the surface.

He was apparently unable find the primary regulator to put back into his mouth and was unable to access his backup regulator. Another diver found him unconscious but was unable to revive him.

Is this scenario something that could happen on that routine dive mentioned above? Sure. In fact, it could happen on ANY dive. Tie-wraps break, fin straps break or come off (I swam up to one of our divers in Yap whose fin strap had come off of her heel and she would

eventually have kicked off her fin - easy fix), BCs leak, and the list goes on. Many times, these are simple problems that have simple solutions. Sometimes they're not. But the reality is that for ANY of them, because we're underwater, what seems like a simple problem can turn into a deadly one if we don't deal with it quickly and correctly.

One of the lessons in our "Why Divers Die" talks over the years is that sometimes what gets people is not one specific little problem, but one problem on top of another on top of another, until you get task-loading and a fatality occurs. So the advice we give is that when something goes wrong on the dive (whatever it is), STOP, fix the problem and - if you can't fix it - abort the dive, get to the surface, and deal with it back on the boat or land. As with the Thai SEAL, the problem may not be that major or even unusual. But circumstances combined to make what should have been a minor inconvenience into something that cost a life.

So there are definitely lessons to be learned from all of this whether you're rec, tec, or rec-tec, or something else that doesn't yet have a clever name. And perhaps the biggest lesson of all from this entire incident is this: Miracles sometimes DO happen.

NORMALIZATION OF DEVIANCE

This isn't as risqué as it might initially sound . . .

The phrase, first made popular during the investigation of the Challenger explosion, refers to

when you have a set of procedures and you start to deviate from those proven procedures. But because nothing goes wrong, you deviate again. And again. And eventually, the deviation from procedure becomes the norm, hence the term "Normalization of Deviance." Because nothing has gone wrong, it's assumed that everything will continue to be fine . . . until it isn't.

With Challenger, as we all know now, a faulty o-ring caused the explosion when the command "Go at throttle up" was given and the pressure on the o-ring increased. NASA engineers had known for quite some time that the o-rings didn't perform well in cold weather, but it was considered an acceptable, and low-probability, risk. However, they'd never launched in weather as cold as on that morning of January 28, 1986. And we all know what the result was.

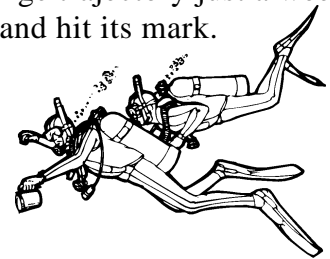
We have a similar thing that happens in diving. We either take protocol shortcuts or eliminate safety factors and, just because nothing bad has happened, we think everything that we're doing is perfectly OK. An extreme example would be divers not trained in cave div-

ing go explore a cave and, because nothing bad happens, they do it again, until the inevitable accident occurs.

When I've discussed this in the past, I've said that many divers not only don't realize they just dodged a bullet, but many of them don't even hear the bullet whizzing closely by their heads. Ignorance is NOT bliss.

So this is a suggestion, especially in light of everything that happened with the Thai cave rescue, to take a good, hard look at your own diving practices and see if you can evaluate them objectively. If there are things you think you're doing right, fantastic, keep doing them. But if there are things that that little voice in your head says, "Maybe this isn't such a good plan," then make some changes.

De-normalize your deviance. Because you never know when that bullet whizzing by your head may change trajectory just a wee little bit and hit its mark.



2018-19 DIVING VACATIONS

Oct. 27 - Nov. 3 • Roatan

March • Yap & Truk ???

May - Bonaire ???

Early fall - Maldives ???

VACATION TRIPS

You deserve a nice vacation, don't you? Of course you do. Here's what's on tap with Reef Seekers.

ROATAN IN LATE OCTOBER

- Actual dates are October 27 - November 3, and we've got one room left (2 people or you can book as a single for an extra charge). However, I'm going to have to release the room by the end of August if no one wants it. So if this is something you've been thinking of, you need to contact us shortly. Roatan's a great place to dive and we'll be at Anthony's Key which is also fabulous. (We were also there in 2013.) Roatan's at the southern end of the world's second-largest barrier reef and it's got lots of great things to see. Nice healthy reefs and a good time will be had by all. \$2,195 covers all your land-based stuff (but not airfare.)

The rest of this is tentative for 2019.

YAP & TRUK IN MARCH

- You know how much I love going to Yap. It also looks like there's a way to combine a week in Yap followed with a week in Truk (Chuuk) diving those famous WW2 wrecks. We'd obviously stay at Manta Ray Bay in Yap (and March is a great time for amorous Mantas at Stammtisch) and I need to investigate Truk a little further. I'd like to do the *Truk Odyssey* but that's not always available. The other option would be to do it land-based, staying at Blue Lagoon. Either way, this would be a fabulous combo. I don't have a feel for pricing yet but you could also do this as simply a week in Yap or simply a week in Truk if you can't do two weeks back-to-back. But

UPCOMING LOCAL DIVES & CLASSES

DAY	DATE	BOAT/SITE	PLANNED DESTINATION	PRICE
Thu.	Aug. 2	- CLASS -	- NAUI NITROX -	\$25
Sat.	11	Redondo	Navigation dive (single tank)	\$25
Sat.	25	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Thu.	Sept. 6	Redondo	••• Night Dive •••	FREE!!!
Sat.	15	<i>Catalina Express</i>	Avalon U/W Park (3 dives)	\$150
Thu.	20	- CLASS -	- PHOTO WORKSHOP -	\$25
Thu.	Oct. 4	Redondo	••• Night Dive •••	FREE!!!

given that the airfare usually runs around \$2,000, doing two weeks gives you better bang for your buck.

BONAIRE IN MAY - I'm always searching for the right word to describe diving in Bonaire and especially when we do it with our longtime friends at Buddy Dive but "reliable" is the one word that always comes to mind. The diving's very good, you can reliably know what to expect, it's not all that tough to get to, fairly reasonably priced, and we always have a good time and are well taken care of by Buddy Dive.

INDONESIA JUNE/JULY - I really love this trip but we simply haven't been able to generate enough interest the last year or so, so it was mothballed. But maybe next year we can be back on track. We generally do this as a 9-day (diving) trip with Murex in Manado. By using them as our base of operations, we have access to all the great reefs at Bunaken, all of the muck sites around Manado Bay, plus we'll try to do a day trip to Bangka, and a day trip to the legendary Lembeh Straits. You can also pair this with a trip extension in Singapore and take a few days to enjoy that fabulous gateway city, or you could tag on another week somewhere else.

ISLA MUJERES IN MID-AUGUST - I am frequently getting people calling me about diving

with Whale Sharks. If Whale Sharks is what you want, this is one place where we can pretty much almost guarantee we'll get you nose-to-nose. About 10 miles north of Isla Mujeres, the largest known congregation of Whale Sharks - numbering 400-800 - forms every year from roughly May-September. You're limited to snorkeling, but it's an amazing experience to be in the water with these animals and it's not unusual to have multiple encounters on a single snorkel dive (which generally last about 10 minutes as we also limit the number of people in the water at any given time). On top of three mornings with the Whale Sharks, we'll also dive cenotes, the Cancun Underwater Museum, a small wreck, and some reefs off of Isla. On top of all of that, we've got a hotel right on the beach and Isla, we've discovered over the years, has some simply fabulous restaurants. This is a great way to spend a week.

MALDIVES SEPT/OCT - The hope/goal here is to intersect with the annual migration/congregation of Manta Rays. (This is different from how we experience them in Yap.) In the northern regions of the Maldives at this time of the year, there are great clouds of plankton and the mantas come in to feed, sometimes hundreds at a time. It's a pretty wild show. This won't be the only thing we're looking for as the Maldives has lots of

really healthy reefs and quite abundant fish populations. We'll again go with Moosa and the *Manthiri* and we'll likely work out some sort of a land-tour extension (Hong Kong, Seoul, etc.) on the way back.

So those are the general thoughts so far. There's nothing locked in stone but this is the time to get hold of me and tell me what tickles your diving fancy and also what dates work or don't work for you. As man of you know, I like to run relatively small groups so 6-8 people is the norm with around 15 being the max (and usually that's when we take an entire live-aboard). So it only takes a few people saying "Yes!!!" to make one of these trips a go. Feel free to e-mail me at kenkurtis@aol.com or call 310/652-4990.



SHARK THIEF IDIOTS

Just when you think you've heard it all . . .

The good news is that the shark (Miss Helen) is fine and back where she belongs. But it seems that three ethically-challenged people tried to steal Miss Helen, a relatively small Horn Shark, from a touch pool at the San Antonio Aquarium. They hid it in a baby

stroller, walked out, and drove off in their truck.

Fortunately, the entire incident was caught on surveillance video. The cops were called and tracked the thieves down through their license plate. In fact, the police said when they apprehended them at their home, the place looked like a mini-aquarium. Apparently the "plan" was to try to sell the shark on . . . wait for it . . . Facebook. (Haven't these morons heard of Craigslist or eBay?)

Authorities retrieved the shark, it's back in its home in the aquarium, and the trio will be charged with a crime. Initially I was thinking maybe their punishment should be binge-watching "Shark Week" but that may be where they got this hare-brained idea in the first place.

PICTURE PAGE - Summer SoCal fish

(All pix by Ken Kurtis © 2018)



Halfmoons
trying to look cool



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Gregarious
Male CA Sheephead



Kelp
Bass



Bat Ray
in transit



School of
Blacksmith