

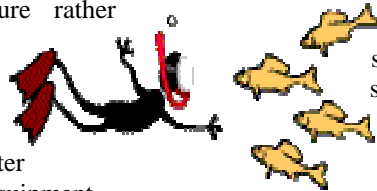


**MY FIRST FREEDIVE**  
by Peter White

Since moving to California, I've noticed that some of the divers here are rather different from what I'm used to. Apart from a worrying tendency to talk about relaxation and mystical communion with nature rather than the latest regulator or the absolutely best type of dog clip, they are repeatedly caught getting into the water without all of their equipment - sometimes so little gear that they can walk. Bundle in better karma and edible shellfish, and I realised, I'd been missing an important part of the California dive experience.

A couple of years ago, my opinion on freediving was pretty much "they're mad - it's unnatural to dive without at least three tanks, four regulators and a large roll of duct tape", encouraged by the British dive press, which eagerly covers the number of

shallow water blackouts in the latest free dive championships. However, after a period of indoctrination based on watching free diving videos, I was beginning to wonder if free diving might be more like what I thought I was getting into when I first started diving. So as Gene and Ken have been saying for some time that they wanted to introduce some of the club's tank divers to the mysteries of freediving, I was keen to go along.



better part of valour (we know better than to believe their excuses about previous engagements and visitors - couldn't their visitor swim?).

As we looked at the great waves breaking over the rocks, I was beginning to contemplate the drive home, but instead we decided to brave the conditions by staying in the shelter of Gerstle Cove itself, within the reserve. After a short briefing on the beach, we swam out into the open water. The culture shock began to sink in on the swim out. There seems something terribly wrong about freediving at first. I mean, where's your buoyancy? Is this really all the kit I need? Am I really swimming out to sea with an 18lb weight belt? And what's all this about controlling your breathing? What do you mean I have to do physical exercise? Can't I just sink to the bottom while twitching a fin now and again?

After a couple of false starts caused by the weather, we finally met up at Gerstle Cove on Saturday 17 of May. Our group consisted of Gene, Ken and Curt (the experts) leading me and Debra (first time freedivers). Meanwhile Pierre and Gerda decided that discretion was the

continue on page 5



**A BRIEF NOTE FROM THE ENTERTAINMENT CZAR**  
Kenneth Gwin

This month's entertainment will be another exciting episode of death defying alpine adventure. Our man, Armin has opted out of ice diving and this month will show pictures of what the Swiss do when the spring thaw has come, the snows have melted (except, of course, the many glaciers not yet taken out by global warming), the tourists are lining up for the Gornergrat, and the inviting raging waters are singing their song. He says "river diving" in Switzerland. I gather this is something like the Matterhorn ride at Disneyland or Splash Mountain, but I really couldn't say. You show up and ask him. Bring hot chocolate and a sweater.

**DER STAMMTISCH**



June is turning out to be a lazy month so far, at least as far as my writing anything for the Stammtisch. It's not something I planned, writing a column isn't like turning on the spigot in your bathroom or tapping your TV's remote. It's a meditative process, an almost Zen like experience. So here's a little insight in my creative processes. First, I poured myself a finger or so of bourbon, a brand called Black Maple Hill. It's made in small batches by some folks in Kentucky that make their sour mash the old fashioned way, one small handmade batch at a time. This particular batch had spent the last fourteen years of it's life, those difficult teen years, gentling in an American Oak barrel just waiting for the day it would be set free. My uncle once described bourbon as God's gift to America. So, I poured myself a bit of the gift, added a splash of branch to bring out the flavor, a fire in the hearth to take the chill out of the evening, a notebook with an old finger staining fountain pen and I was ready to write.

First, despite the languorous progress of the month so far, I have managed to get wet a couple of times since the last newsletter. On the 16th, a Friday, Armin and I decided to take a break from the workaday. Armin pulled into my driveway with his dive mobile bright and early; we loaded my gear in amongst his doubles and headed for the Marriott. Have you ever noticed the Darth Vader character of this particular hotel, maybe it was the early morning light or the lack of coffee, still the place looked eerie to me. Once there we picked up Armin's friend always under the watchful eyes of the hotel staff. They kept eyeing the van and the two of us and seemed relieved when a bonafide guest actually seemed to know one of us. Armin's friend, Rahel, was in town from Switzerland for the American Convention of Psychiatry and wanted to do some diving while here. Great, Gerda thinks I'm some sort of nut anyway, so at least for once I would be under professional observation. Like the Three Musketeers or maybe the Three Stooges would be a more apt description, we packed up her kit and headed for a day of diving in Monterey.

**continue on page 5**

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**Payments for membership and activities  
should be mailed to:  
Pierre Hurter  
515 Diamond Street  
San Francisco, CA 94114**

## REEFER RAP

<b>JANUARY</b>	<b>FEBRUARY</b>	<b>MARCH</b>
<p>01 - New Year's Day Dive - Point Lobos</p> <p>11 - Cypress Sea – (3 Dives) - Sat</p> <p>15 - <i>General Meeting</i></p>	<p>05 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p>08 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives)</p> <p>15 – Ed Cooper Memorial</p> <p><b>19 - General Meeting</b></p>	<p>05 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p>09 – Pt. Lobos</p> <p><b>19 – General Meeting</b></p> <p>22 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat</p> <p>29 &amp; 30 - Pt. Lobos</p>
<b>APRIL</b>	<b>MAY</b>	<b>JUNE</b>
<p>02 – Officer's Meeting</p> <p>04 through 06 - Abalone Opener</p> <p><b>16 - General Meeting</b></p> <p>26 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat</p>	<p>07 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p><b>21 - General Meeting</b></p> <p>24 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives)</p>	<p>04 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p><b>18 - General Meeting - SINDBAD'S</b> on Pier 2, San Francisco</p> <p>21 - Monterey Beach Dive Coordinator: Pierre - 415.285.6293</p> <p>22 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sun Coordinator: Pierre - 415.285.6293</p> <p>TBD - Abalone Closer</p>
<b>JULY</b>	<b>AUGUST</b>	<b>SEPTEMBER</b>
<p>02 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p><b>16 - General Meeting</b></p> <p>26 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat Coordinator: Pierre - 415.285.6293</p>	<p>01 – 03 Abalone Opener Salt Point Statepark Coordinator: Ursula Bernhart 415.586.0357 <a href="mailto:ursulabernhart@juno.com">ursulabernhart@juno.com</a></p> <p>06 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p><b>20 - General Meeting</b></p> <p>- 20 - Channel Islands – Coordinator: Jim Vallario 415.566.0784</p>	<p>03 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p>06 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat Coordinator: Pierre - 415.285.6293</p> <p>TBD - Alcatraz swim/paddle Coordinator: Pierre - 415.285.6293</p> <p><b>17 - General Meeting</b></p>
<b>OCTOBER</b>	<b>NOVEMBER</b>	<b>DECEMBER</b>
<p>01 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p>11 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat Coordinator: Pierre - 415.285.6293</p> <p><b>15 - General Meeting - Officer Nominations !!!</b></p>	<p>04 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p>TBD - Annual Sea Ranch Weekend</p> <p><b>19 - General Meeting - Officer Elections</b></p> <p>23 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sun Coordinator: Pierre - 415.285.6293</p> <p>TBD - Abalone Closer</p>	<p>03 - Officer's Meeting</p> <p>13 - Cypress Sea - (3 Dives) - Sat Coordinator: Pierre - 415.285.6293</p> <p><b>17 - General Meeting - Christmas Party</b></p>



**AB SEASON REOPENS AUGUST 1.**

Camp, Dive and Feast on Abalone Fri. Aug. 1 to Sun. Aug. 3

*We have two reserved campsites at Salt Point State Park (Woodside Campground, to right (east) of Highway 1 on the Sonoma coast). Check-in time is 2 p.m. Friday, check-out 12 noon Sunday. I will arrive early to try and get two adjoining campsites. Check the Bulletin Board at the campground entrance for site numbers.*

Only 8 overnight campers can stay in each site. Let's try to carpool as only one car is permitted in each campsite. (Extra cars can be parked nearby and have to pay an additional nightly fee). There will be opportunities for both free and scuba diving. Remember to bring fishing license and abalone punch card.

Late Saturday afternoon we'll get busy preparing for the big potluck abalone banquet. Seems there are a number of newer Reef Divers who have not yet experienced this ancient ritual. If you need information on what to bring and how to get there, give me a call. We can also talk about it at the June and July meetings.

Since we are limited to 16 campers, it's important to call me as soon as possible to reserve your space.

Ursula Bernhart - Phone: 415 586-0357. E-mail: [ursulabernhart@juno.com](mailto:ursulabernhart@juno.com)



**Channel Island Trip Aug. 16 thru Aug. 20: THE TRIP IS FULL AND THERE IS NOW A WAITING LIST.**

Since we are going to the southernmost island (San Clemente), **the boat will depart from Ventura at 10PM on Saturday, August 16th**, rather than midnight.

The Peace will be doing an oil rig dive the day after we get back (Wednesday, August 20<sup>th</sup>). If you wish to do the oil rig dive but can only reach the Peace voice mail, you have the option of sending your check and following up with them later. Address is: Peace Dive Boat, 1567 Spinnaker Drive, #203-393, Ventura, CA 93001 Total cost is \$85.

The final payment of \$235 will be due on July 1<sup>st</sup>, to be sent to our Treasurer, Pierre "Greasy Thumb" Hurter (515 Diamond St, SF, 94114).

To repeat some information from the original announcement:

- The Peace has Nitrox capability. The fee for unlimited fills on a three-day trip is \$75, payable when you arrive on the boat. The requirements are:
- A Nitrox certification card (to be shown to the Divemaster).
- A full tank of Nitrox prior to boarding the boat. (Their system does not require an oxygen-clean tank).
- The tank must have a Nitrox ID sticker, or some other form of Nitrox ID, visible on the tank.

**Some reminders:**

Bring all of your dive gear, including weight belt and one tank.

If you've let your DAN insurance lapse, now would be a good time to renew.

Each bunk has a pillow and blanket, so if you require more, i.e. sheets, a sleeping bag, etc. plan accordingly.

Food and non-alcoholic drinks are included. If beer and wine are part of your diet, please bring your own.

(Remember the rule: Your first drink is your last dive).

**from page 1 – Freedive**

Freediving is certainly a different skill after tank diving, something brought home to me when on my first free dive I took a deep confident breath through my snorkel about four feet underwater. However, with practice it seemed easy enough, as after a few dives I could spend ages on the bottom at a tremendous depth. As I reached this level of expertise, Ken pointed out that we were in 15 feet of water, and my watch showed that I had been holding my breath for a whole 20 seconds. Meanwhile, the others went off to warm up with dives to twice the depth for four times as long, and I began to realise that maybe there's a lot more skill to this than I'd ever imagined.

The experience of free diving is hard to describe. My attitude to tank diving has become very relaxed - you make yourself negative, sink nearly to the bottom, and then potter around for a bit before popping back to the boat for another doughnut. Free diving isn't like that. On the one hand, you don't have very long to get to the bottom and do whatever you are going to do, so you'd better get a move on. On the other hand, if you try to hurry, you use all your air in a few seconds and don't get very far either. In addition, somehow a little 20 foot dive is tremendously dark and atmospheric when you are constantly wondering how many more seconds of air you have left in your lungs. It all comes down to the right combination of absolute technical efficiency and developing the perfect mental state, as Ken says - but neither is easy, and the two together is quite a trick.

After my first real freediving experience, I would definitely do it again given the chance. I don't honestly see me becoming an avid

abalone hunter, but it certainly puts the bottom of Gerstle Cove in a whole new light when you aren't carrying a junk shop of dive equipment with you. I felt quite a sense of achievement getting to the bottom at all when freediving, let alone getting there for long enough to find an abalone (and I've now seen my first abalone in the wild without tanks). There's just so much room for technique that I don't have that I could easily spend hours practising, and after the first few dives I was getting comfortable and really beginning to enjoy it. It's even a lot warmer (that physical exercise thing again), so you can leave your dry suit at home.

However, after an hour of working on my dives, I was quite happy to call it a day, as my ears were complaining bitterly from the repeated dives as well as my leg muscles. Meanwhile the wind was picking up and Gerstle Cove was starting to feel a lot less sheltered than it had when I started. Time to go and have a well-deserved lunch.

Finally, thanks to Gene, Ken, and Curt for taking us out and nursing us through the experience of our first free dives, and to Debra for coming long so I wasn't the only other first time victim.



**from page 2 - Stammtisch**

On arriving at the Breakwater I started to unpack. About the time I was standing there holding my integrated weights, it dawned on me that my BC was still hanging in its usual place of honor in the garage. So much for my neatly laminated, pocket-sized scuba gear checklist, of course that was somewhere in the garage too. Thanks to the cheerful young lady

at Aquarius II I was on my way with a rental BC with a minimum of embarrassment. We made two dives, both at the Breakwater. The first dive took us out and away from the breakwater, the second we stuck to the Breakwater itself. The visibility on both dives was never better than five to six feet. On at least one occasion, I couldn't read the compass on my wrist. Still we had a pretty good time, lots of parking spots and Rahel got to make a couple of dives in Monterey. She'll probably go back and tell everyone to stick to lake diving, there's no need to travel this far to dive in California, just close your eyes wherever you are and you get the same effect. The highlight of the evening was when we headed to a place called Banana Island in Daly City for dinner. It's your typical Singaporean, Thai, Malaysian sort of place. A little something on the menu for every taste and yen and it was child friendly for those of you looking for a place to bring the tadpoles.

Our monthly Cypress Sea trip fared much better, at least as far as visibility went. Gerda and I drove down the night before and stayed at the Hyatt courtesy of Priceline.com all for the princely sum of \$50. If you have never tried Priceline.com, it can be great if you are a little flexible in your lodging needs. You wait until the last minute and then put in a bid at a "three or four" star hotel and see what happens. What's the worst that can happen? You don't get a room and you have to drive down the next morning. Anyway we had a restful night and pulled up to the wharf just in time for the boat's departure. The Cypress Sea was skippered by Dave with Julia and Kelly as the faithful crew. Xcott was out of action having broken his leg in a motorcycle accident.

**continue on page 6**

**Stammtisch – from page 5**

Still we managed all right without him, I did miss the chowder though. We met up with Jim, Peter, Debra, Kathryn, Sean and a long time member I had not met before, Dr. Joe Kushner. Our first dive was at the Outer Pinnacles, visibility was around 20 feet and Gerda and I practiced diving with our stage bottles and trying with fairly comical results to fine tune our buoyancy control.

I missed out on Dr. Kushner telling Gerda about his introduction to diving. Turns out that as a 17-year-old sailor he was one of the “volunteers” who helped develop the decompression tables in use today. His comment was that they would dive until they complained, now you know that 17 and 18 year olds to complain publicly so keep that in mind next time your pushing the boundaries of your tables or computer. After the first dive Dr. Kushner decided that he would stick to warm water diving from now on, still he’s diving and if he was 17 in 1944, well you do the math.

The second dive took place at Inner Pinnacles also known as the Cathedral. Gerda and I dropped down on the starboard side of the boat and tied off on a convenient outcropping. We used the reel and worked our way back and forth along the sandy-bottomed canyons that traverse the area. We saw several large, four foot plus, lingcod, patches of nipple sponges, large puffball sponges and several good-sized schools of kelp perch.

Gerda decided to sit out the last dive, the second one had been decidedly cooler than the first. I teamed up with Jim and Peter and we dropped down the anchor line and did a leisurely circuit of

Pescadero Rock. As we came back to the anchor I gave my buddies the “I’m cold” sign and made my way slowly back to the boat. A great day with some good diving and lively company. As usual we found ourselves at the London Pub afterwards. There seems to be sort of natural affinity between divers and deep fried foods, particularly when coupled with a frosty pint.

Last Thursday evening Gerda and I went to an interesting presentation at Fort Mason. The Nature Conservancy has launched what they are calling the Marine Initiative in an effort to link land and sea conservation. They are doing this in partnership with other organizations such as the locally based Coral Reef alliance and others. Dr. Rod Salm gave an excellent presentation concerning how the Marine Initiative seeks to protect the rich array of plant and animal life and safeguard the tremendous benefits the oceans provide. If you are interested in more information take a look at [www.coral.org](http://www.coral.org) and <http://nature.org/initiatives/marine>

I’m already chomping at the bit to get wet again. Is anyone up for a beach dive? I have not seen any in the Newsletter or posted on the Yahoo site for some time. Since Gerda and I will be in Monterey on Saturday, the 21<sup>st</sup> I’d like to get together with some Reef Divers and do some shore diving. How about meeting at the Aquarius Dive Shop (on Del Monte) at 8:30 and we will dive where conditions dictate. As Mike Nelson might have said, “You know, three fifths of the world is covered by the sea, and how little most of us know about that underwater world. Go below with us again next week, for another thrilling adventure aboard the Cypress Sea.” Until then dive often, dive deep and dive safe ... pierre

**NOTE FROM THE EDITOR**



Have you ever wondered what goes on at the Officers’ meetings? What important club business is being pondered? What politics go on behind closed (restaurant) doors? Well, here is a glimpse into our last meeting and what it can trigger.

For those of you who are receiving Yahoo emails it will also answer your question of “what the hell is Gene referring to” in his 6/6 posting, since the meeting minutes, to which he responded, only went out to the officers.

By the way, the officers’ meetings are held every 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month and are open to every club member in good standing. So if you are interested in attending watch for Gene’s Yahoo postings or call him to find out where the next meeting will take place. The venue does change depending on the president’s food cravings. Lately it has been peanut sauce and sticky rice with mango.

**MEETING MINUTES FROM 6/4/03**

Reefers,

The following attended the June Officer's meeting at Tawan's Thai Restaurant:

Curt Degler	Peter White
Gerda Hurter	Armin Luggen
Pierre Hurter	Ken Gwin
Robert Miche	

Aside from eating copious quantities of excellent food and trading bawdy tales and ribald jokes we discussed the following:

**continue on page 7**

**from page 6 - Officers' Meeting**

\* Ken talked about this month's entertainment, Three local divers with a DIR bent who pose no threat of forcible conversion. Ken will provide the particulars for the newsletter.

\* Curt talked about having a kayak/beach dive in the near future, preferably on the North Coast.

\* Gerda said we would be arranging a beach dive on Saturday, June 21, details forthcoming.

\* Armin announced that Frank Matzskies, one of our "Old Europe" correspondents would be here for month following the 4th of July weekend. Assuming clearance from Homeland Security, we will have a dive, barbeque extravaganza.

As usual there where no leftovers and the meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm with the merry crowd dispersing before the owners of Tawan's called on the SFPD to clear the streets of loiterers.

**THIS PROMTED:**

----- Original Message -----  
>From: genekramer@pacbell.net  
>To: sfreefdivers@yahoogroups.com  
>Sent: Thu, 05 Jun 2003 22:44:14

Reefers,

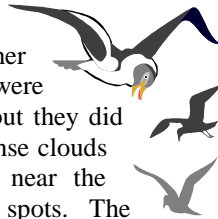
Contrary to Pierre's report, the president of the club, me, was there too. My contribution was to place two orders for pork satay with peanut sauce. The reputation of the Swiss for secretarial efficiency may be overrated.

The last two days of strong winds from the south has flattened out the ocean and left me with a temptation that I could not resist, mud diving at Linda Mar this evening. The previous two weeks of strong winds from the north did

their usual magic, the cold rich waters from the depths did a wonderful job of encouraging a fresh crop of the grass of the sea, phytoplankton. It was Two to three feet of vis. The grass of the sea completely overwhelmed the lawn mowers of the sea, copepods and assorted other zooplankton. They were not up to the task, but they did form some rather dense clouds of dancing minutia near the bottom in several spots. The water nearer the rocks had the best vis, a whopping three feet, otherwise known as 1 fish length. I did see some of the usual suspects for that area, dungeness and rock crabs, horseneck clams whose siphons are more sensitive than any seismograph, and nervous perch who shot out of view as soon as I could make them out. Halibut, alas were not to be found. I did see one small UFO come flying out of the sand, but I only had a glimpse of it as it rocketed into the soup. I also saw some small 1 to 1.5 inch long silvery fish that would burrow into the sand, dash out a few feet and burrow into the sand again. Anyone know what they might be. Max depth was 20 feet, time about 1 hour. I did see a rare, for me sight, as I came back onto shore. In three feet of water, just behind the ankle biter waves, I saw what I thought was a seal slap the water several times with its flippers while chasing a perch. I kept looking at the area where the water was disturbed, hoping to see the head of a harbor seal. None stuck its head up, but something would break the surface of the water about every minute. Finally, I saw it, the dorsal fins of a few stripped bass slicing through the water. This was the first time I'd ever seen them in such shallow water in the surf. I should have brought

a spinning rod. In fading light, and in murky water a lot of fish that are normally quite shy will venture into water that is only a foot or two deep. I've seen numerous perch as well as schools of anchovies in such water as the sun was setting on the horizon. This weekend should be calm. You just have to find water that isn't well fertilized.

-Gene Kramer



-----Original Message-----  
From: Armin Luggen [mailto:armin@luggens.com]  
Sent: Friday, June 06, 2003 7:41 AM  
To: genekramer@pacbell.net; genekramer@pacbell.net; sfreefdivers@yahoogroups.com  
Subject: RE: [sfreefdivers] Re: June Officer's Meeting addendum

Gene  
Thanks for the nice report. In representing the Swiss Authorities, I can only say: We do not know and are therefore "NEUTRAL".



Please submit any further discrepancies without any delay to the nearest Swiss Official Office, including your Name, First Name, Gender and your voluntary deposit amount in US\$. You will be contacted in the near future, by a Case Number Consultant, which will handle your comments and provide you with your very own personal number account, for ease of access, in case of any further problems or further deposits. Sincerely

Gruezi

**continue on page 8**

Officers' Meeting - from page 7

-----Original Message-----  
**From:** Hurter, Pierre  
[mailto:pwh5@pge.com]  
**Sent:** Friday, June 06, 2003 7:52 AM  
**To:** Armin Luggen;  
genekramer@pacbell.net;  
sfreefdivers@yahoogroups.com  
**Subject:** RE: [sfreefdivers] Re: June Officer's Meeting addendum

Mr. Honorable President Gene,

I am the sole heir to Sanya Obachi, a recently deposed and wrongfully accused and subsequently torn limbs from limb by hyenas, despot of a small nation you have never heard of. My late brother managed through hard work and thrift to save 57 billion dollars and some change mostly Swiss Franks and Euros. If you would provide me with your bank routing information, I would be happy to share this money with you on a 50/50 basis.

**TRINIDAD HEAD,  
HUMBOLDT  
COUNTY**

by Mike Staninec

My buddy Brian Ishida and I decided to drive up to the Arcata area to try some diving. We left Friday night before Memorial day and spent over six hours going up 101 to just north of Arcata, where Brandi Easter lives. She is a great diver; the current reigning national spearfishing champion. Since Humboldt County is open for rockfish, we were eager for that which we cannot get here this time of the year. We got in late, around midnight, and after a peaceful night in the quiet woods we got up to go diving around 8 AM. We drove along the coast on a rough road just to check out

some other potential dive sites, then ended up at Trinidad head, which has a small, somewhat protected cove, about the size of the Ft. Ross cove. The swell was running about 5', not calm, but certainly dividable. The water looked a bit murky, so we drove up north to check out a couple of other spots around Patrick's Point, but found the entries a bit rough, so we came back to Trinidad and launched our kayaks just north of the head off a sandy beach. After punching through the surf we paddled about a quarter mile to some rocks and a small, sparse kelp bed.

Brian and Brandi dove while I paddled a bit further to check out some other rocks. They had been in for maybe 10 minutes when I came back and got the report of nothing to see and nothing to kill. So I hauled off to another spot, dropped anchor and dove down. The vis at the surface was 3-4", but both vis and light diminished drastically on the way down. At 30' I hit a layer of Guinness and another 7' down I hit the bottom with my outstretched hand. I was in absolute darkness! I actually made a few more dives and felt around the rocky bottom with my hands, even tried my light, but found nothing. By now, Brandi and Brian paddled over and listed to my negative evaluation of this dive site. We paddled around the head to the south and parked by a large rock with fairly vertical looking walls. We all jumped in, and here the vis was about the same, but at least there was something to see along the walls. The 30' bottom was just as bad, but the sides of the rock had maybe 3-4' vis and a ton of urchins on them, so I knew I would not come home empty handed.

Working up and down the walls I also found a rare treat: three rock

scallops. Brian thought they were off limits because of the red tide, so he left the one he found. We headed in and after putting away our boats, we had some wonderful barbecue outside the local market, fresh off the grill. Pork and beef ribs never tasted so good. After coming back, we emailed back and forth a bit, including the Cencal freedive list in our messages, discussing the vis, the scallop toxicity, etc. After sorting out through the opinions of various people on the list, I did some searching on the web and found a phone number, the Shellfish Hotline 800-553-4133. It gives a recorded message about current closures and dangers of eating shellfish. Mussels are currently closed, as they usually are from May 1 to November 30. As for scallops, they said to not eat the guts, only the meat button. Alan Spehar, another great Cencal freediver noted that he had some information from a scientist who is an expert in the field that even the meat of scallops has levels of domoic acid that could be a problem, but I decided to chance it and feed the first scallop to my daughter. Observing that she did not drop dead, my wife and I ate the other two. They were delicious and we are still alive and well. In some 18 years of diving the north coast, I've only collected two other scallops. As for the vis, both Brandi and another Humboldt county diver said that that is actually pretty normal up there.

I guess there must be other times and places up there that may be better, but I don't know about them. We certainly did have fun and a great workout, even though we got no fish or abs.



## RIVER DIVING IN VALLE DE VERZASCA, SWITZERLAND

by Armin Luggen

Welcome back to another episode of cliffhanging diving adventures in Switzerland. You may remember my previous reports about diving in the Swiss Alps. As a native of those mountainous areas, with their yodeling cow's and the cheese and chocolate enriched diet / health food meals, I have to say, Switzerland surprises me again and again.

When you think of it, Switzerland is not much bigger than Los Angeles and has about the same size population. The surprising thing is, that the Swiss have the largest per capita percentage of divers. No other country has as many divers as we do. No, I know, we do not have sunny beaches and the big waves as in Hawaii. The water tastes sweet and there are not many battle shipwrecks to be found. No oceans are abutting Swiss territory and the Swiss military is still not considering establishing a special force like the Navy Seals. (At least, that's what is publicly stated, there could be a secret unit, it has been so far anyway).

So where do they dive if they have so many divers? Everywhere. No place is to boring, to high or to low, to deep or to curved, for a trip in the underwater world of that fantastic country. Lakes provide the greatest diving pleasures to most divers. The four seasons spice things up quite a bit, and so it is a real ritual to go for a nice Ice dive in the middle of February, do a deep record dive in the middle of the summer or maybe just float down the rivers in late summer.

### RIVER DIVING ???!!!

Yes, I can assure you, you do not need new glasses. Your old ones

are working just fine. I said and I wrote river. River diving over the last five to ten years has become one of the most sought after diving activities. Divers are coming from all over Europe to see and enjoy the wonders of river diving in the Valley of Valle Verzasca.

When Winter finally prepares to go on vacation for the summer and when the first warm sun rays are melting the white blankets of pure snow crystals covering the mountains, it is time for the river Verzasca to swell with clear, cold water and to descend to the valley floor. April and May are the best months for river diving during Spring. Thereafter, the waters rise to high and become to dangerous. During September and October, the water's force abates and more dives can be done.

Why diving in a river? Well, that is a very good question. Who would ever think of such a crazy idea? I guess the same sort of people who invented the wheel, the cell phone and the egg timer... The interests and minds of many people have created a need to explore nature, and that is exactly what happens with divers wanting to explore rivers.

River diving is a specialty dive. Certification is mandatory to assure safe diving. The course is very informative and has many elements covered that are not only useful while diving in a river. Safety is always the first priority and the locations as well as the daily current are examined before each dive. The water level of the river may change over night and one is either confronted with water swelling and rushing down or just simply floating down in the carved canyons.

The water is crystal clear and you can see the bottom in most cases. Over time, the river has

made it's way down the hills and formed bizarre and interesting forms carved into the stone. Underwater, the dive resembles a walk in a museum. Every inch is formed by hundreds of years of water erosion, which give the river one of the most incredible perspectives on nature.

The sunny days in the Ticino region of the Italian part of Switzerland are bright and warm. The sun reflects on the water's work and compliments the picture. It is a thoroughly rare sight. A dive, you won't see every day.

As you make your way against the current, fish and little critters entertain you for their amusement. It is an easy job, but can demand sometimes a little extra effort, to get around the corner, around the next wonder. River dives are usually not long dives, but the time spent makes such an impact, that you will remember the brief moments, days later.

Once it is time to turn around, the fun starts over again. Just let the water do it's job. You'll fly like bird, or for those that prefer, you'll swim like a fish, down the river with a very slight current, and become one with the river. It is a feeling that cannot be described, but rather has to be experienced.

So, where is your next dive leading you? Nature is full of fantastic things, and we just need to explore it. Next time you are in Switzerland or any other area, check it out, the possibilities are without any boundaries...

For more information in regards to river diving, classes, and organization, check out [www.stingraydive.ch](http://www.stingraydive.ch) or [http://www.info-tessin.com/Valle\\_Verzasca/valle\\_verzasca.html](http://www.info-tessin.com/Valle_Verzasca/valle_verzasca.html)

**NOTE FROM THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIR:**

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More to come stay tuned...



The San Francisco Reef Divers is a not for profit community organization dedicated to safe sport diving and the preservation of our ocean resources. The San Francisco Reef Divers General Meetings are open to the public and are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month at Sinbad's, located at Pier 2, Embarcadero Street, SF, CA 94111 (For driving directions and a map for this location, visit our club web site: <http://www.sfreedivers.org/>.)

*We highly encourage you to also support the other organizations listed below when you pay your annual dues. (Please indicate your membership options with the checkboxes below.)*

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**ABOUT SAN FRANCISCO REEF DIVERS (SFRD):**

The *Reef Diver Times* is the official newsletter of the San Francisco Reef Divers, a not for profit community organization dedicated to safe sport diving and the preservation of our ocean resources. Membership is \$25 annually, dues payable to "SFRD". The General Meeting is held 3rd Wednesday of the month at at Sinbad's, located at Pier 2, Embarcadero Street, SF, CA 94111. Meet at 7:00pm for socializing, drinks and food and 7:30 pm for club business and entertainment. For more information, visit <http://www.sfreefdivers.org/>.

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